

# **Racism Without Race? : the Case of Japan's Invisible Group**

by

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the persistence of social exclusion of the Buraku people. They were created as a class -- lower than the lowest, under the strict *Tokugawa* feudal system (1603-1867), and in 1871 they were officially emancipated.

The Buraku people are physically, ethnically, racially, religiously and culturally indistinguishable from the rest of Japanese society. However, even now they suffer from discrimination, particularly in marriage and employment.

This thesis tries to explain why discrimination against the Buraku persists. Discussion of discrimination against and persistence of social exclusion is conducted in the context of four major sociological perspectives: 1) race and racism, 2) minority group status, 3) qualification group, and 4) outcaste group. This thesis then focuses on explanations that have been offered for the reasons why the Buraku exclusion has remained through the centuries from four aspects: 1) Japan's incomplete transition from feudalism to capitalism, 2) the concept of purity and impurity, 3) Japanese national character, and 4) identities that convey superiority and inferiority. This thesis also examines the *Koseki* system, which has played an important role in maintaining the social exclusion of the Buraku people.

Finally, the thesis explores the sorts of changes that, if made, could contribute to the eradication of these relations of inclusion/exclusion.

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## Introduction

In 1986, Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone declared that "Japan is a homogeneous nation. We do not have any minority issues" (Quoted in Asahi Shinbunsha, 1999: 375) (my translation). While this statement attracted criticism, it also demonstrated that the Japanese people have not thought out the place of minorities in their midst. It suited us to believe in the myth of Japanese homogeneity. Yet, in Japan there are three main groups of minorities that comprise about 4% of the population -- the Buraku people, Korean (Korean nationals or Korean-Japanese) and the Ainu people, representing respectively an historically outcaste group, those who come from elsewhere or whose ancestors did, and aboriginal peoples. All these groups suffer from discrimination in one form or another.

This thesis focuses upon the Buraku people, Japan's largest minority group. The Buraku people are physically indistinguishable from the rest of Japanese society. As Anthony Giddens noted, they "have lived in the country for hundreds of years and share the same religion, yet are regarded with hostility or disdain by the majority of the Japanese population" (1989: 243). Although there have been attempts to claim that their origins are racially distinct from the majority, "none of them," in Donoghue's words, "withstand the test of historical criticism" (1977: 9) and these racial claims have been rejected by most modern Japanese historians. Nor do most majority Japanese believe that the Buraku are racially distinct people (see Table 1.).

**Table 1. Origin Claims of the Buraku People**

	Race	Religion	Occupation	Poverty	Politics	Others
Buraku	1.3%	1.1%	3.8%	14.5%	70.3%	9.1%
National	9.9	1.5	12.6	9.7	55.1	11.3

Source: Management and Coordination Agency Policy Office of Regional Improvement 1997: 467.

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In 1993, the Management and Coordination Agency Policy Office of Regional Improvement surveyed the Buraku people, and majority opinions on the Buraku, by interviewing sixty thousand of the Buraku people and by surveying by mail twenty-four thousand qualified voters who live in non-Buraku areas. The purpose of this official national-level survey was to measure the effects in the Buraku of the government Dowa projects, which had been carried out since 1969. Dowa is a government-coined word which refers to the Buraku, while Dowa districts refer to their communities.

The asked question: "what is the origin of the Dowa districts? Choose one from the above six choices." The majority, both Buraku and non-Buraku people, chose "politics" which especially refers to the feudal system under the *Tokugawa* government, a regime that extended from 1603 to 1867. Under the strict Tokugawa feudal system, the Buraku people were created as a class -- lower than the lowest, and faced discrimination in every aspect of life.

The Buraku people can only be distinguished from other Japanese people by their place of residence, for they are ethnically, linguistically, culturally, racially and religiously identical to majority Japanese. Yet, even after their official emancipation in 1871, discrimination against the Buraku persisted. The Buraku people remain a socially subordinated and despised group.

considered inherently inferior. To this day, they suffer from prejudice and discrimination especially in areas of employment and marriage.

My task is to try and explain why discrimination against the Buraku persists. How can we explain this situation? In Chapter One, I will focus on the history of the creation of the Buraku people, which dates back to at least the seventh century. Their position as a separate class was crystalized and sharpened especially during the Tokugawa period (1603-1868), when feudal society was consolidated. Shintoism and Buddhism also have played a major role in labeling the Buraku people as a subordinate group. Both Shinto and Buddhist beliefs contended that the taking of life, eating meat, coming in contact with blood and the dead are impure activities. These beliefs significantly affected the Japanese attitudes towards those people whose ancestors' jobs included slaughtering, leather tanning, and tomb watching.

Later in the chapter, I focus on the current situation of the Buraku people, using primarily government data. I compare them with the Japanese majority in terms of population, employment, education, and standard of living. While their living conditions have improved significantly, as a result of government projects, their standard of living is still lower than the national average. Employment opportunities have always been limited. They tend to be hired by smaller companies who pay less, provide fewer fringe benefits, and offer less secure employment than larger ones. As a result the annual income of the Buraku people remains low compared with the national average, and the number of households on relief is four times the national average. I will also

introduce two court cases which involved the Buraku people. One is the *Sasayama* case, which involved a Buraku youth who was arrested for murder and sentenced to imprisonment for life. However, the counsel for the accused claimed that he was falsely accused because he was a Buraku. As a result, mass protest movements developed across Japan. The other is the suit against the cancellation of marriage because one of the spouses belonged to the Buraku. The court declared that discrimination against the Buraku people would no longer be tolerated.

In Chapter Two, I look at discrimination against the Buraku and the persistence of their social exclusion from four major sociological perspectives: 1) race and racism, 2) minority group status, 3) qualification group, and 4) outcaste group. Following this, I focus attention on the explanations that have been offered for why Buraku exclusion has continued through the centuries. Some scholars argue that the persistence of discrimination stems from Japan's incomplete transition from feudalism to capitalism. Yet, as we know, systematic racism informs other capitalist societies as well. Other scholars focus on cultural aspects: the concept of purity and impurity; Japanese national character; and the reproduction of, and connection between, identities that convey superiority and inferiority. Finally, I explore the Koseki system which plays an important role in maintaining the social exclusion of the Buraku people.

In Chapter Three, I explore the sorts of changes that could contribute to the eradication of these relations of inclusion/exclusion. First, I provide an

overview of the development of organizations such as the Buraku Liberation League (BLL). The Buraku movements started in the *Taisho* period (1912-1926). First, they focused on self-improvement, hoping that if they improved themselves, discrimination would cease. Their lack of success led to other strategies. They focused on highlighting the poverty of the Buraku people and allied themselves with political parties seeking to overthrow capitalism and to change the political/legal regime. Buraku organizations have contributed to quickening and promoting the government's Dowa measurements. On the other hand, some of the tactics of the Buraku Liberation League have made the public and media reluctant to discuss the Buraku.

In 1958, the post-war government first accepted their responsibility for assisting the Buraku and started to increase funding to their communities. Since 1969, the government has spent more than 400 billions yen (1Cdn\$ = 71yen) to improve the community environment (housing), education, employment opportunities, agriculture, and small enterprises. As a result, life for the Buraku has improved.

Yet, discrimination against them persists. Clearly, changing the economic and social infrastructure alone has not ended discrimination. The social exclusion of the Buraku is complex and deep. In order to bring about new relations between the Buraku people and majority Japanese, we have to focus on various factors and enlighten people on the Buraku true situation in a broad context.

## CHAPTER 1: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW AND CURRENT SITUATION OF THE BURAKU PEOPLE

In order to understand the contemporary situation of the Buraku, I shall first provide an historical interpretation, focusing upon the processes through which the beliefs and practices that created and sustained them as distinct and inferior people were mobilized. In the structuring of the Japanese class system over the centuries, the Buraku people were excluded and placed outside the class system: they became a group apart, occupying a place outside and below the lowest rank of the class system. Historically, the Eta and Hinin, ancestors of the Buraku people, were sustained as people apart, especially during the *Tokugawa* period (1603-1868), when the foundations of a feudal society were formed. However, the origins of the group may be traced back to the seventh century.

### HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

#### Historical Development and the Effect of Native Shinto and Japanese Buddhism

As early as the first century A.D., systems of social stratification of small nations within the geographical territory of present-day Japan had been organized, and by 4 or 5 A.D., a fairly well-developed social hierarchy existed under the Yamato government. Each *Uji* [clan] had a *Be* [guild] that engaged in specialized occupations such as weaving or pottery manufacture. These

hereditary guilds were subordinated to the clan. In most cases, guilds were closely associated with occupational specialization and handed down their skills from generation to generation (Inoue, 1994: 29-30).

Around the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, Buddhism was imported to Japan from China and Korea.<sup>1</sup> As Buddhism blended with the Japanese native religion of *Shintoism*, it had a profound influence on the origin and subsequent development of the Eta class. Both Buddhist and Shinto beliefs contended that the taking of life, eating meat, and coming in contact with blood and death are impure activities. These beliefs significantly affected the Japanese attitudes towards those people whose livelihood depended upon animal slaughtering, leather tanning and tomb watching. Almost every aspect of Japanese religious life was influenced by the concept of purity and its converse, physical and moral impurity, which is at the core of all Shinto ceremony.

According to Donoghue (1977: 9-10), when Buddhism was imported, society was dominated by agriculture and, accordingly, those who were artisans and craftsmen were located at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Moreover, with the influence of Buddhism, people who engaged in animal slaughtering occupations began to be tabooed and looked down upon. Yet, impure occupations held functionally significant roles in society. Hence, "mechanisms for their continuity or persistence were created, and then jealously safeguarded" (1977: 11). As Passin (1955: 27) points out, the

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<sup>1</sup> According to the ancient record called *Nihonshyoki*, it was imported in 552 A.D., but according to another ancient record, *Jyougushotokuhouou-teisetsu*, it was in 538 A.D..

phenomena of 'untouchability', that mark "the low castes of India, the Eta-Hinin of Japan, the Paekchong of Korea, and the Ragyappa of Tibet" are linked to occupations believed to be unclean and ritually impure.

By the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, following the Yamato regime, Japan's government became decentralized. The large numbers of independent and self-sufficient clans were federated into a loose network. While the clans pledged to support the Imperial clan and the nobility, in reality, they had a lot of power.

Through the *Taika* Restoration in 701, in an effort to reduce the powers of the clans, several notable changes were made in the formal social structure. During this reform, people were categorized into two groups -- the *Ryomin* [free or good people], and the *Senmin* [unfree or lowly people], generally thought to be ancestors of the Buraku people. Sansom (1943: 217) points out that this hierarchy rested upon family origin, and there was hardly any inter-marriage. Within the Senmin "there were five categories classified according to occupational specialization: *Ryoto* [tomb guards], *Kanko* [government cultivators], *Kunuhi* [government servants], *Shinuhi* [private slaves], and *Gunin* [temple and private slaves]" (Shimahara, 1971: 15). In addition, there was a group called *Zakko*, consisting of semi-Senmin who had somewhat higher official status. The *Zakko* held more highly skilled occupations, such as leather work, tanning, cloth dyeing, shoemaking, weapons manufacture, etc.

Among the *Zakko*, there were the *Etori*, who were engaged in gathering food for the hawks and dogs used by Imperial families for hunting in the

Department of Falconry called the *Takatsukasa*. Inoue (1964: 17) traced the etymology of Eta to the Etori, with Etori corrupted to Eto, and then Eta. When the Department of Falconry was abolished in 860, due to the influence of Buddhism, the Eta became butchers whose main work was the slaughter of animals. When the killing of animals became illegal, slaughter began to be despised. Some Etori lost their jobs and moved to the less populated districts on the riverbanks or on the outskirts of the city. Their extreme poverty forced many to become wanderers, hunters, fishermen, and vagabonds. Along with escaped criminals some traveled door-to-door singing, dancing, entertaining and wishing luck upon those who were entertained.<sup>2</sup> They resided along the river banks and in the vacant areas around the cities and villages. Powerful clans used them in order to expand their territory.

In the *Chusei* period (1192-1603), *Bushi* [warriors] arose as a new power, gaining political influence all over Japan. During this period, society was roughly divided into four classes -- the nobility, the warriors, the peasants and the Senmin. However, distinctions between them were uncertain, and individuals could pass among them more freely than at any other time in Japanese history. Marriage between classes became relatively common. The Senmin category remained but there was upward and downward mobility, as Inoue points out:

Successful Senmin and serfs became landlords or full-fledged farmers, whereas declining landlords, serfs and warriors fell in to the category

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<sup>2</sup> These people became the famous *Kabuki* players.

of Senmin. Owing to the social upheaval of the Chusei Period which caused the intermingling of Senmin with others, Senmin of this period were not identical with those whose status had been stabilized in the previous centuries (1964: 18).

In this era, the Senmin were an especially important group because they supplied the warriors with the essentials of warfare. The feudal lords vied with each other for their services, inviting them to their territories, treating them with deference, and exempting them from all forms of taxation. Thus, especially during the last half of this period of anarchy (the Warring States period), the Senmin spread to every sector of Japan. Moreover, as a result of their tax exemption, many warriors who had been unsuccessful in battle joined the Senmin. Although the Senmin increased in numbers, they remained low in the social hierarchy and still lived "on the banks of rivers or on barren land within the precincts of manors" (Shimahara, 1971: 16). In times of war, they fought for feudal lords and in times of peace, they engaged in lowly jobs such as pottery, tanning, leatherwork, well digging, and cattle breeding. The Buraku people may be said, in large part, to be descendents of the Senmin of this period.

But, according to Newell (1961: 5), up until about 1615, the end of the Chusei era, discrimination against them was not entrenched. That was to happen in the succeeding era, the *Tokugawa* period, when discrimination was encoded in law and strictly enforced.

### Under Tokugawa Feudal System: the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century

While there was some economic and social mobility during the Chusei era, in the *Tokugawa* period (1603-1867) any mobility was forbidden and a truly rigid social structure was formed. It consisted of a four-tier caste system, from top to bottom -- warrior, farmer, artisan and merchant. Outside of this structure, two outcaste groups, the *Eta* [the Great Filth] and *Hinin* [not humans] from the Senmin of the previous era, were legally created. According to Takagi, "social discontent was buffered by the presence of these lower-than-the-lowest of classes" (1991: 285). In addition, the poorest, most miserable dropouts of the farmer, artisan, and merchant classes were incorporated into the Eta, while criminals, persons who committed incest, and survivors of suicides were forced to join the Hinin (Takagi, 1991: 285). These people were fixed in a position at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Since the Eta and Hinin were physically indistinguishable from other people, the authorities forced them to wear special clothes or shoes, and live in ghettos or on marginal farmlands. Under the feudal rules, they were required to marry within their class and were prohibited from coming into contact with other people. A portion of the social rules governing them follows:

[The Eta had to] wear more humble clothes than farmers, identifying themselves by rectangular pieces of cloth five by four inches attached to their clothes. When approaching the home of a commoner, Eta were required to take off their headgear and footwear before entering the courtyard. Sitting, eating, and smoking in company of the commoners was also denied them (Shimamura, 1971: 17-8).

Moreover, under the Tokugawa regime, citizenship records of the Eta and Hinin were registered separately from other Japanese, and they were not included in the census. "In 1857, when an Eta was murdered in a brawl, the judge ruled that the murderer could not be punished unless he killed six more Etas: an Eta life was worth a seventh of that of an ordinary Japanese" (Obituary, 1997: 84). Because they were not considered human, they were exempt from all taxation. Through these rules, the Tokugawa Shogunate differentiated these two groups from others in order to perpetuate the social hierarchy. Additionally, Shintoism and Buddhism played an important role in enforcing the power position of the Shogunate. Not surprisingly, prejudice and discrimination against them became stronger, and other Japanese people avoided direct contact with them.

### **The Official Emancipation and the Modern Period**

With the downfall of the Shogunate in 1868 and the *Meiji* Restoration, Japan set about to rebuild itself as a modern state. The feudal system that had dominated Japanese society for roughly seven hundred years came to an end. From the beginning of this period, petitions and recommendations advocating the legal emancipation of the Eta and Hinin were submitted to the Emperor of Meiji by liberal politicians and government officers trying to modernize Japan by removing traditional feudal obstacles. In response, in 1871, the Meiji government issued an emancipation edict, abolishing the use of the terms Eta and Hinin, and announcing that the status and occupation of those persons

should be treated equally with those of the Eta-Hinin or commoners (former farmers, artisans, and merchants). Also, the government decreed that "Eta-Hinin's citizenship records be incorporated into the general citizenship records" (Shimahara, 1971: 19). Through this official emancipation, the Buraku people could live where they wanted, and choose their jobs.

The government set up a new class system, however, composed of the *Kazoku* [peerage], the *Shizoku* [descendants of former warriors], and the *Heimin* [commoners: former farmers, artisans, and merchants]. The Meiji government also began a system of family registers that listed each citizen's family background. Despite the emancipation edict, the status of the former Eta and Hinin were clearly recorded as *Shin-Heimin* [new commoners]. This system still records each person's address at the time of birth, thereby potentially allowing companies or prospective spouses to determine whether a family is from a Buraku area. Prejudice and discrimination against them was become deeply engrained in popular consciousness (Neary, 1986: 557).

From the late nineteenth century, concern for the Buraku people grew among progressive thinkers, writers and social reformers. Novels based on their life were published, of which Toson Shimazaki's "*Haka!*" became famous. Until the beginning of World War II, sporadic efforts were made to eliminate discrimination against the Eta. After the war, the Buraku people increased their organizational influence, and the government became more responsive to their needs. In Chapter three, I discuss the Buraku movement in detail.

## Terminology

In current terminology, people call this discriminated group, the Buraku people, but historically they were called *Eta* and *Hinin*. Takagi (1991: 284) explains that the two *Kanji* [Chinese letter] for the word "Eta" were "profane" (e) and "plentiful" (ta). As it is written, "Hinin" literally means "not human". Although the Meiji government abolished the use of the terms, they continued to be used, even after World War II, to refer to people of Buraku background. Originally, the word Buraku meant 'community or village'. It is now the most popular word to refer to 'communities of people of Buraku background'. When it refers to the Buraku people, the word Buraku is a shortened form of a phrase *Tokushu-Buraku* [special communities]. The Buraku people or Burakumin ('*min*' means people in Japanese) refers to people of Buraku background.

Today, the government uses '*Dowa*', a term first used in 1926 by Emperor Showa in his ascension address, and derived from the phrase '*Doho Ichi-wa*', which means same people, one harmony, meaning fellow countrymen should live in harmony. In 1984, the Office for Regional Improvement in the Management and Coordination Agency provided this historical background:

The Dowa districts are communities...formed ... around the outset of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (early in the Tokugawa period) when some people, restricted by political, economic and social conditions of Japan's feudal society, settled down in particular districts. The residents of the dowa districts were defined as humble people of the lowest rank and as such were subjected to severe discrimination in all aspects of social life ranging from occupation, residence and marriage to social intercourse

and even dress...treated almost as if they lived a non-human existence and their personal dignity was trampled upon (Quoted in Takagi, 1991: 286).

While the government uses 'dowa district' for districts where the Buraku people live and also 'the people in Dowa districts' for the Buraku people. I choose 'Buraku community' or 'Buraku people,' the term common in scholarly and popular usage.

In the next section, relying mainly on government documents, I analyze the current situation of the Buraku.

## **CURRENT SITUATION**

### **Population**

The population of Japan is 125,760,000 (1996) and includes three main minorities -- the Buraku people, the Koreans and the Ainu people. Despite the pervasive myth that Japan is an 'homogeneous nation', about 4% of the Japanese population (or about 5,000,000 persons) are considered to be minorities whose members arguably suffer from discrimination. Korean nationals number about 650,000 and Korean-Japanese are in the tens of thousands. There are about 23,830 Ainu people (aboriginal people) living in 6,714 households (Hokkaido Minseibu, 1993: 2).

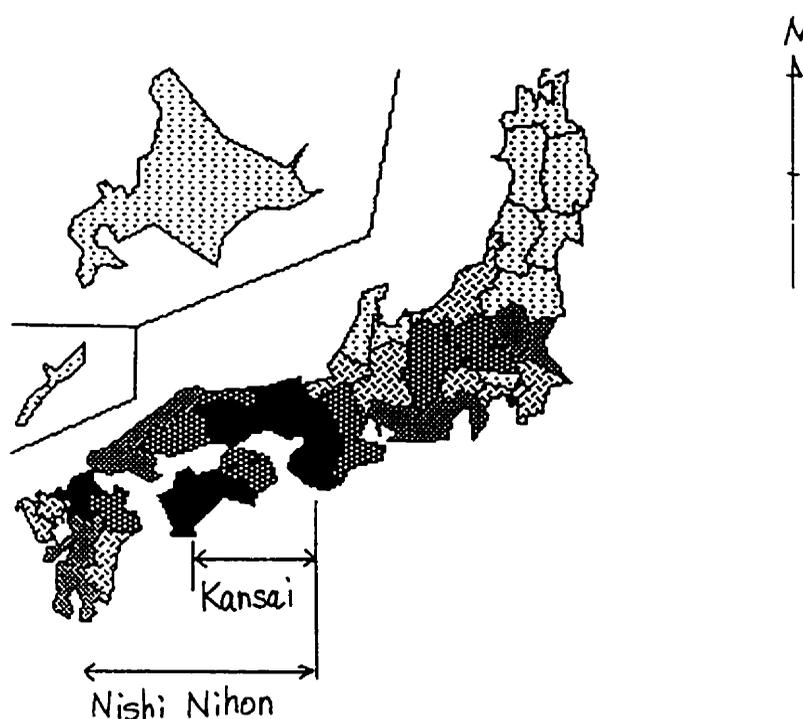
The Buraku people, Japan's largest minority, are physically invisible. According to the government survey (1997), the number of Buraku people stands at 892,751 (298,385 households) living primarily in 4,442 special

communities which the government assigned to Dowa districts (Management and Coordination Agency, 1997: 419). However, according to the data from the Buraku Liberation Research Institute, there are anywhere from 1,000,000 to 3,000,000 Buraku people, living in 6,000 such districts (De Vos, 1983: 3).

The difference in the two sets of figures arises from the difficulty of counting members of an invisible minority, as well as from disagreements about the definition. The government defines the Buraku people as those who live in particular communities (Dowa districts). However, some Buraku-origin communities refuse to be assigned as a Dowa district because they fear discrimination. In these Buraku-origin districts, not designated by the government, many residents are subjected to inferior living conditions. In its survey, the government just counted the number of official districts, while the Buraku Liberation Research Institute counted all Buraku-origin communities. Moreover, there has been rapid movement of population, especially into cities. Some non-Buraku people live in Buraku communities, while some Buraku people have moved away. Therefore, it is difficult for any survey to include all Buraku people.

While the Buraku people live throughout Japan, they are disproportionately concentrated in the *Nishi Nihon* [West part of Japan], especially the *Kansai* area [Western part of Japan] (see Table 2.). Over 10% of the residents of Osaka, Hyogo, and Fukuoka prefectures are Buraku. Thus, contemporary Burakumin areas are a feature mostly of the area from Osaka westward across Honsyu, and southward through Shikoku (Smith, 1994: 199).

Table 2. Distribution of Buraku People by District (1987)



**Hyogo	13.1%	**Shiga	3.11%	*Kagoshima	0.71%	**Toyama	0.00%
**Osaka	12.32	*Tokushima	2.85	Ibaraki	0.53	Ishikawa	0.00
*Fukuoka	11.69	Gunma	2.69	*Shimane	0.52	Okinawa	0.00
**Nara	5.34	*Tottori	2.16	*Miyazaki	0.43	Tokyo	0.00
*Okayama	4.87	*Oita	1.95	Gifu	0.37	Yamagata	0.00
**Kyoto	4.46	Nagano	1.92	*Fukui	0.30	Akita	0.00
**Wakayama	4.07	Tochigi	1.87	Chiba	0.26	Fukushima	0.00
*Ehime	3.87	*Yamaguchi	1.75	Kanagawa	0.16	Miyagi	0.00
*Kochi	3.80	*Kumamoto	1.09	*Saga	0.14	Iwate	0.00
*Hiroshima	3.70	Shizuoka	0.95	Niigata	0.09	Aomori	0.00
**Mie	3.69	*Aichi	0.88	*Yamanashi	0.03	Hokkaido	0.00
Saitama	3.47	*Kagawa	0.73	*Nagasaki	0.03		

Source: Herman W Smith. 1994:200.

Note: \*\* implies Kansai area and \* implies Nishi Nihon (West part of Japan).

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According to the official data (1997), the Buraku population count has been declining for the last twenty years (see Table 3.). There are two main reasons for the decline. The government has tried to buy the land of Dowa communities through Dowa projects, and Buraku youths tend to leave Buraku communities.

**Table 3. Change in the Composition of the Buraku population (1971-1993)**

	Dowa Community	Numbers of Household		Numbers of Population		Percent of mixed living(B/A)
		Total	Buraku	Total(A)	Buraku(B)	
1971	3,972	386,992	277,137	1,458,802	1,048,566	71.1
1975	4,374	520,062	315,063	1,841,953	1,119,278	60.8
1993	4,442	737,198	298,385	2,158,789	892,751	41.4

Source: Management and Coordination Agency. 1997: 419.

Note: Total number of household and population show the number of households and population who live in Dowa communities but are not the Buraku people.

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**Table 4. Gender and Age Structure of the Buraku Population (1971-1993)**

	Sex		Age Structure		
	Male	Female	Under 15	15-64	Over 65
1971	49.0%	51.1%	24.1%	68.7%	7.2%
1975	49.0	51.0	23.1	68.7	8.1
1993	48.7	51.3	16.2	68.3	15.5

Source: Management and Coordination Agency. 1997: 422.

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Since the 1970s, the percentage of young people has declined and Buraku society has begun to age rapidly (see Table 4.). Even though this tendency can be seen in the total Japanese population, it is much more remarkable in the Buraku population (Yagi, 1994: 88). Although the official data do not show the details within the 15-64 category, Japanese sociologist, Kosuke Yagi (1994) conducted a field study in the Asaka area of Osaka where there is a Buraku community. He discovered that older people (over 50) and females make up the highest percentage of that community. Men are more likely to leave communities than women, and Yagi points out also the 'feminization of poverty' in the Buraku communities (1994: 80).

Buraku people frequently register in majority districts in order to avoid discrimination. They move into mainstream society while trying to cover all

tracks that lead back to their origins. During periods of economic growth, there were many job offers and a huge number of recruits were sought in the big cities. Therefore, more people left the Buraku communities. According to Miyazaki (1999: 133), in Wakayama Prefecture, 6.3% of the population left the Buraku community between 1945 and 1952, and 18.7% between 1952 and 1962. The official data (1997) revealed that 13.2% of the Buraku people (under 30 years old) had left during the preceding eight years. The majority stays because they are free from day-to-day discrimination inside the communities (Yagi, 1994: 116-7). They would like to increase their opportunities by leaving, but they know that unless they can successfully disguise their origins, they will face discrimination. According to the survey conducted by Yagi in Asaka (1994: 56-7), 19.8% of the residents, especially young people, answered that they wanted to move to non-Buraku areas (see Table 5.).

**Table 5. The Buraku People's Opinion About Staying or Leaving the Community (1992)**

	Total	Sex			Age				
		Male	Female	N/A	15-18	19-23	24-30	50s	N/A
Continue to live	143 (43.6%)	67 (39.6%)	68 (45.9%)	8	5 (11.9%)	17 (25.8%)	25 (31.6%)	92 (70.8%)	4
If possible, want to move out	51 (15.5)	25 (14.3)	26 (17.6)	0	6 (14.3)	12 (18.2)	15 (19.0)	17 (13.1)	1
Want to move immediately	14 (4.3)	6 (3.6)	8 (5.4)	0	2 (4.8)	5 (7.6)	4 (5.1)	3 (2.3)	0
Don't know	120 (36.6)	71 (42.0)	46 (31.1)	3	29 (69.0)	32 (48.5)	35 (44.3)	18 (13.8)	6
Total	328 (100%)	169 (100%)	148 (100%)	11	42 (100%)	66 (100%)	79 (100%)	130 (100%)	11

Source: Yagi, Kosuke, 1994: 56

Note: The numbers inside ( ) show the percentage of each attribute.

\*\*\*\*\*

Moreover, when asked for reasons for leaving, 21% of the Buraku people (mainly older people) in the Asaka area referred to high population density and close --too close-- interpersonal relationships, although such relationships help them to resist discrimination by the people outside the communities. Also 18% (mainly younger Buraku people) answered that they inevitably face residential discrimination, because community or a whole is discriminated by the majority. It is clear that discrimination motivates younger people to want to move out of the Buraku community (Yagi, 1994: 56).

### Education

Buraku children do not do as well in school as majority children. Studies by Japanese social scientists have demonstrated systematic differences in scores on intelligence and achievement tests between majority and Buraku children attending the same schools. Their truancy rate is also much higher, according to the 1993 government survey of Buraku communities and a national survey by the Ministry of Education (1993) (see Table 6.).

**Table 6. Buraku Truant Students (1993)**

	Buraku community	National average
Elementary students	1.6%	0.12%
Junior High students	4.5%	0.94%

Source: Management and Coordination Agency, 1997. Ministry of Education 1993.

Note: Truant students are students who were absent from school for more than 30 days a school year (from April 1, 1992 to March 31, 1993). The percentage of truant students is calculated through the following equation: [(the number of truant students) ÷ (the total number of students)] × 100.

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As given by children, the reasons, for school truancy are illness and a dislike of school for both Buraku and non-Buraku students.

**Table 7. Educational Attainment of Buraku People Compared to the National Average (1993)**

	Elementary Education	Secondary Education	Higher Education	Never Enrolled	Unknown	Total
1993	55.3%	32.3%	7.6%	3.8%	1.0%	100%
Age 15-19	40.3	57.6	--	0.4	1.6	100
20-24	16.5	63.8	17.3	0.3	2.1	100
25-29	17.5	61.0	19.5	0.2	1.8	100
30-34	17.5	60.4	19.8	0.5	1.9	100
35-39	26.0	54.7	17.1	0.4	1.8	100
40-44	45.6	43.9	8.5	0.7	1.2	100
45-49	61.2	31.4	5.0	1.4	0.9	100
50-54	73.0	20.4	2.6	3.3	0.7	100
55-59	77.2	14.4	1.7	6.1	0.5	100
60-64	80.3	12.5	1.5	5.2	0.5	100
65-69	82.5	9.7	1.6	5.7	0.5	100
70-74	83.1	6.4	1.1	9.0	0.5	100
75-79	80.9	4.9	0.9	12.9	0.4	100
Over 80	73.0	3.2	0.8	22.5	0.5	100
1985	64.0	28.2	5.7	1.5	0.6	100
National'90	31.6	45.4	21.2	0.2	1.6	100

Source: Management and Coordination Agency, 1997: 442.

Note: Elementary Education: graduates from elementary and junior high schools and dropouts from high schools. Secondary Education: graduates from high schools and dropouts from college and universities. Higher Education: graduates from colleges and universities and dropouts from graduate schools.

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Many middle-aged Buraku people did not complete even compulsory education.<sup>3</sup> As Table 7 reveals, according to a 1993 government survey, 3.8% of the Buraku and only 0.2% of the total population never enrolled in school. The percentage of people who finish compulsory education but drop out of high

<sup>3</sup> Under the Japanese education system, compulsory education consisted of 6 years of primary school and 3 years of junior high school.

school is 31.6% for the general population and 55.3% for Buraku people, roughly 1.5 times the national average (see Table 7.). However, as Table 7 shows, younger Buraku people attain higher education more often than did the older people. Also, current data reveals a dramatic improvement in educational enrollment among Buraku students. This is specifically so in secondary schools, where the national average rate of entry into high schools is 96.9% (Ministry of Education, 1999), and that of Buraku people is 91.8%. In post-secondary schools, the Ministry of Education reported that the rate of entry into colleges or universities was 16.5% for Buraku people while the national average was 44.2% (1999). As for completion, as Table 7. shows, the percentage of higher education completion among the Buraku people is 7.6%, compared to 21.2% in national average.

These data show that Buraku youth have had almost equal opportunities to enroll in secondary education. Yet, there is still a huge gap in the completion of post-secondary schools and in higher education.

### **Working Status**

Historically, employment opportunities have been limited for the Buraku people. The 1965 government Dowa policy still assumed that Buraku people only engaged in unstable and casual work. The decline of the Buraku people-run leather industry, a traditional industry in Buraku communities, and the massive entry into the market of major meat-processing trading companies have further threatened their stability of employment. In 1980, according to

Labor Ministry Statistics, the average unemployment rate in Japan was 2.2% but in Buraku districts it was much higher: for example, in Nagasaki Prefecture it was 50%, in Osaka 29%, and in Kochi 26% (Miyazaki, 1999).

However, the employment situation has been improving: in 1993 more than 70% of the Buraku people were employed and approximately 80% of the youth had regular full-time jobs (see Table 8.). The Buraku people should no longer be considered, in Marxist terms, as part of the 'non floating surplus-population (*stockende Uberbevölkerung*)', although they still experience many disadvantages.

**Table 8. Working Profile of the Buraku People Compared to National Average**

(%)	Employees				Family Business			Help Family Busine ss	Piece Work at home	Other
	Total	Regul ar	Temp.	Casua l	Total	With employ ees	Without employ ees			
1993	73.6%	58.5	9.4	5.7	15.2%	5.2	10.0	7.1%	1.6%	2.5%
15-19	93.5	72.3	15.6	5.7	0.3	0.2	0.1	4.1	0.3	1.9
20-24	93.1	81.4	8.6	3.0	1.0	0.3	0.7	4.3	0.3	1.3
25-29	89.5	78.5	7.7	3.3	3.5	1.7	1.7	4.8	0.7	1.6
30-34	82.8	70.4	8.7	3.7	7.1	3.4	3.8	6.8	1.1	2.2
35-39	80.0	65.8	10.2	4.0	10.1	4.7	5.4	6.0	1.6	2.3
40-44	74.5	60.5	9.5	4.6	14.1	6.0	8.2	7.0	1.6	2.7
45-49	72.1	57.6	9.5	5.0	17.2	7.4	9.8	6.3	1.9	2.5
50-54	70.0	55.1	8.4	6.6	18.2	7.3	11.0	7.3	2.1	2.3
55-59	67.9	51.4	8.2	8.2	20.4	7.3	13.1	7.1	1.7	2.9
60-64	56.5	33.9	11.8	10.8	27.4	7.0	20.4	10.2	2.6	3.2
65-69	43.6	20.7	12.1	10.9	36.7	8.2	28.4	12.8	2.7	4.3
70-74	32.0	15.7	9.6	6.7	45.7	6.4	39.3	15.2	3.2	4.0
75-79	21.2	8.4	6.5	6.2	53.5	6.7	46.8	15.4	5.4	4.4
80-	17.9	11.9	2.8	3.2	54.8	4.8	50.0	17.9	3.2	5.4
1985	68.4	53.3	8.2	7.0	16.8	5.4	11.4	8.9	1.5	4.4
Nation al '92	73.9	65.0	6.9	2.3	11.6	3.2	8.4	7.2	1.2	6.0

Source: Management and Coordination Agency, 1997: 447.

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Discrimination by large firms remains, since they prefer majority Japanese. Most firms still require potential employees to submit their *Koseki* (family registers, to be analyzed in the next chapter) which shows their residence, birth-place, and other information about family members. Lists which compile the addresses of Buraku communities have begun to circulate. It is estimated that, between 1976 and 1980, at least nine substantial lists were produced, and sold at a high price to firms, including well-known large companies and major banks. As William Wetherall has explained:

Some were based on lists published during the 1930s by the government together with official reports on Buraku problems. The lists have been used to screen the present and past addresses of applicants and their relatives to identify those with Buraku backgrounds and frustrate their dreams of escape from the fetters of a legally proscribed but socially indelible status (1984:36).

There has been pressure by the Buraku Liberation League (BLL) to make these lists illegal, so far to no avail. These lists are bought not only by companies but also by individuals who wish to ensure that their children do not inadvertently marry a person of Buraku status. Both companies and individuals also use private detective agencies to determine Buraku status.

Partly because of that, the Buraku people, especially older people, tend to be hired by smaller companies (see Table 9.), mainly as manual and unskilled laborers. As Table 9 shows, 21.8% of the overall employed population are in firms with 5-29 employees, compared to a Buraku average of 30.9%. While 23.3% of the Japanese population work in firms with over 300 employees, only

10.6% of the Buraku hold jobs in these companies. Hence, while increasingly Buraku people have stable jobs as regular employees, they are more affected by economic fluctuation because they work at smaller companies which provide less job security.

**Table 9. Employment Data by Size of Enterprise**

Size \ Age	1-4 people (%)	5-9	10-19	20-29	30-49	50-99	100-299	Over 300	Government & municipal	Unknown
1993	25.9%	12.5%	11.6%	6.8%	6.7%	7.2%	7.9%	10.6%	9.4%	2.5%
15-19	11.1	17.2	14.6	7.9	7.5	8.5	11.1	16.4	2.8	2.7
20-24	10.2	12.2	12.7	7.7	7.8	9.2	11.8	18.1	8.2	2.1
25-29	13.2	13.0	12.1	7.7	7.4	8.0	9.7	15.9	10.9	2.2
30-34	17.3	12.7	12.7	7.2	6.8	7.7	8.5	13.7	11.5	1.9
35-39	19.4	12.7	11.7	6.9	6.5	7.4	8.8	11.7	13.1	1.8
40-44	23.6	12.7	11.2	6.4	6.7	7.5	8.1	10.8	10.9	2.1
45-49	25.0	12.2	11.7	7.3	6.8	7.4	7.3	10.2	10.0	2.0
50-54	27.5	12.2	11.5	6.8	7.2	6.9	7.4	8.4	9.8	2.4
55-59	29.2	12.5	10.9	7.0	7.0	7.2	7.1	7.5	9.0	2.6
60-64	39.6	12.9	12.1	5.6	5.9	5.8	4.9	4.3	5.6	3.3
65-69	49.8	11.2	10.1	4.7	4.8	4.1	3.8	2.5	4.5	4.7
70-74	61.0	10.6	5.4	3.2	2.9	3.4	1.8	1.7	4.7	5.3
75-79	71.0	7.5	4.1	2.2	2.1	0.8	1.6	0.6	4.1	5.9
80--	67.9	8.3	5.2	2.8	1.6	1.6	1.6	0.4	3.2	7.5
National92	24.5	9.2	7.9	4.7	5.3	7.0	9.7	23.3	8.1	0.3

Source: Management and Coordination Agency, 1997: 449.

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Additionally, according to the Buraku Liberation Research Institute's report (October 1993), compared to the general population, there are fewer white-collar workers and more blue-collar workers among the Buraku in each prefecture, and the ratio of workers in manufacturing is higher among the

Buraku.<sup>1</sup> For example, in Kyoto, 12.9% of the Buraku people engage in clerical jobs, compared to 21.9% of the population in Kyoto. In contrast, 43.5% of the Buraku people work in manufacturing, compared to 35.9% of the population in Kyoto (Buraku Liberation Research Institute, 1993: 6).

Government jobs are not closed to Buraku as they once were. Educated Buraku people hold bureaucratic positions of considerable importance and become active in politics. In 1993, 9.4% of Buraku people held government and municipal jobs (see Table 9.). According to Yagi's survey conducted in Asaka (1994: 90), 23.2% work for municipal agencies, through the government Dowa projects. However, many of them engage in unskilled jobs, such as garbage collecting and only a few hold senior administrative jobs. These jobs are stable and provide regular income, but this pattern of employment also reproduces discrimination against the Buraku people, because they mainly engage in unskilled work in municipal, town, or village office.

The annual income of the Buraku people still remains remarkably low compared with the national average. According to the survey conducted by the Buraku Liberation Research Institute (1993), in Osaka 15% of the Buraku people made less than 1 million yen (1Cdn\$  $\cong$  71 yen) a year, compared to less than 1% in the general population, while 15% of the Buraku people made over 5 million yen a year, compared to 50% of the non-Buraku population.

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<sup>1</sup> Workers in manufacturing are those who work in manufacturing assembly like.

## **Standard of living**

The number of households on relief among the Buraku people continues to be far greater than the national average. According to the survey conducted by the Buraku Liberation Research Institute, in 1975, 76% of the Buraku were on relief. By 1985, the figure had dropped to 57.1%, compared to 12.3% for the national average. According to official data (1997), by 1993 the figure had dropped somewhat to 52.0% while the national figures stood at 7.1%. These high rates among the Buraku were caused by inadequate pensions, unemployment, health problems and lack of education. Many older people remain on relief, while young Buraku people have been more likely to access higher education and better jobs. Also, compared to the national average of 36.9%, the Buraku people remain on relief for a long time: for example, 46.5% of the Buraku welfare families were on relief for more than ten years.

## **Cases of Discrimination**

In 1993, a government poll found that 33.2% of Buraku people declared that they had suffered from discrimination. This discrimination was mainly experienced in marriage, getting work, at work and in daily life (see Table 10.). Compared to the past, discrimination against the Buraku people, especially in employment and schooling, has declined. However, it is true that they constantly suffer from discrimination especially in marriage and at work.

Nearly 47% of Buraku people who suffered from discrimination did not

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construction, operating, and repairing machines, transporting and cleaning.

appeal their treatment,<sup>5</sup> while only 6.2% of the general population who suffered similar human rights violations failed to appeal (Cabinet Public Relations Office, 1993).

**Table 10. Contents of Discrimination**

Age Discrimination	-5 years ago	6-10 years ago	10-20 years ago	20years ago
Marriage	22.2	19.6	30.4	27.6
Getting employment	15.9	18.0	24.2	41.7
At School	5.6	6.8	17.0	70.5
At Work	27.4	17.8	25.8	28.7
Daily Life	28.1	15.0	20.3	36.4
Others	27.0	15.2	19.0	37.6

Source: Management and Coordination Agency, 1997: 459.

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### Court cases

There have been several court cases that have focused attention on discrimination against the Buraku people, the most famous being the *Sasayama* case. In 1963, a female high school student was killed in the Saitama Prefecture, north of Tokyo. A Buraku youth, Kazuo Ishikawa, was arrested and sentenced to imprisonment for life. However, the counsel for the accused, the Buraku Liberation League, and other groups claimed that he was falsely accused, and a mass protest movement developed. This case resulted in a lot of support rallies for the Buraku across Japan in the 1970s. In 1994 Ishikawa was finally released on parole. In the process of the retrial, it became clear that the claims of the prosecution contained a lot of inconsistencies.

In March 1983, the Osaka District Court served a warning that

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<sup>5</sup> The reason is that many Buraku people try to hide the fact that they are Buraku.

discrimination against the Buraku people would no longer be tolerated. The court decision ordered a man and his parents to pay his former fiancée 5 million yen (US\$ 20,000) in damages for breaking a 10-year relationship which entailed several postponements of marriage because of parental objection to her alleged Burakumin status (Wetherall, 1984: 36).

### **What is the problem? -- Identification of the problems**

One man who married a Buraku woman describes his subsequent experience with his parents: "I have two sons aged eleven and nine. My father met the first one once when he was a baby and the second time a few months ago by accident at the hospital when we were visiting my grandmother" (Quoted in Neary, 1997: 112). Although the two families live close-by, they have no contact, and even with the death of his Buraku daughter-in-law, his father refuses to relent (Neary, 1997).

Clearly discrimination against the Buraku people in contemporary Japan runs deep. The Buraku people have suffered from prejudice, and discrimination continues to exist.

Picture 1 shows graffiti found on the Ohnami Bridge at Kizu River, in Kyoto. The graffiti say "Kill Buraku people." The similar malicious and discriminatory graffiti and letters such as "Burakumin are non-humans" and "Burakumin are even lower than worms" have been found in men's toilets at various railway stations all over Japan (Buraku Liberation Research Institute, 1985:55).

Picture 1



"Kill Burakumin!"

Scribbles found on the Ohnami Bridge at Kizu River, Feb 21, 1983

Source: Buraku Liberation Research Institute. 1985: 56

Many Japanese people have negative stereotypes about the Buraku people and their communities, although they know, in some sense, that they should abandon these stereotypes. For example, according to the poll conducted by the government in 1993, 87.8% of the general population answered that they would continue to have the same relationship with a person, even after finding out that he/she was from the Buraku. But 10.4% answered that they would try to avoid any further communication (Management and Coordination Agency, 1997: 469) and this is a lot of people who openly admit prejudice. As to marriage, less than half (45.7%) of the general population answered that they would respect their children's will and allow them to get marry a Buraku person (1997: 471).

Historically, in Japan, there has always been a class of people who were considered outside the mainstream of ordinary society, people who were not only considered inferior, but also were believed to be ritually polluted.

As we have seen, the Buraku people's living conditions have been improving since the 1970s. Many Buraku people work as regular employees and have acquired higher education, but their average living condition is still well below the national average. We cannot deny that the Buraku people continue to have difficulties living in modern Japan because of deep-rooted prejudice. Under these conditions, it is necessary to think about why discrimination against the Buraku people remains, in order to consider solutions to this problem. In addition, we have to pay attention to the new aspects of the Buraku communities. In the past, the Buraku communities

were identified by two words -- discrimination and poverty. However, the Buraku communities have changed as a result of the government Dowa projects and due to the high economic growth in the 1970s. During the strong economic growth in the 1960s and the 1970s, living conditions of the whole Japanese society rapidly improved. At the same time, the Buraku people got marginal benefits of the booming economy.

How can we explain the Buraku situation? It is often difficult for Westerners to understand what sets the Buraku people apart in the minds of majority Japanese. The two groups are ethnically, linguistically and religiously identical, and the vast majority of the Buraku people no longer participate in jobs in which their ancestors engaged. Yet social prejudice and myths of spiritual and racial purity abound in contemporary Japan (Evans, 1990: 46-7). In the next chapter, I will explore the reasons why the Buraku people continue to be discriminated against in Japanese society

## **CHAPTER 2: WHY DOES DISCRIMINATION AGAINST THE BURAKU PEOPLE CONTINUE?**

In this chapter, a comprehensive analysis is undertaken of the main question: why discrimination against the Buraku people continues? This analysis is based on the statistical data provided in chapter one as well as on studies undertaken by Western and Japanese scholars. First I will outline the various sociological perspectives that have been drawn upon to classify the relationship between the Buraku people and the rest of Japanese society. The crux of the matter is this: the Buraku people are Japanese: they speak Japanese and inherit Japanese traditions: they cannot be distinguished racially, ethnically, linguistically, culturally or religiously. What do sociological theories have to offer by way of explaining and understanding their situation? There are various theories: (1) race and racism, (2) minority group status, (3) qualification group, (4) outcaste group. I will consider them one at a time.

### **SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES**

#### **Race and Racism**

Non-Japanese scholars abroad such as George A. De Vos (1967) and Hermer W. Smith (1994) use the term "invisible race" to refer to the Buraku people. There are several sociological perspectives/definitions of race. Even though the applicability of the 'race' concept is debated, most sociological definitions take 'race' to be a category based in part on differences in human physical characteristics. Anthony Giddens (1989: 747) defines 'race' as

"differences in human physical stock regarded as categorizing large numbers of individuals together." Social scientists, such as Ellis Cashmore, employ the notion of 'social race' to refer to "a group of people who are socially defined in a given society as belonging together because of physical markers such as skin pigmentation, hair texture, facial features, stature, and the like" (1988: 238). Also, Richard Jenkin (1986) mentions that the concept of race is conceived of as a socially constructed notion of biological difference used by one group to categorize another in the context of unequal power relations. Even these concepts of 'social race' invoke biological or physical differences.

However, Robert Miles, in particular, argues strongly against the use of the concept 'race' in any circumstances:

There are no 'races' and therefore no 'race relations'. There is only a belief that there are such things, a belief that is used by some social groups to construct an Other (and therefore the Self) in thought as a prelude to exclusion and domination, and by other social groups to define Self (and so to construct an Other) as a means of resisting that exclusion (1993: 42).

He continues:

In certain historical conjunctures and under specific material conditions, human beings attribute certain biological characteristics with meaning in order to differentiate, to exclude, and to dominate: reproducing the idea of 'race', they create a racialised Other and simultaneously they racialise themselves (1993: 44).

Moreover, he points out that racism is an ideology that "constructs (real and imagined) difference as natural not only in order to exclude but,

additionally, in order to marginalise a social collectivity within a particular constellation of relations of domination" (1993: 101). Within a context of unequal power relations, real or imagined biological differences can become the definitive criterion for categorization, exclusion and domination. Miles points to the Irish, Jews and Gypsies as examples of culturally distinct European populations 'racialized' on the basis of imagined biological difference (1993: 13, 87). These ideas do not result from inherent human aptitude to discriminate but are articulated in certain historical contexts by groups located within power relations. This conception permits us to describe the creation, treatment, and categorization of the Buraku people as a form of racism. In Memmi's words:

Racism [Discrimination] is the generalized and final assigning of values to real or imaginary differences, to the accuser's benefit and at his victim's expense, in order to justify the former's own privileges and aggression (1968: 185; 2000: 169).

While differences among people and groups in cultures, living styles and customs are always present in some form, those differences do not link to discrimination directly. The problem is, as Memmi points out, the differential valuation of these differences by those with power. If a difference is missing, racists invent one. If a difference exists, racists interpret it to their own advantage. They emphasize only those differences that contribute to their arguments. In other words, whether the differences are real or imaginary, they do not matter for discrimination to develop. Kousuke Yagi (1994: 151) also

argues that physical differences are simply invoked as justification for discrimination.

To borrow from Miles once again, racism is a supportive ideology that builds real and imagined differences to exclude and marginalize a social group (1993: 101):

The concept of racism refers to those negative beliefs held by one group which identify and set apart another by attributing significance to some biological or other 'inherent' characteristic(s) which it is said to possess, and which deterministically associate that characteristic(s) with some other (negatively evaluated) feature(s) or action(s). The possession of these supposed characteristics may be used to justify the denial of the group equal access to material and other resources and/or political rights (1982: 78-9).

Accordingly, racist ideology produces legitimation for the continued existence of unequal economic and political relationships. In addition, ideologies, as Miles argues, "have to be produced and reproduced, with the implication that their content and object is subject to change" (1982: 81). Understanding how racial ideologies become entrenched requires an examination of the context through which they were historically produced and reproduced, generation by generation.

Wagatsuma and Yoneyama demonstrate that racism is deeply rooted in Japanese culture and has its origins in the pre-modern period (1976:20-33, 93, 120-140). Discrimination against the Buraku people did not happen overnight, but resulted from historical prejudices passed from generation to generation. Therefore, when we analyze the reasons for discrimination, we have to keep in

mind that racism, like all ideologies, has cultural and historical roots, that it does not exist simply as a pure idea. Hence, we have to discuss a wide range of aspects. If racism creates race, the Buraku provides a dramatic example.

### **Minority Group Status**

Second, there are also various sociological definitions of minority group that may apply. A widely used definition comes from Louis Wirth:

We may define a minority as a group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination (1945: 347).

This definition does not fit the Buraku people, because they do not have any marked physical or cultural characteristics. However, Giddens (1989: 245) mentions other features of a minority group. He agrees that "its members are disadvantaged, as a result of discrimination", but adds that "members of the minority have some sense of group solidarity, of 'belonging together' and minority groups are usually to some degree physically and socially isolated from the larger community."

Michael Goldstein (1972: 22) remarks that a minority is defined as "any group which is considered by the politically dominant groups within the society to be as a group 'different'." Members of minority group are viewed, therefore, as outsiders or out-group members. Moreover, they are denied membership in the dominant in-group and prevented from identifying with

the dominant reference groups in the society. When a "minority" is also denied access to the political, economic, and social rewards of the society, an oppressed minority is formed. Once a group has been identified as "different", this process of exclusion is generally inevitable, unless some sort of settlement laws (official agreements between minority and majority) are arranged between the dominant and subordinate groups.

According to Giddens' and Goldstein's definitions, the Buraku people can be seen a minority group. Historically, the Buraku people share these three characteristics which Giddens points out: historically they have been disadvantaged through discrimination, especially in marriage and employment: they tend to think of themselves people apart and have strong solidarity as a result of discrimination: and they live in isolated communities. The majority group believes them to be different and excludes them.

### **Qualification Group**

In contrast, Noboru Yamamoto (1986: 12), another Japanese sociologist, argues that the Burkau people can not be described as a minority group, because they lack distinguishing physical and cultural characteristics. Accordingly, he prefers the term "qualification group" which refers to a group defined by its members' qualification, such as gender. He points out women's clubs and young men's associations as examples. The qualification may be acquired through physiological or shared social features. The Buraku people have a qualification, namely, as residents in the Buraku communities.

## Outcaste Group

Western scholars, such as De Vos (1967)<sup>6</sup>, Cornell (1961)<sup>7</sup> and Donoghue (1967)<sup>8</sup>, perceive the Buraku as an "outcaste" group, people who are socially located outside of the caste system defined by Berreman (1967: 279) as "a hierarchy of groups in a society, membership in which is determined by birth".

Drawing on Lloyd Warner's urban anthropological study, De Vos and

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<sup>6</sup> Most of the Buraku studies have been done since the end of the World War II. Until then, as Cornell notes, "a taboo on field studies of the Buraku communities [had] prevailed among Japanese social scientists" (Cornell, 1967: 179). Even now, although as Yamamoto (1986: 18) points out, there are a lot of reports on the Buraku communities, most of them are confined to statistical surveys, though there are some sociological analyses of Buraku communities and their treatment in Japanese society. De Vos started his work in the early 1950s, with a Japanese socio-anthropologist, Hiroshi Wagatsuma (1967, 1971, 1983, 1990, 1992, 1995). From 1962 through 1965 they conducted field studies, mainly by interviewing both the Buraku members and majority Japanese. From the interviews, they concluded that the Buraku people's living standard, such as income and education, is lower than the majority Japanese. Also, they mentioned distinct Buraku customs with regard to food preferences, dress and way of speaking. They noted that "eating internal animal organs continues to be an abhorred Buraku characteristic": that their dress was extremely informal or careless, and that speech patterns were more informal and less refined than the general society (1995: 277). These Buraku characteristics which are seen as negative, unlike the majority characteristics which are seen as showing better taste, more refinement, as a result, they gain preferred occupational position and maintain power and status. In this respect, Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital -- knowledge or idea which contribute to maintain power and status -- perfectly fits the Buraku case.

<sup>7</sup> John B. Cornell (1961, 1967) carried out fieldwork in Japan from 1957 to 1958, focusing upon four aspects: (1) relations between Buraku and non-Buraku communities, (2) the majority's view toward Buraku neighbors, (3) the social cohesion in the Buraku communities (1967: 153). He, then, suggested that "discriminatory attitudes, self-fulfilling biases, and inter-group tensions" (1961: 293) were factors which maintained minority-majority relations.

<sup>8</sup> An anthropologist John D Donoghue has conducted many studies using primarily participant observation and interview with the Buraku people (1957, 1967, 1971, 1977). His first field research, in 1953-54 in a Buraku community, Shin-machi (a pseudonym), located in the city of Toyoda in the Tohoku District of northeast Japan, focused on intergroup and interpersonal relations, and socioeconomic organization that influenced the persistence of this community. His second field research in 1974 and 1976, aimed to discover the changes in the community and in its relations with the larger society. His studies dealt with processes related to community and society, views about the community and outside it, minority -majority relations, mass movements, and society at

Wagatsuma differentiated the interviewees (both the Buraku and non-Buraku people) into "upper-, middle-, and lower-class" based on "occupation, education internal conditions of the home, residential location, and source of income" (1995: 275). The Buraku people were mainly categorized as either "lower-lower" or "upper-lower" class.

Most inhabitants were unskilled day laborers in construction or similar work -- "lower lower" in Warner et al.'s system. A number worked for the city, often on a daily or temporary basis, doing street cleaning, garbage collecting, or (at the time we studied them) night-soil collecting. Some members of the community achieved Warner's "upper-lower class" i.e., blue-collar status within the community (1995: 276).

There are a good number of women among those employed in small stores and in some cases as factory workers. If the husband worked in a store or factory, generally the social status of the family seems to be classifiable as upper-lower class. If, however, the father worked as a day laborer or casual construction worker and his wife or daughter worked as a factory hand, the family was considered by our informants to be in the lowest class position (De Vos, 1992: 152).

Like De Vos, Tadashi Fukutake (1965), one of the most noted Japanese sociologists (although he is a Marxist), drew upon Lloyd Warner's ideas on social status, and compared the Buraku people with the Black people in the United States. He argued that although the Buraku people participate in the social structure and interact with those in larger capitalist society, they were disproportionately located in the "lower-lower" class. Even those who might

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large.

rank first in their communities, rank last in the broader economic order. Accordingly, they are located in the lowest status, and finally, are excluded altogether from the status ranking. Moreover, he points out that the Buraku people lived in isolated communities, and so most cannot be proletarians -- they have no access to wage labor. Proceeding, then, from a Marxist perspective he argued that the whole social system had to be transformed.

De Vos also found "functional similarities in the treatment of Japanese outcastes and of African-Americans, despite the fact that in Japan it is not physical visibility that leads to racism" (1995: 284). Both societies emphasize occupational and educational achievement, and like African-Americans, the Buraku are excluded from professional occupations or jobs requiring skill.

In comparing Japan, India, the United States, Germany, and South Africa, he notes that "there are underlying structural similarities that maintain caste or racist attitudes in the social-cultural matrix operative in all these modern national states" (1967: 325). He concluded that "the Burakumin can only be interpreted as a historical instance of caste" (1967: 326).

He went on to develop an integrative, structural theory of caste drawing on Durkheim, Frazer and Nadel. He focused on psychological mechanisms underlying caste -- the structure of caste-segregate behavior -- and was critical of the Marxist theory of social classes for focusing on only economic explanations. He explored the "caste-type thinking related to religious concepts of purity or impurity" (1967: 339).

Passin (1955) uses the concept of "untouchability", and compares the

Buraku people with groups in India, Korea and Tibet.<sup>9</sup> He defines untouchability as "a system of social relations in which certain groups within the community are looked upon as so different from and inferior to the generality of society that they must be kept isolated" (1955: 247). The most extreme form of caste, "untouchability [refers to] a rigid hereditary hierarchical system: a world view that conceives of social status as inherent in the constitution of the universe: and a concept of pollution that associates dirt with ritual impurity" (1955: 262). He also points out that a lot of Japanese people even try to avoid talking about the Buraku, because of this untouchability.

Although the analyses of caste and untouchability are persuasive and perceptive, the use of "outcaste" to describe the Buraku is open to question. Current Japanese society is not a caste society, even though historically, especially in the Tokugawa period, Japanese society had a rigid class system which could be called a caste system. Buraku people can move anywhere they wish in Japan. There is no official occupational specialization peculiar to Buraku people. Also, endogamous and ritual restrictions are not enforced. Moreover, many Buraku people have stable work, and a small number are white collar workers, investors and owners. Taira (1971) prefers the term "pariah" with reference to the Buraku-min, contending that the Buraku people should be considered "special members" of the lower class.

However, De Vos' focus on how non-economic factors help determine

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<sup>9</sup> Four untouchable groups, which Passin (1955) analyzed, are the low castes of India, the

people's behavior is very useful. As he insists, it is necessary to look for deep psychological feelings that maintain the exclusion of the Buraku.

As we have explored, the Buraku may be viewed from different sociological perspectives. The Buraku people do experience racism based on imagined differences: they appear to share characteristics as minority group, qualification group, and outcaste group. In order to arrive at more satisfactory conclusions, however, we need to look more in depth at the existing studies in the context of the history of Japanese society.

### **WHY HAS THE BURAKU SITUATION PERSISTED?**

#### **The Incomplete Transition to Capitalism-- the Remnants of Feudal Society**

In explaining the persistence of Buraku exclusions scholars, inspired by Marxism, have examined what they call Japan's incomplete transition from feudalism to capitalism. From this approach they also show how Japanese society retained many of its traditional aspects throughout the Allied Occupation after World War II.

To understand this continuity, Japanese sociologists, (Yamamoto, 1986: Fukutake, 1989) analyzed the transition from feudal to a modern capitalist society during the Meiji Restoration in 1868. Fukutake identifies several aspects of modern society:

Few individuals live and die in the villages and towns in which they were born: more and more are geographically mobile as they seek their

living elsewhere. They no longer are frozen in a social status accorded them at birth: the possibilities of rising or falling in the social scale increase. Man, as a citizen, is freed from the local isolationism and the status discrimination of traditional society and ideally creates a society of free and equal individuals. Modern society is a society of citizens (1989: 12).

People leave the land and flow to the big factories which need workers. The feudal status system, which restricted residential, occupational and social movement and contact among status groupings, was altered to provide for the free movement of labor.

But Yamamoto (1986) has argued that, in Japan, the transition from a status system to a class system never really occurred. According to him, there are three main differences between a status and a class system (1986: 7). First is the degree of mobility. Under a status system, mobility among status groups is prohibited, while under a class system it is unrestrained. The second concerns the legal regime. Under a status system, people's rights, obligations, and opportunities are legally different depending on their social status, while under a class system, people are equal under the law. The third concerns the relationship between status and class, on the one hand, and occupation on the other. Under a status system, status is strongly related to occupational groups and occupations themselves, while under a class system there are basically no relations between class and occupation because of the mobility among classes.

When applying these three criteria to Japan, we see that the social status of the Buraku people is ascribed by birth. Although the Buraku people were

legally emancipated in 1871, the characteristics of a status system continued to be transmitted across generations. The abolition of the official status system, which gave every person the formal and legal freedom to choose and change his/her occupation, was not instituted in practice. In Yamamoto's view, this incomplete class transition is related to a distorted form of modernization. A modern civil society was not created in Japan, nor was the idea of democracy developed.

There appear to be three major reasons for the specific nature of Japan's development. The first reason is the historical relationship of Japan with the rest of the world, especially Western countries. From 1639 to 1853, Japan closed its doors to foreign countries, except China and Holland, because the government was afraid of the spread of Christianity. As Fukutake (1989: 13) points out, it was only in 1853 with the "threatening appearance off the coast of Japan of 'Black Ships' [Perry's fleet] coming from the advanced countries" that Japan reluctantly opened its door to foreign countries. This was one hundred years after the British industrial revolution and the French revolution.

New practices and ideas from the West arrived with the opening of the country. Accordingly, the incentive for reform, such as the Meiji Restorations of 1868, came from tremendous pressure from the outside rather than internal momentum. The aim of Meiji Restorations was simply to catch up to, and protect Japan from Western countries, rather than to engage in Western-style bourgeois revolution. In Siddle's words, "the leadership of Japan embarked

upon a conscious policy of modernization along Western lines, motivated by the need to build a 'prosperous country and a strong army' in the face of Western power" (1996: 11). As Mitsuchika Kuga, an historian, put it:

In every country, the development of a sense of nation [was] roused by the stimulus of foreign relations. In Japan not only our national autonomy was impaired but foreign influences threaten[ed] to rush in and buffet our island country about until our manners and customs, our institutions and civilization, our historical spirit, even our national spirit [were] swept away (Quoted in Gluck, 1985: 75).

The transition to modern capitalism, then, was not a result of disintegrating feudal structure, as in the West, and many aspects of the Japanese feudal structure persisted.

The second is that the Meiji Restoration of 1868 was not a capitalist revolution, complete with two conflicting classes of proletarians and bourgeoisie as Karl Marx posited. Rather, the Meiji Restoration was carried out under the leadership of the lower-ranking warriors [Bushi (Samurai)]. The lower Samurai who made up 90% of the rulers sought to perpetuate the traditional social structure within the new order posed (Man, 1965). While higher education became an important condition for membership in the ruling political and business elites, it was by and large available only to the children of the upper strata of the old society (Fukutake, 1989: 58). Thus, even in the second generation after the Restoration, the character of the first generation was reproduced. In a sense then, the Meiji Restoration was a restoration of feudal rule, and in comparison with the countries of Europe and America, it

was a highly 'distorted' form of modernization.

Additionally, through the development of state enterprises that were subsequently sold off to private individuals -- in other words through the promotion of bureaucratic capitalism -- the Japanese capitalist class acquired a "politico-merchant" character, that was not opposed to the government (Inoue, 1994: 245). Therefore, there was no impetus for a bourgeois revolution. By utilizing feudal remnants within the society, Japanese capitalism never performed the historically progressive role that it 'should' perform, opening the way to liberty and equality. In feudal European societies kings with absolute rights saw their regimes collapse. People were 'freed' to make their way in the new capitalist market-place.

Thirdly, under the Meiji government, an emperor-centered nobility system was established<sup>10</sup>. Although the government officially abolished a four-tier feudal status system, consisting, from top to bottom, of warriors, artisans, merchants and farmers, the nobility system remained. Fukutake (1989) argues that the mass of the people was easily indoctrinated because Japan had for so long closed its doors to foreign countries. While Western modern science and technology were imported, the ideology of emperor worship and the morality of loyalty was propagated.

All this contributed to the maintenance of discrimination against the Buraku people. The pressure to modernize from outside prevented a complete

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<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the general translation is "Meiji Restoration" instead of using the word, "revolution".

transition from feudal to modern capitalist society. Contemporary society retained some feudal elements, including the attitudes and practices which maintain Buraku status.

After Japan's defeat in World War II, there was another major impetus to change. From 1945 to 1951, Japan was instructed by the General Headquarters of the allied occupation army (GHQ) to adopt a new value system and promote democracy. Once again, the pressure for change was from outside. Yet, while the occupation army ruled Japan, it did so through the Japanese government. Accordingly, some of the reforms were hard to reconcile with the feudal value system. A famous Japanese economist, Yukio Noguchi (1998: 3) has pointed out the continuity of the pre-war systems, even after the reforms carried out through the GHQ, especially in industrial, financial and bureaucratic systems.

In the words of Richard Evans, "Japan's great economic and technical revolutions have not been accompanied by commensurate social change and at the root of contemporary Japanese society, the vestiges of medieval characteristics can still be discerned" (1990: 46). Despite Japan's economic growth, the country remains insular in many ways, tied to past traditions. Japanese society is changing, but slowly.

As we have explored, Japanese society continues to show feudal characteristics. However, we cannot forget that systematic racism continues in other capitalist societies as well. Capitalism has surely not done away with racism. Indeed, new forms of racism enabled capitalist development.

Therefore, we need to look into the exclusion of the Buraku people more deeply.

### **Cultural Aspects**

#### **Religion -- the concept of purity and impurity**

As is well-known, Marxist theory emphasizes forms of inequality that are related to political and economic power. The theory tends to underestimate the autonomous force of non-utilitarian, expressive values in the continuity of culture. De Vos argues that a thorough understanding of these psychological forces in the context of the society's cultural history as well as the economic functions of discrimination, are necessary if we are to understand the nature of continuing prejudice in modern society (1995: 285).

Both Durkheim and Weber paid attention to the force of unquestioned or sacred values in shaping and continuing a cultural pattern. Understanding the non-economic forces governing human behavior is important in order to explain why discrimination against the Buraku people continues. Attitudes or feelings related to non-economic/political values become embodied in socially discriminatory behaviors.

Nisbet (1974: 164-5) summarizes Durkheim's understanding of religion and its function in society this way: 1) religion is necessary to society as a vital mechanism of integration for human beings and as a means to unify symbols; 2) religion is a seedbed for social change; 3) more important than creed or belief, religion's most enduring elements are in ritual ceremony, hierarchy,

and community: and 4) there is a link between religion and the origins of human thought and reason. In short, Durkeim saw religion as a consecration of community, and a source of respect for society. In his social theory, the religious system governing a society is, in essence, an embodiment of the sacred or value aspects that give ultimate meaning to a system. From Durkeim's perspective, religious elements, in this case, especially concepts of purity and impurity, require analysis. Several writers have used this perspective to analyze Japanese society and the exclusion of the Buraku, including Mary Douglas (1966), George De Vos and Wagatsuma (1995), and De Vos and Suarez-Orozco (1990).

Historically, in Japan, there has always been a status system that entirely excluded some people, by considering them outside mainstream society. They were considered not only inferior, but also ritually polluted. De Vos points out that while "various visibly different physical characteristics may be suggested as necessary criteria for differentiation.....non-visible features can be used with equal force to segregate off a portion of the population of a society as essentially inferior, or in religious terms 'impure'" (1992: 171). As examples, he notes that "particular language forms and modes of physical comportment or eating practices.....can come to be interpreted as genetically transmitted forms of 'ugliness', if they differ from the standards aimed at by the majority" (1995: 284).

The indigenous religion of Japan, Shinto, places great emphasis on ritual purity conceived as both a state of soul and a state of body, and on purity's

necessary underside. conceptions of pollution, here associated with blood, dirt, and death. These Shinto beliefs were deployed by the rulers to create a lowest class comprised of the Eta and Hinin, because they engaged in jobs related to death and bloodletting. They started to be considered dirty and polluted. At the same time, under the influence of Shinto, Emperor worship was also created. As Douglas put it, "beliefs which attribute spiritual power to individuals are never neutral or free of the dominant patterns of social structure" (1966: 135). Emperor-worship and scorn for the Buraku people share roots in the same religious concepts. In early Japanese religion, cleanliness was not merely next to godliness, it was godliness.

These beliefs took on additional meaning with the importation of Buddhism in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Until then, there had been noble-ignoble relations under the ancient emperor system. From ancient times to the beginning of the Chusei period (1192-1603), this system was dominant (Kan, 1995: 13). Buddhism played an important role in effecting a shift from the noble-ignoble system to the absolute pure-impure system. From the Chusei period to the beginning of Tokugawa period (1603-1867), the two systems were fused, but during the Tokugawa period, the latter became dominant (Noma and Nakaura, 1983: 210). This explains why discrimination against the Eta people escalated in the Tokugawa period. Under the latter system, the impure people are isolated and removed, as Kuroda has demonstrated, and as a result, they are considered outside the system (Kuroda, 1996).

Murata (2000: 19) shows how those who are considered impure and

polluted are isolated and excluded from society. Their fate is controlled by rulers and, the structure of discrimination is doubled. In other words, such people are not only at the bottom of the status system but they are also considered polluted. As a result, even after the class system is abolished, and they become free from official control, people continue to label them as impure and to stigmatize them.

Douglas (1966: 117) also suggests that "if a person has no place in the social system and is therefore a marginal being, all precaution against danger must come from others. He cannot help his abnormal situation." She argues that:

Pollution is a type of danger which is not likely to occur except where the lines of structure, cosmic or social, are clearly defined. A polluting person is always in the wrong. He has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone (1966: 136).

For her, fear of pollution is a symbolic referent to social structure. She assumes that the origin of a fear of pollution must be found in social structure. De Vos also mentions that "the disavowal is accompanied by abhorrence"(1995: 284), and that all abhorrent activities are "initiated as well as responded to with the human autonomic nervous system"(1995: 284). In other words, the reaction to such people is experienced as physiological aversion.

Thirty-five years ago, George Leonard (1964: 16-18) discussed frankly his feelings towards black people in the United States. When he shook hands with

a black person, he felt the hand was dirty and had an impulse to wash his hands immediately. However, he realized that this was a ridiculous feeling, because black people had taken care of him, had cooked his meals, and he had never felt that black skin was dirty. It was the equality of touching that distressed him. As Wagatsuma (1964) opined, when the superiority of the white people was firm, they did not have to confirm their superiority, in ways, such as looking down on black people. However, after the official emancipation in 1865, some white people looked for ways to confirm their own superiority. In this case, "dirty" does not have a literal meaning, but implies consciousness of impurity, including strong evasion and removal. As we have explored, through the concept of purity and impurity, a certain group is excluded and considered untouchable. Then, these concepts of purity and impurity contribute to or may become a discourse on racism.

The question is whether these religious concepts -- pure and impure -- still affect the Japanese people. It is generally claimed that the Japanese people are no longer religious. But according to Agency for Cultural Affairs (1997), the number of Japanese people who register membership in religious groups (religious affiliation) is 207,758,774: Shinto 12,213,787 (49.2%), Buddhism 91,583,843 (44.1%), Christianity 3,168,596 (1.5%) and others 10,792,548 (5.2%). Based on these numbers, almost two thirds of Japanese people belong to two religious groups because the Japanese total population is only 125,760,000 (1996).

Yet, most surveys conducted in Japan over the past three decades show

that about two-thirds of Japanese people claim they are not religious. In a recent survey conducted in a university class, "not a single student attended the services of any religion on a weekly basis. And only seven went monthly to either a Buddhist temple (5), a Shinto shrine (1), or a Christian church (1)" (James, 2000: 2).

However, daily life in Japan is affected by religious elements which originally come from Chinese *Rokuyo*. *Rokuyo* is a six-day rotation of unlucky days and lucky days. According to this, we have a very lucky day every sixth-day. Almost all Japanese calendars show which date is lucky or unlucky day, based on *Rokuyo*. For instance, couples never have their wedding on unlucky days. Therefore, halls for wedding ceremonies are usually closed or have special discount on these days. Also according to the National Police Agency, 88.14 million people went to shrines and temples during the first three days of the year 2000. The Japanese people think that is not religion, but just custom. However, James (2000: 2) suggests thinking "about whether Japanese people are 'religious' in a different way. Not in terms of belief or weekly worship perhaps, but in terms of what they do, in terms of religious activity. Because if it looks like religion, and if it smells like religion, then maybe it is religion."

The concepts of purity and impurity, also have been assimilated into daily life and ways of thinking. For example, funeral attendants salt themselves at the entrance before they enter their houses, to purify their bodies that have been contaminated by attending the funeral. This kind of ancient Shinto practice, also seen in sumo wrestling, is one of many ways in which Yamato

Japanese continue to observe ablution and other rituals intended to cleanse a place or object that is thought to have been defiled. While the Japanese do not necessarily recognize religious practices, we unconsciously follow these practices in daily life. Douglas points out that "the concept 'purity' remains in the culture. Cultures, in the sense of the public, standardized values of a community, mediate the experience of individuals" (1966: 52). The concept of purity is inserted in culture and handed down from generation to generation. In this process, religious concepts affect ways of thinking and behaving.

In the case of Buraku exclusion, the concept of purity and impurity which the Japanese unconsciously have, has played a vital role. For example, disgust is the most widely held and commonly verbalized attitude against the Buraku people among majority Japanese. Individuals who are unwilling even to discuss the Buraku distort their faces and exclaim -- dirty. Moreover, the majority also tend to have negative images; minority people are "dirty," "lazy," "aggressive," "unstable", "hostile", "dangerous," "clannish" (Donoghue, 1977: 40). A Buraku person reported that: "shoppers did not try to touch money which she paid, because they thought it was really dirty" (Obituary, 1997:84). Because of this avoidance of pollution, discrimination against the Buraku people continues more than one hundred years after official emancipation. In this way, the concepts of purity and impurity become a discourse on racism and Buraku people have been racialized and excluded.

## National Character

In this section, I will examine what is said about the Japanese national character which, needless to say, draws upon the preceding religious aspects.

The noted American anthropologist, Ruth Benedict published this summary in 1946<sup>11</sup>:

Their [Japanese] reliance upon order and hierarchy and our [American] faith in freedom and equality are poles apart (43). In all her national history, Japan has been a strong class and caste society (57). [Japan is] a nation truly hierarchal from top to bottom and hence understood the necessity of taking 'one's proper place' (28). Hierarchy based on sex and generation and primogeniture are part and parcel of family life (49). Japan sanctioned class mobility to a greater degree than continental Europe did, but no evidence for such a statement could be more convincing than the lack of any sign of a class war between aristocracy and bourgeoisie (73). The attendant habits diligently pursued make it possible for the Japanese to honor their moral indebtedness to a degree that would not cross the mind of an Occidental (103).

As she points out, historically, there have always been stratification systems based on different measures such as social status, age and sex. While this promotes a sense of security about the social order for many Japanese, the other side is that they are expected to behave according to their position in the status order. Therefore, the development of ego-control, of the capacity to act

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<sup>11</sup> This is a classic analysis of Japanese society and, even now, has been introduced to grasp the idea of Japan and the Japanese. Her analysis is surprisingly accurate, even though the Second World War prevented her from visiting Japan to conduct field research. She interviewed many Japanese people who lived in the United States, and Westerners who had lived in Japan, and collected data from other written materials.

according to one's own judgments and carry through principles one personally believes, is inhibited from infancy. Through the educational system, these characteristics were reinforced. With these underlying attitudes and principles of conduct, the Japanese people respect the "supremacy of custom" and "submission to authority" (Fukutake, 1989: 43). Behavior within a status order means suppressing one's individuality and submitting obediently to the will of status superiors. Therefore, the Japanese are rarely conscious of conflict of interest among the ruling groups.

This characteristic is created through the IE [family kin] system. The Japanese traditional family was based on a parent-child relationship, rather than a marital relationship. In particular, the father dominated other family members, -- a clear patriarchal system. The eldest son carried on the family tradition and succeeded as the family head. The family head had total power over the family members. This long-standing IE system was kept and legalized under the Meiji Civil Code. According to Max Weber (1924), the purest forms of feudalism were established in Europe and Japan with inheritance systems strictly favoring elder sons rather than the systems of divided inheritance in other Asian countries such as China and India. This Japanese inheritance system worked well in supplying large numbers of laborers to industrialization because people who did not inherit the family headship went to work in factories. Therefore, the IE system helped promote industrialization. On the other hand, succession to the head position in a family helped maintain the family's social standing, such as honor and fame --

or, in the case of the Buraku, their lack of respect.

In addition, the IE system prevented civic equality and created sexual discrimination within families. Fukutake has argued that it should have been otherwise:

When, with the development of society's productive potential, circumstances permit men abundant opportunities for economic independence, they are able to become free, independent, and self-reliant actors. Their social relations are relations of equality based on a mutual recognition of each other's basic equality as individuals. Even relations of control and subordination, when they arise, are relations limited to particular spheres which do not involve subordination of the whole personality. Such are the social relations characteristic of modern society (1989: 49).

In Japan, however, this IE system was reflected in the whole society -- a familistic structure created a "vertical society" (Kwashima 1948, Nakane 1967). In his post-war book, *The Lonely Crowd*, David Riesman (1950) described the Japanese as tradition oriented with familialism pervading the workplace. The lifetime employment system and seniority-based promotion system were -- and still are -- common among many Japanese companies. This system contributed to company loyalty and whole-hearted devotion to one's work, and finally led to high economic growth.

Fukutake (1989: 15) uses the expression -- "'Western techniques' with an 'Eastern morality'". Although the familistic character has brought some benefits, it blocked the development of individualism and a self-conscious sense of citizenship. Instead, strong group solidarity has been maintained and

people tend to distinguish their communities from the outside.

One of Japan's leading psychiatrists, Takeo Doi (1973), analyzes the anatomy of dependence as a key component of Japanese behavior. He related that "the Japanese are often said to be group-minded, to be strong as a group but weak as individuals. It is also said that the freedom of the individual is still not firmly established in Japanese society" (1973: 173). Moreover, he notes that the "Japanese people tend to distinguish between the types of human relationship that they refer to as outer and inner", and "most Japanese consider it perfectly natural that a man should vary his attitude depending on whether he is dealing with his 'inner circle' or with others" (1973: 40-41). Partly because of this, it is generally said that foreigners who live in Japan feel alienated. As with foreigners, the Buraku people, are also categorized as outsiders, and the Japanese majority act differently towards them. Moreover, because of strong group-mentality, Japanese tend to value cooperation and hide divergent opinions, as a Japanese proverb goes -- the nail that sticks out will get a pounding. As a result, they tend to follow custom, and prejudice against the Buraku people continues.

Giddens observes (1989: 243) that "the case of the Burakumin demonstrates how ingrained and enduring prejudices towards a minority group can be, even when there are no physical differences from the rest of the population." The Japanese national character -- that sedimented amalgam of socio-cultural beliefs and practices -- has helped to enforce persistence of exclusion of the Buraku people. These beliefs and practices are internalized.

and contribute to the development of people's identities.

### **Identity -- superiority-inferiority**

Berger (1963: 98) argues that "identities are socially given, maintained, and formed." and Burker (1980: 18) has singled out four aspects of identities. "(1) identities are meanings a person attributes to the self as an object in a social situation or social roles: (2) identities are relational: (3) identities are reflexive: (4) identities are a source of motivation: and identities operate indirectly." Accordingly, identity is a social production which is generated from social interaction with others and produces definitions of self. More complex societies produce more complex identities. De Vos related that "the concept social self-identity suggests how the individual makes some attempt to assume, in as integrated a manner as possible, an inner consistency in inhabiting a series of roles in various social relationships" (1990: 32). Identities, including "self concept, social self and reflected self," (Yagi, 1994: 41) are created step by step through interactions with families, teachers, and others from childhood.

De Vos argues that personal individuation and maturation among the Buraku people is more of a challenge than among ordinary Japanese, for a person must overcome obstacles to obtain ready acceptance from members of the majority (1995: 282).

Through systemic prejudice and discrimination from childhood, the Buraku have to create their identity. As a result, negative identity or self-

image develops unconsciously (De Vos and Wagtsuma, 1995: 281)<sup>12</sup>. This tendency can be observed in a lot of minorities, such as Black people in the US. Some revealing material has been gathered by a few Japanese social scientists concerning the Buraku's group identity. For example, Koyama (1953) showed the mixture of active resentment against the majority society and a passive sense of personal inferiority in Buraku attitudes. Donoghue mentions one episode:

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<sup>12</sup> As a result of exclusion by means of strong social discrimination and prejudice, many Buraku people, especially older people, have a strong sense of solidarity and a sense of unity reminiscent of pre-modern societies. De Vos (1992: 169) explains that "the Buraku person who remains identified with the group is obliged to depend even more strongly upon members of the group than do members of the majority society, especially in the sphere of occupation and marriage." Fukutake (1969: 96) analyzed Japanese rural communities. In these communities, each household has very close relations with its nearest neighbors, often with stem-branch family relations. In every day matters, contacts are closer and more continuous. The ties provide convenient networks for various social activities. This kind of neighborhood group system has a very ancient history and in the Tokugawa period this kind of group membership shared legal responsibility. With the outbreak of World War II, for example, neighborhood groups were created throughout the country. But, after the World War II, with the processes of modernization and urbanization, this kind of pre-modern system vanished across Japan. Yet, it remains in the Buraku communities where the pace of modernization and urbanization is much slower. While this solidarity helps individuals cope, some argue that these pre-modern aspects in the Buraku communities help maintain discrimination which is enforced by the outside communities. In Yamamoto's words, "the Buraku community in a big city is like a small island in the Ocean" (1986: 40) (my translation). The tendency toward endogamy remains strong in the Buraku communities and is reinforced by exclusive practices of non-Buraku Japanese. According to Yamamoto's research (1986) in the Kashima area, 53.5% of people marry within the Buraku community. As a result, kinship in the Buraku communities becomes more complex. Moreover, blood relatives and shared territorial bonds are linked in the Buraku community. This characteristic protects the Buraku people from discrimination by outside communities, but on the other hand, it helps keep Buraku people in their communities. These relationships affect the Buraku people's behavior and their personality formation. The Japanese generally have well-developed honorific expressions used to show respect to the person addressed. However, it is always said that the Buraku have a more informal and less refined speech pattern (De Vos and Wagatsuma, 1995: 277, Yamamoto, 1986: 16). "Patterns of speech, dress, and comportment shared by all individuals help maintain a strong sense of in-group social solidarity, though individuals of the wealthier families may also learn to behave in a style acceptable to the outer society." (De Vos and Wagatsuma, 1995: 277).

A young [Buraku] man left the community to look for employment... He stepped into a cabaret, but as he pushed open the doors, the hostesses began to laugh: embarrassed, he immediately returned to Shin-machi. The young man claimed that "the girls laughed at me because they knew where I came from" (1957: 1014).

But, the girls would obviously be unable to distinguish him from any other strangers. This episode conveys his negative self-image and sensitivity to discrimination. "By adulthood many have already formed an irreversible sense of their inferior social destiny" (De Vos, 1971: 11). It is clear that the practices and attitudes of inferiority become part of one's identity -- as with the Buraku.

De Vos mentions that "a very difficult aspect of minority status is a continual need to cope with a negative self-image, automatically internalized as a child becomes socialized within an enclave surrounded by a disparaging outer society" (1995: 280). Ishikawa (1992) also analyzes the relations between discrimination and identities. He points out that discrimination deprives people of their value of existence. As a result, the person strives to prove their existence (to manage their identities) in order to protect his own individual value (Ishikawa, 1992: 12).

Noguchi (1991), Ishikawa (1992) and De Vos (1995) analyze how the Buraku people try to transform these negative influences. De Vos (1995: 275) demonstrates that "a Burakumin must choose between four limited alternatives in social self-identity and group belonging":

1. Maintain an overt and direct identity with one's past and a present minority status. By so doing, one may be passively receptive

and resigned to the stigmata of past definitions of the society.

2. Gain increased social advantages or changes in status through cooperative action with others sharing a demeaned status.

3. Go into a selective disguise, in which one maintains expressive family affiliations and group membership within the Buraku community, but for occupational and other instrumental purposes one may lead a life of semi-disguise among members of the majority population.

4. Attempt to pass completely; move from the home community and cut off overt contacts with family, forging an entirely new identity, and in some cases fabricate a new past. (1995: 275)

In the 1970s, Suiheisya, the organization for emancipation of the Buraku people declared "it is time to pride ourselves in being the Eta." which echoes a similar declaration of "Black is beautiful" in the black consciousness movement in the United States. These movements strive to counteract the negative identity that has evolved through discrimination and prejudice. The Buraku Liberation League has encouraged the Buraku people to take the second option and develop collective identity. But, according to Yagi's research (1994: 47), only 16.2% of the Buraku people belong to Buraku organizations, such as the BLL. Nearly half of his respondents did not even support the aims of the national and regional Buraku leadership or their reform programs (only 33% support these programs) (Yagi, 1994: 48).

De Vos' option of social passing means moving into mainstream society while trying to cover all tracks that lead back to one's origins. Since World War II, the opportunity for leaving the Buraku communities has become greater. Some Buraku people, especially the youth, want to emigrate and lose their

Buraku identity in order to assimilate into the general population<sup>13</sup>. Since they are not physically different, only their place-of-residence might identify them as Buraku. Some Buraku people succeed in passing, by moving and changing their address at least twice. However, according to De Vos (1995: 278), "the intra-psychic tensions and difficulties over self-identity make it impossible for most to continue their passing role." To live outside usually means to discard family and community ties and to exist under the constant threat of exposure to the full effects of discrimination as an isolated individual (Cornell, 1967: 345).

Even better-off Buraku families have difficulty passing, because their sources of income and prestige lie within the community, while passing is difficult for the poorest Buraku because of unfamiliarity with the social practices and speech forms in use outside the community (Donoghue, 1957: 1013). Therefore, the pressure to pass is felt most strongly among Buraku's middle-income families who are sufficiently well-off to provide the education and financial support for their children to enable them to become established as white-collar workers. As discussed here, even though it is hard for them to

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<sup>13</sup> However, according to Yagi's research conducted in Hyogo (1994: 81), 84.1% indicate that they will continue to live in the community because of "the warmth and cooperation of the community". Another study conducted by Yamamoto (1986: 222) showed that 62.3% of the Buraku people think that living inside the community is more comfortable than living outside the community. Only 6.9% disagreed. There were no big differences among sex and age categories. However, the less educated people tend to think living inside is more comfortable. Taking the result of Yagi's research (1994: 81) again, people who want to leave the community pointed out the same reason. In other words, relationships in the community are too overpowering, they choose to leave rather than remain and be bothered by the community. The "warm community" has intensified the ambivalence toward remaining in the community and leaving the community.

pass completely, 20 per cent of people, especially youth, hope to move out of the communities (Yagi, 1994: 56). This implies that cracks are appearing in identities of the Buraku people<sup>11</sup>.

Some Buraku youth choose to become members of Yakuza [a criminal gang] to avoid facing discrimination in legitimate society. As De Vos suggests, they "feel more readily accepted in this career activity than in attempting to face the more overt discrimination that occurs in other occupational pursuits" (1995: 282). Through interviews with policemen, De Vos found that 70 percent of the underworld is of Buraku or Korean origin (1995: 294). Some Buraku women become entertainers, bar girls, or prostitutes to easily remove themselves from the Buraku community. Moreover, some of them migrate to other countries for the same purpose (De Vos, 1995: 279).

As we have explored, through discrimination and prejudice from the majority Japanese, the Buraku people unconsciously form negative identity and try to manage it. Although some attempt to pass, practices and attitudes of inferiority become part of the Buraku's identity.

The other side of this, however, is that the practices and attitudes of superiority become internalized in the majority Japanese. In De Vos's words:

Japanese know very well, perhaps too well, who they are and especially who they are not. For the Japanese, group identity is an assured given. They tend to believe that there is a greater degree of

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<sup>11</sup> Yagi points out a new phenomena -- denial of Buraku discrimination. There are increasingly a lot of young people who accept that they have Buraku background and recognize that discrimination still exists, but think that they will not face it (Yagi, 1994: 43, 54).

physical homogeneity among themselves than actually exists. And they tend to believe that they look uniquely alike and always look different from other Asians. In the Japanese mind, only those born of Japanese are genetically Japanese -- nobody can become a Japanese (1995: 268).

The above quote shows how strongly the ordinary Japanese people believe in their own identity, an identity rooted in Shintoism, which stresses the superiority or uniqueness of the Japanese. The Japanese tend to divide clearly the inside from outside. With this tendency, historically they have excluded the Buraku people and considered them different. They unconsciously have developed a sense of superiority to the Buraku people.

These practices and attitudes of superiority can be seen clearly among middle class new comers into the Buraku communities. The definition of new comer is someone who lives or moves into a Buraku area, but whose parents and grandparents were not born there. According to Noguchi (1999: 126), about 53% of residents in the Buraku communities (12 communities) in Osaka, are new comers. Among these 12 Buraku communities, four communities have new comers comprising more than 50% of the total population (the highest is 65% and the lowest is 13%). Among the new comers, 22% come from other Buraku communities, and 78% are from outside the Buraku communities (Noguchi, 1999: 127).

Since the 1980s, some Buraku areas, especially urban areas, improved their living conditions through the government Dowa projects. The government tore down old houses and developed a new residence area. As a

result, some middle-class people bought houses in or near the Buraku communities without realizing that it was a Buraku area. Once there, they tend to think that they have been cheated. A typical case is the Okura residence discrimination case in Fukuoka in 1986. The middle class newcomers distributed handbills which argued that real estate companies should have notified people that these residential areas were Buraku. As a result, Japanese people now tend to ask agencies whether or not places in which they are going to build or buy houses are Buraku areas. These reactions of the middle class who buy unknowingly into the better off Buraku areas can be explained in terms of their feeling of superiority. Because they believe themselves superior to the Buraku people, they think that they have been cheated, and that they should not have to live with the Buraku people. As Fukutake notes "people's ideas and attitudes and character are affected by changes in their social environment, but the basic structure of consciousness is slow to change" (1989: 141).

Most newcomers to the Buraku communities, however, are not middle-class. Most have academic background, occupation, and living condition lower than the average of the Buraku people. Some are foreigners. Sugimoto (1998) reports that 49% of newcomers into a Buraku community in Kyoto are Korean people. Yamamoto (1986) suggests that they moved into the Buraku area, because the rent is lower than in poor non-Buraku areas. As a result, some Buraku communities form a sort of mixed urban slum. As these cases show, the very poor and the foreigners who cannot afford to live elsewhere, or who

are unwelcome elsewhere have entered the Buraku communities. This is a problem lying in the workings of the Japanese economy (capitalism) that does not provide good employment for all and "expels" these inferior people who find another residential option in Buraku communities.

### **A KEY MECHANISM IN PREVENTING THE BREAKDOWN OF THE SYSTEM OF EXCLUSION -- *KOSEKI*, FAMILY REGISTER SYSTEM**

We have discussed four points in the terms of persistence: the remnants of feudal society; religion -- purity/impurity; national character; and identity -- superiority/inferiority. Together they cover the major systematic aspects of society -- economic, religious, and psychological. This section focuses on the Koseki system [Family Register] and how it helps to maintain the system of exclusion. To understand the current Koseki system, we will first explore its development.

While the first Koseki was established in 670, this was only at the local level. The first nation-wide Family Register System (Jinsin Koseki) was established in 1871. At that time, only the nobility, families of the samurai class, priests and the common people were registered. This excluded the Buraku people's ancestors -- the Eta and Hinin. In 1872, the government brought in a law which prohibited changing family names and, in 1875, according to this law, everybody had to have a family name. The main aim of Koseki was not to identify people and legalize family relations, but to enable the government to keep people under perfect control through controlling families. The Koseki included place of residence, and original class such as the

nobility, or samurai class. Even though the Eta and Hinin class disappeared as a result of the emancipation in 1871, the Koseki system continued to show their origin.<sup>15</sup>

Over time, there have been several discussions of Koseki. In 1882, in the Diet session on Koseki rules, a jurist, Rinsyo Midukuri, declared "Koseki exists only in the East. It was necessary for the feudal system, but it is not necessary any more. The West does not have this kind of family register system. When the civil law is established, it will be unnecessary" (Quoted in Ninomiya, 1995: 32) (my translation). In response, however, a government official, Kiyoshi Watanabe, said that "the head of a household undertakes the responsibility of the family and supports children and elder people. Therefore they protect the family ethics. Even poor people get food and clothes because of this kind of good custom. Koseki shows what a family ought to be. Therefore, it will not be abolished" (Quoted in Ninomiya, 1995: 33) (my translation). Despite opposition to the Koseki system, succeeding governments retained it. As a result, the ideology of IE [family], based on the Koseki register, spread across Japan (Ninomiya, 1995).

In 1898, under Meiji civil law, both the Koseki and Class Register System existed. In 1914, the government decided to abolish the latter. In a special session of the House of Representatives, a politician, Toshio Shimada,

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<sup>15</sup> In 1923, one of the biggest organizations for the Buraku people, Zenkoku-Suiheisya, requested the government abolish the entry of class. As a response to that, in 1924, the government decided to prohibit the use of "Eta" and "Hinin". However, people put other classification in Koseki register. Therefore, blanks mean that the individuals in general are Eta and Hinin. Finally in 1938, the government abolished the class entries.

suggested reforming the Koseki: "the Koseki came from the IE system, so it is a natural process when we have IE system. However at the same time, relations inside the family are made between individuals. When society develops and IE system, which is the civic law's ideal goal, is destroyed, another system which is different from Koseki will be necessary" (Ninomiya, 1995: 37) (my translation). However, the government's position was that "when individualism develops and IE system is abolished, we will have to abolish Koseki system. However, under the present situation, we should reduce the idea of individualism and develop the idea of family a little bit more" (Ninomiya, 1995: 38) (my translation). In the ensuing debate, the original proposal was passed in the Diet, and the idea of the modern register system based on individualism was thrown out.

After Japan's defeat in World War II, General Headquarters (GHQ) asked the Japanese government to abolish the Koseki system, and make a new register based on individual citizens. The GHQ also suggested that individual Koseki should be established instead of the family Koseki. However, the Government replied by saying that "it would take a lot of money and paper for individual Koseki and that it would be difficult to change Koseki style. Once the economic situation recovers, they would try to change it" (Ninomiya, 1995: 41) (my translation).

It was not until 1966 that the Koseki was reformed, but it did not change much. Only the registration unit was changed from an extended family style to

a nuclear family.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the GHQ's plan, to make the individual Koseki an alternative to the family Koseki, was not realized.

Under the current Koseki system, every Japanese National is required to register in a family or personal record which is maintained at a local office and transferred, upon request, when the citizen moves to another locality. Registers show not only current residence but also previous residences. For a small fee, anyone may know the Koseki of others.

The purpose of the current Koseki is to prove personal status officially. There are some rules for the Koseki. First, only people who have the same family name can register in the same Koseki, and secondly, only two generations -- such as parents and their children -- can register in the same Koseki. Therefore, when people get married, they have to remove their name from the old Koseki and register in a new one. Thirdly, the address given in the Koseki can be changed anytime and since 1887, we have been able to choose any addresses for the depository of our family register, but it is still possible to trace the earlier addresses. Another feature is that the head of a family, as recorded in the register is never removed, even if he dies or is divorced. The person (usually the father) is always the basis of the registration. The Koseki also has an appendix, which shows the details of previous addresses changes. Koseki and a certificate of residence connect each other.

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<sup>16</sup> Until that time, the high economic growth had already started, and the idea that men should work and women should keep house was spread across Japan as an ideal family model. Therefore, the idea that a married couple and children comprise created a family was naturally accepted. As a result, the government succeeded to transit swiftly from a big family style to a nuclear family as a registration unit.

Thus, through either of them, it is easy to trace origins.

Moreover, the Koseki can be seen easily for a small fee, and it is easy for others to get photocopies. People can obtain personal information about others such as age, name, date and place of birth and death, or other details about their personal status, such as marriage, divorce, adoption, acknowledgement of paternity of children and heirs etc.<sup>17</sup> Also anyone can trace other people's relatives endlessly. Since 1890, the Koseki has been open to the public, because of the convenience of establishing inheritance claims and other real estate registration. There is no protection of privacy. The Koseki system makes it relatively easy for private investigators to discover former addresses. Hence, even after the Buraku people socially pass into the majority, they continue to run the risk that their past associations with a marked community may be discovered by someone who would not welcome a person with such a background.

Since 1974, cities, towns and villages, mainly in the Kansai area, in western Japan, have lobbied for a law in which the Koseki is open to only families and relatives, but court ruled that these laws were illegal (Wakayama Family Court, May 27, 1974; Kobe Family Court, January 22, 1975). In 1976, reforms were introduced to protect people's privacy. People have to give good reasons to see the Koseki of others. However, it is difficult to judge what

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<sup>17</sup> The Koseki also indicates whether or not a child is born out of wedlock. To be specific, the Koseki shows the relationship to the head of the household. In the case of a legitimate child, it shows the 'eldest son', 'second son', or 'eldest daughter' etc. However, in the case of illegitimate children, it just shows 'child'. Therefore, the system discriminates against divorced, and children born out of wedlock. Foreigners can not register in Koseki, even if

constitutes good reasons. In 1993, for example, there were 32,036,184 requests for Koseki, an increase, since the 1976 Koseki reform.<sup>18</sup>

As mentioned in chapter one, most firms of any size still require potential employees to produce Koseki or other recommendations. That is a sort of custom of hiring employees. The companies can check their background, especially family background. Also some check their partners' Koseki before marriage. The Japanese Koseki system is a pre-modern system that works as a mechanism for preventing the breakdown of the Buraku exclusion.

We have examined various aspects of Buraku exclusion in terms of persistence. Now, returning to the original four sociological categorizations which we have discussed at the beginning of this chapter, through our discussion, a combination of "race and racism" and "outcaste group" turns out to be the most helpful way of looking at the Buraku sociologically. The Buraku people have been racialized through the concept of purity/impurity and became an outcaste group in the old caste system. The Buraku exclusion is sustained through racialized identities of superiority and inferiority. In the next chapter, we will explore the possibilities for change.

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they marry a Japanese national.

<sup>18</sup> This includes requests for one's Koseki (to show employers etc. as well).

## CHAPTER 3: POSSIBILITY OF CHANGE

In the previous chapter, we examined why discrimination against the Buraku people continues by focusing upon systemic aspects of Japanese society -- economic, religious, and psychological.

In this chapter, we will explore the possibility of change. Since the early part of the twentieth century, the Buraku have mobilized politically and culturally through organizations, such as the Buraku Liberation League (BLL). Partly in response, successive governments initiated new policies and measures to address the long-standing social exclusion of the Buraku from Japanese society. This chapter analyzes the Buraku movements, and government responses before discussing the possibilities for genuine transformation.

### HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF BURAKU ORGANIZATIONS

The Buraku began to organize during the Taisyo period, 1912-1926. Prior to this, the Buraku had engaged in many *Kaizen* [self-improvement] activities, hoping in this way to become more acceptable to the rest of Japanese society. If they improved themselves, they thought discrimination would cease. In 1912, based on this idea, the *Yuwa* [Harmony] group was founded to promote closer relations between Buraku and non-Buraku communities.

However, in the 1920s, as more powerful currents of socialist and liberal ideas swept through Japan, some Buraku began to argue that the fault lay not

within them but with the Japanese social system. They began to demand changes in the social structure. In 1920, some Buraku youth, in Kashiwabara in Nara prefecture, led by Sakamoto Kiyotoshi, formed the *Tsubamekai* [the Swallow Club], whose aim was to get away or "fly" away from discrimination. They argued that "the emancipation of the Burakumin must be based on two principles":

Firstly, the Burakumin must themselves begin to demand the abolition of discrimination against them..... Secondly, since both workers and Burakumin are economically weak and exploited, in order to build a good society which contains neither exploiters nor oppressors it is necessary for both to form a close union: a joint movement (Neary, 1989: 64).

These ideas inspired members of the *Tsubamekai* to launch a national movement. On March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1922, the Buraku people launched the National Suiheisha [The Levelers Association] in Kyoto, as a national movement to fight against prejudice and discrimination, which they encountered in their daily lives. In Suginozaka's words, this was a "new collective movement through which we shall emancipate ourselves" (1982: 59). The movement was organized to protest against discrimination and highlighted the poverty of the Buraku people:

Buraku-min throughout the country, unite!..... Brothers -- our ancestors sought after and practiced liberty and equality. But they became the victims of a base, contemptible system developed by the ruling class.... The time has come for the victims of discrimination to hurl back labels of derision. The time has come when the martyr's crown of thorns shall be blessed..... Let there now be warmth and light

among men (Quoted in De Vos and Wagatsuma, 1967: 44).

Some consider this the first declaration for human rights in Japan (Matsumoto, 1994: 174). During this period, there were not only Buraku protest movements but also social movements by left-wing peasants and labor federations that sought to overthrow capitalism, the political-legal order and change social attitudes.

In response to the Buraku protest movements, the government initiated improvement projects and supported the moderate Yuwa group. Its goal was to undercut the Suiheisha activities, and all radical movements. To this end, in 1925, the government passed the Peace Preservation Law mainly to outlaw communists, although subsequently this law was applied also to social activists and liberals who aimed to change the fundamental character of the state. Under this law, founders and participants of the communist and socialist organizations were suppressed and punished. Additionally, in 1928, the government strengthened the enforcement of this law by adding capital punishment as a form of deterrence. In 1941, as Japan moved toward open militarism, it prohibited the Suiheisha from continuing. Indeed, during World War II, all associations (including the Yuwa group) were disbanded.<sup>18</sup> A national level organization for general mobilization, was established to include all Japanese in the war effort.

Soon after the war, former Suiheisha leaders met to consider how their

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<sup>18</sup> In 1941, the Yuwa projects were renamed Dowa projects, but the movements themselves were also disbanded during the World War II. However, post-war government adopted this term to refer to government's Buraku projects.

movement might be re-established (Asada, 1969: 171) and, in 1946, they formed the *Buraku Kaiho Zenkoku Iinkai* [National Committee for Buraku Liberation (NCBL)]. In the first election after the war, held in April 1946, nine Buraku people were elected in the general election: seven of them were members of the Japanese Socialist Party (JSP). This established a link between the NCBL and the JSP.

Through publicizing examples of discrimination, the NCBL began struggling against local governments for improving their living conditions, by providing their communities with improved facilities. They attracted wider support and met with some success. In 1955 they changed the name to the *Buraku Kaiho Domei* [Buraku Liberation League (BLL)] (Asada, 1969: 269), because it "was considered to have more of a 'mass' [appeal]" (Neary, 1986: 560). While the BLL did not deny that improvements had been made in the Buraku's physical environment, it emphasized that very little progress had been made in changing the attitudes of the majority population and the resulting discriminatory employment and marriage practices (Neary, 1986: 557). The BLL continued to pursue demands for complete equality of the Buraku people particularly in economic areas such as living conditions and employment.

During the 1950s, the Japanese Socialist Party and the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) committed themselves to supporting the Buraku people to achieve complete equality.<sup>19</sup> In 1957, the JSP offered an analysis and

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<sup>19</sup> The Japanese Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) was the ruling party from 1955 to 1993.

a proposal of the problem. The party stated that discrimination and prejudice were supported by the socioeconomic structure of capitalism and fundamental change was necessary. However, the party argued, even under the capitalist system, it was possible and necessary to improve the living conditions of the Buraku and to resolve their economic problems. Particular attention was to be paid to five areas: environment, housing, education and culture, agriculture and fishery policy. The party also stressed that the poverty of Buraku people was qualitatively different from other kinds of poverty because of the long history of discrimination.

The BLL agreed with the JSP's proposals, and forged strong connections with that party. However, the BLL is an independent organization from the JSP and has its own policies. It supports the JSP, but sometimes is very critical of the Party.

The BLL became the largest Buraku organization with branches in 39 prefectures (out of 47 prefectures), and a membership in the 200 thousands. The BLL has been involved in lots of activities such as calling for the creation of a special commission on Buraku within the Prime Minister's Office during the 1960s<sup>20</sup> (Neary, 1986: 560-1) and lobbying for legislation called a Fundamental Law for Buraku Liberation<sup>21</sup> (Buraku Liberation Research

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<sup>20</sup> As a result, in 1974 the Prime Minister's Secretariat Office for Dowa Measures was established to promote and co-ordinate Dowa projects carried out through various government ministers.

<sup>21</sup> The government legislated the Special Integration Measures Law (1969-81) and the Area Improvement Measures Law (1982-86), as well as the Law for the Measures for Promotion of Human Rights Protection (1996). However, no special laws for the Buraku people has been legislated. The BLL proposed as follows: "1. To provide completely equal access to employment and education; 2. To wipe out discriminatory attitudes; 3. To

Institute, 1985:60). The BLL's demand led the government to consider seriously the Buraku situation.

The Japanese Communist Party also produced a policy statement on the Buraku people. The JCP continued to insist that the Buraku problem (as well as all social issues, such as unemployment) lay with United States imperialism and Japanese monopoly capitalism, and worked to strengthen its influence within the working-class movement. For the JCP, the Buraku issue was part of its long-term revolutionary strategy. But most members of the BLL did not agree with this point because of the historical differences between the Buraku and the working-class movements. Therefore, the BLL did not accept the JCP's proposal.

In 1976, some communist members of the BLL left to set up a separate organization -- *Zenkoku Buraku Kaiho Rengoukai* [All Japan Federation for Buraku Liberation Movement] which strongly cooperates with the JCP. Unlike the BLL that argues that discriminatory attitudes toward the Buraku people are being perpetuated despite the government's measures, the Federation believes that discrimination against the Buraku people has gradually been disappearing with the modernization of society. The Federation considers the Buraku people's movement as part of the working-class movement and as such the JCP agrees with. The Federation has branches in 35 prefectures and has a membership in the 80 thousands.

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penalize vicious discrimination." It also insisted that the law should "emphasize the government's responsibility and initiative to abolish discrimination as soon as possible by carrying out comprehensive measures" (Buraku Liberation Research Institute, 1985: 60).

The Federation's activities and policies are more modest than the BLL for the following reasons: 1. the Federation is subordinate to the JCP and under the JCP's control; 2. The JCP renounced violent revolutions and aims at peaceful transformation of Japan into a socialist society; 3. The JCP considers the Buraku issue as a part of the working-class movements and do not strongly focus on it.

In 1960, the ruling party, the LDP had begun to try and win over the leadership of the Buraku liberation movement from the opposition. The Party approached conservative members of the BLL and Buraku communities to found the *Zen Nihon Dowa-kai* [the All Japan Dowa Association (AJDA)] as its advisor on Buraku policy. In doing so, the government announced that they could no longer work with the BLL, because of its belief in class struggle and promised to work instead, with the All Japan Dowa Association.

In 1986, the All Japan Dowa Association split with the majority forming the *Zen Nihon Jiyuu Dowa Kai* [the All Japan Liberation Dowa Association (AJLDA)], because of the AJDA's leaders' monetary scandals (Takagi, 1991: 286). Since then, the LDP has considered the new organization -- the AJLDA-- as its advisory institute on Buraku policy. The AJLDA has branches in 22 prefectures with 90,000 members. It defines the Buraku issue as one of human rights, and urges the government to pass basic human rights laws to protect people like the Buraku. All these Buraku organizations have demanded that the government take measures to solve discrimination against the Buraku people, and they have met with some success.

On the other hand, there has also been criticism of these organizations, especially the BLL's tactics of denunciation. A Dutch journalist, Karel Van Wolferen, who has lived in Japan for a long time, notes:

The BLL has developed a method of self-assertion through 'denunciation' sessions with people and organizations that it decides are guilty of discrimination. Confessions and apologies are usually forthcoming, but they have little significance. The BLL does not use legal channels to combat discrimination (1989: 74).

He adds:

The denunciation tactics of this group [the BLL] have made it very powerful when it confronts publishers, authors, journalists, editors and teachers. Any of these who says anything about the burakumin minority that contradicts BLL ideology runs the risk of being forced to undergo denunciation sessions. These can become fairly unpleasant, with the victims taken against their will to a meeting place where, in the presence of other 'representatives of society', they are given a dressing down by a succession of denunciators. They may be held until they offer their profound apologies (1989:342).

On this point, the BLL insists that denunciation is justifiable because there are no specific laws to control discriminatory actions against the Buraku people. However, the other Buraku organizations argue against the BLL's excessive denunciation and violent actions. Moreover, the government warned that if the BLL continues their denunciation tactics, it would curb their freedom of speech. Wolferen points out that, as a result of these denunciations, "most references to Burakumin in books and magazines are cut by editors"(1989: 342). Takagi (1991: 284) argues that these BLL's denunciations

have "rendered discussion of the Buraku issue taboo in Japanese society, making eradication of lingering discrimination that much more difficult," because anyone who dares to criticize the BLL's tactics becomes a target for 'denunciation'. Accordingly, it cannot be denied that the media tries to suppress this controversial issue, and, as a result, the process of solving discrimination against the Buraku people is slowed down.

These problems have been accentuated by "incidents in which gangster groups posing as Dowa organizations illegally acquired concessions and funds" (Takagi, 1991: 287). Former gangs or fixers (pushers) pretend to be BLL members and blame administrators and companies for discriminating against the Buraku people. The government has defined these actions --which started in the 1980s-- as *Ese Dowa* actions [Pseudo-Dowa]. According to the government, such actions represent "an unjustified demand and an illegal act by using discrimination against the Buraku as an excuse" (Management and Coordination Agency, 1997: 303) (my translation). In 1986, in response to a rampage of *Ese Dowa* actions, the government set up a conference for eliminating them, and promised co-operation with ministries and lawyers.

There has also been a backlash --with charges of reverse discrimination-- against government efforts to improve the Buraku communities (Wetherall, 1984: 36). In response, some non-Buraku people or non-Buraku communities, which have found themselves at the short end of urban improvement budgets, pretend to be Buraku to get government money.

On one hand, the Buraku organizations historically have played a really

important role. quickening and promoting the government's Dowa measurements, which we will discuss in the next section. Under immense pressure by the Buraku organizations, the government was forced to think seriously about social exclusion of the Buraku people, and to effect certain policies to improve their situation. On the other hand, their radical actions might have contributed to the continuation of the Buraku problem. In particular, extreme denunciation by the BLL threatened the public and resulted in the public and media avoiding this topic altogether. Also, this contributed to creating another phenomena known as "Ese Buraku," and a vicious circle of preserving prejudice against the Buraku is set in.

## GOVERNMENT BURAKU POLICIES

John Cornell summarizes Japan's policy on race and minority issues as follows:

For the most part Japan does not face the dilemma of race, nor has she had a long history of admission of foreign elements in which to develop a melting pot tradition. Therefore, no conscious polity of toleration of minorities, no genuine policy of pluralism, may be said to exist, but only various attempts to solve a particular minority problem (1967: 338).

Historically, efforts to eliminate discrimination against the Buraku people began with the legal abolition of the derogatory names, Eta and Hinin, but the situation did not improve much until after World War II (Takagi, 1991: 283). In the early 1950s, Buraku organizations such as the BLL started to demand

that local authorities improve living conditions in Buraku areas. This struggle developed into a movement demanding a national policy on Buraku problems. These organizations successfully pressured the national government to enact laws to improve communities, and take some steps to counter discrimination.

In March 1958, Prime Minister Kishi Nobuhiko said publicly that "discrimination against the Buraku people is regrettable and he would undertake to introduce appropriate policies" to solve the problem (Morooka, 1982: 297-8). This was the first post-war government to accept responsibility for assisting the Buraku. However, nothing directly came out of this promise. In October 1958, the LDP set up a committee, the Dowa Policy Committee, which consisted of Cabinet ministers, in order to consider the problem, and, in May 1959, it suggested that the Buraku communities should be provided with central government funds (Neary, 1997: 62). In 1960, the committee proposed to the Cabinet that a commission of inquiry be established and, in response, the Cabinet set up the Commission of Inquiry on Dowa Policy to improve the economy, educational standards and environmental conditions of the Buraku people. The commission was made up of ten officials representing their respective ministries, several academics, journalists, one judge, and one member of the BLL who had a strong connection with media.

In 1961, the government announced that it was going to cease work with the BLL and cooperate with the All Japan Dowa Association. In 1965 the commission submitted its report to the cabinet. The report affirmed that the elimination of discrimination against the Dowa districts was the responsibility

of the government (Management and Coordination Agency, 1997:264). and presented a series of policies to improve housing and environmental conditions, increase social welfare and provide easier access to educational facilities. Importantly, the report rejected the widely held belief that it was best to ignore the problem. At the same time, the government started to increase the funds for solving discrimination against the Buraku people.

In 1969, the *Dowa Taisaku Gigyo Tokubetsu Sochiho*, [Law on special measures for Dowa projects (SML)], was enacted for a period of 10 years, with the aim of narrowing the gap between the Buraku districts and other areas, and carrying out campaigns to enlighten the general citizenry. This law provided general aims for anti-discrimination and improvement of the Buraku people's societal status by increasing assistance and welfare. In April 1974, the Prime Minister's Secretariat Office for Dowa Measures was established to promote and co-ordinate Dowa projects carried out through various government ministers. Following a three-year extension of the law, in 1982, *Chiiki Kaizen Taisaku Tokubetsu Sochiho* [the Law for Special Measures for Regional Improvement] came into force for an additional five years. In this law, the word "Dowa" was replaced by the phrase 'regional improvement', but it was clear that this referred to the Dowa districts. This law provided a more specific budget for regional improvement projects than had the previous law. In 1987, it was renewed as *Chiiki Kaizen Taisaku Tokutei Gigyo ni kakawaru Kuni no Zaiseijyo no Tokubetu Sochi ni Kansuruho* [the Law Regarding the Special Fiscal Measures of the Government for Regional Improvement

Projects] and it was extended until March 1992.

By March 1992, with the expiry of the law, the government believed that its goal of improving living conditions in the Dowa districts had been more or less achieved. It decided not to legislate an extension of the law. But, in December 1990, it had set up the Council on the Policy of Regional Improvement to deliberate on how further to deal with exclusion of the Buraku people, studied the question of whether to mobilize existing laws, or adopt a new special law. The government hoped for a smooth transition after the expiration of the law. From January 1991, the Council gathered opinions from nine ministries and agencies involving the current Dowa projects, (including the Management and Coordination Agency, Ministry of Construction, Ministry of Health and Welfare, and Ministry of Justice, municipal governments, and the BLL, the All Japan Federation for Buraku Liberation Movement, and the All Japan Liberation Dowa Association). In 1997, the Council offered an assessment that some projects had been successfully carried out and goals reached in matters such as road construction, improvement of residence and drainage work, etc. But, the government decided, in February 1997, to extend for five years the Law Regarding the Special Fiscal Measures of the Government for Regional Improvement Projects in order to complete unfinished Dowa projects.

When we look at the government's budget devoted to the Dowa projects, over the 28 years following 1969, the national and local government spent a total of 4,121,533,000,000yen (see Table 11.) in 4,600 Dowa districts to

improve the community environment (housing etc), education, employment opportunities, agriculture, forestry, and small enterprises.

**Table 11. Change in the Government Budget Allocated to the Buraku**

	The Total Budget	Monetary	Non-Monetary
1969	(million yen)6,217	5,846	371
1970	11,893	11,275	618
1971	20,891	19,982	909
1972	31,406	29,681	1,725
1973	42,530	39,427	3,103
1974	57,513	52,056	5,457
1975	82,307	73,048	9,259
1976	107,805	93,207	14,598
1977	139,200	117,373	21,827
1978	184,318	155,444	28,874
1979	226,524	190,191	36,333
1980	252,482	212,524	39,958
1981	279,235	235,071	44,164
1982	274,531	229,435	45,096
1983	238,394	194,762	43,632
1984	214,852	172,980	41,872
1985	210,610	170,398	40,212
1986	214,489	175,301	39,188
1987	190,949	160,072	30,877
1988	179,173	149,887	29,286
1989	164,419	135,594	28,825
1990	151,372	121,977	29,395
1991	155,940	125,905	30,035
1992	130,761	100,290	30,471
1993	123,767	92,334	31,433
1994	122,311	90,726	31,585
1995	119,938	87,976	31,962
1996	126,015	93,778	32,236
1997	61,691	42,468	19,223
Total	4,121,533	3,379,008	742,524

Source: Management and Coordination Agency, 1997:299.

Note: Monetary: Road construction, improvement of residence and drainage work etc.  
Non-monetary: scholarship for high education, counseling centers, and projects for equal opportunities for jobs.

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As a result, there have been some notable achievements, especially in the physical environmental, where new apartment blocks have replaced sub-

standard housing in many ghetto areas. Therefore, there is a general belief that the Buraku problem has been solved and, since 1982, the government spending on Dowa projects has been on the decline (see Table 11.). Compared to the total national budget for 1998 of 77,669.2 billion yen (Asahi Shinbun, 1999:478), the budget allocated to the Buraku remains insignificant at about 0.08%. Japan now is teetering on the brink of recession. Its economy has not been active recently. The financial difficulties of the nation will affect negatively any further government allocations to the government budget to the Buraku.

From the early 1990s, as noted, there has been a backlash from non-Buraku neighbors whose communities had not been similarly subsidized. In some respects, the public programs of amelioration and special economic assistance helped to rebuild social walls around the Buraku by giving them social advantages compared to their poor non-Buraku neighbors. Accordingly, the government decided to translate their Buraku policies into a general policy of regional improvement and extension of human rights. In De Vos's words, the government was "seeking to alleviate the position of the Buraku people by general welfare programs, providing relief for the unemployed and the destitute in the manner of other modern states" (1992: 170).

The BLL has led a national campaign since 1985 seeking for enactment of a Fundamental Law for Buraku Liberation. The draft stipulates the obligations of the government to completely and immediately end discrimination against the Buraku people. It urges the government to take

legal measures for the promotion of human rights and education, the ending of discrimination against the Buraku, the introduction of a relief system for the victims of discrimination as well as the legal measures for Dowa projects. The campaign has been joined by various organizations from labor, business, religious, academic, local governments and other sectors.

In response to the campaign, the government enacted, in December 1996, the Law for the Measures for Promotion of Human Rights Protection. It established the Council for Promoting Human Rights Protection which was directed, within two years, to present policy recommendations for human rights education and awareness-raising, and within five years to provide measures for the victims of human rights violations.

The government believes that the special laws pertaining to the Buraku problem have worked well to improve their living conditions. As we have explored in this section, the government now tends to treat the Buraku problem more universally, as a human rights issue.

## **CONCLUSION: POSSIBILITY OF CHANGE**

In the previous two sections, we have explored both Buraku movements and government's effort to solve the social exclusion of the Buraku people and discrimination against them. However, as we have revealed, discrimination against them continues.

There is considerable literature on oppressed groups and their struggles for justice and equality. Michael Goldstein (1972) for example, talks about

minority political behavior as follows:

Oppressed minorities have long been considered enthusiastic supporters of radical political movements. Systematic persecution has been viewed as the crucial factor in driving vast numbers of these minority elements into political movements that challenge the very social and economic structure of the society. It has also been considered quite logical to assume that the unprejudiced "new society" promised by radical movements should be an enticing vision to many minority group members (1972: 1).

Lipset also noted that "deprivation under the existing socio-economic system" (1960: 261) is the most obvious force directing minority groups towards left-wing radicalism. He explains:

Many ethnic and religious minorities suffering social or economic discrimination support the more left parties in different countries. although this pattern is most commonly found in the Jews.... Other examples can be found in Asia. In India, the Andheras, a large linguistic minority, have been among the strongest supporters of the Communist party, while in Ceylon the Communists are disproportionately strong among the India minority. In Japan the Korean minority gives considerable support to the Communists..... (1960: 261).

This has certainly been true with the Buraku people in Japan who have been attracted to the communists and socialist parties, despite their disappointment with them for insisting first on an end to capitalism. Since its foundation in 1922, the Suiheisha has refused assimilation with the majority, declaring that "the time has come when we can be proud of being Eta" (De Vos

and Wagatsuma, 1967: 44). The Buraku people have forged a strong identity and insisted that they themselves should be the center of their movements. Buraku protest has grown into a major social movement, which allied itself with the left wing peasants and labor federations (Neary, 1989: 1). After World War II, successors of Suiheisha -- the BLL and the Federation -- have supported the JSP and the JCP. They have played an important role especially in urging the government to take measures to solve discrimination against the Buraku by their improving living conditions. However, mainly because of the BLL's tactics of extreme denunciation, even the Buraku people tend not to support Buraku organizations.

As for the government's efforts, after World War II, the central government accepted its responsibility for the Buraku problem, partly because of the pressure by the Buraku organizations, such as the BLL. The main aim of the government's Dowa policy has been to narrow the gap between the Buraku and the majority especially in terms of living conditions, such as housing, environment, and education. In 1965, a report submitted to the cabinet by the government's Dowa Policy Council clearly showed their central aims were to improve the Buraku people's living condition by providing equal opportunities to education and jobs, the elimination of discrimination against the Buraku people.

Through these policies, economic problems, especially poverty in the Buraku communities, have been alleviated. It should be said, in fairness, that life for the Buraku people has improved during the past two decades. Living

conditions, such as housing, roads and sewers in their communities have improved considerably as a result of various government measures.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, a Marxist, Yamamoto, predicts that the Buraku problem will be solved in due course (1986: 56). However, there is still a very long way to go. This means that social infrastructure alone does not solve the discrimination problem. The economic factor is not enough to solve the Buraku situation.

Anthony Giddens (1989: 271) puts forward three types of models for the development of ethnic relations -- assimilation, the melting pot, and cultural pluralism. According to Giddens, assimilation means that ethnic groups "abandon their original customs and practices, moulding their behaviour to the values and norms of the majority" (1989: 271). The melting pot means that "all become blended to form new, evolving cultural patterns" and cultural pluralism means "development of a genuinely plural society, in which the equal validity of numerous different sub-cultures is recognized" (Giddens, 1989: 271). In the Buraku case, not only the government policy but also the Buraku's own organizations, have tended to work towards assimilation, although the Buraku organization have had a strong connection with the JSP

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<sup>22</sup> Through narrowing the economic gap (although gaps in income, education etc. remain), the Buraku people somewhat have undergone the social passing process. In other words, they have changed their 'habitus', using Bourdieu's term, which refers to certain patterns which consciously or unconsciously inform social life (Miyajima, 1995: 126). Therefore, as we have explored in the second chapter, the Buraku people are facing an identity crisis now. Fewer Buraku people, especially the youth, support the BLL. Also according to Yamamoto (1986: 242), some Buraku people do not necessarily support leftist parties, such as the JCP and the JSP. Yamamoto carried out field research in two urban Buraku communities in Osaka-- the Sumiyoshi area and the Kashima area. In the Sumiyoshi area, 30.2% support the LDP, 24.4% support the JSP and 1.3% support the JCP. On the other hand, in Kashima, 35.7% support the JSP, 13.0% support the LDP and 3.7% support the JCP (Yamamoto, 1986: 242).

and JCP. Because the Buraku people do not have any physical, linguistic, racial, cultural, and ethnical differences from the rest of Japanese, the government and Buraku organizations have thought that assimilation by narrowing the economic gap, would be the best and easiest way to solve exclusion of the Buraku people.

Yet, as we analyzed in the second chapter, social exclusion of the Buraku people lies deep, not only in economic but also in religious and psychological aspects. Therefore, focus on the economic aspects by narrowing the economic gap between the Buraku people and ordinary people has not been enough. Because of the fact that the Buraku people cannot be distinguished racially, ethnically, linguistically, culturally or religiously, the concepts of race/racialization and outcaste -- which we have concluded most are the useful approaches -- have not been considered or applied to the Buraku case by Japanese scholars in general.

However, the process of racialization is very important for understanding the Buraku situation. As we have seen, historically the Buraku people have been excluded from the main society through the processes of racialization based on imagined differences. To borrow from Miles once again,

Racialization and racism were ideological forces which, in conjunction with economic and political relations of domination, located certain populations in specific class positions (1993: 50).

Moreover, he notes:

These processes [racialization, the expression of racism and

exclusionary practices] create not only particular fractions of classes, but also resistance which has as its objective the elimination of racism and exclusion (1993: 51).

Through the process of racialization, the Buraku people are situated in specific economic positions and excluded from the majority population. Through racialization, resistance to eliminating barriers to discrimination is strong. The social exclusion of the Buraku people is complex, deep, and continuing. As we have analyzed in the second chapter, the remnants of feudal society/incomplete transition to capitalism, the concepts of purity/impurity, national character and identity (superiority/inferiority), all are crucial points in understanding the persistence of the Buraku exclusion. Moreover, the Koseki system has worked as a mechanism to maintain social exclusion. Accordingly, when considering a solution, we have to focus on these factors.

The easiest point is the reform of the Koseki system because it could be changed or abolished by legislation. As we saw, the Koseki system permits systematic discrimination against the Buraku. The Koseki reveals everything about the family, including the place of parents' birth. Also we can trace, in an unlimited fashion, past family history and genealogy through the Koseki. Moreover, the current system has only loose regulations to protect privacy: in fact, anybody can see others' Koseki easily for a small fee. Privacy should be protected strictly by law. Moreover, the Koseki system should be abolished or at least transferred from family to individual. In other words, if the abolition of the Koseki is considered too radical, as a first step, the individual should be

the basis of the Koseki instead of the current family Koseki. Through abolition or reforms of the Koseki, a key mechanism in maintaining Buraku exclusion would be dissolved.

Now, we have to go back to other aspects, which cannot be abolished by legislation. As we have seen, we cannot deny Japan's incomplete modernization. The Japanese social system retains some feudal characteristics, which are also related to the Japanese national character such as group mentality.<sup>23</sup> The social features created by the incomplete transition to capitalism, are deep-rooted in history and are difficult to change. Change is always slow, but the Japanese have started to recognize feudal characteristics in their modern society, especially in the economic system. Japanese society has been changing. Many companies have tried to alter certain aspects, such as familialistic characteristics (life-time employment system and seniority-based promotion and wage system). In January 2001, even the government reformed its bureaucratic system and tried to reduce our pre-modern characteristics. That was the biggest bureaucratic reform since Japan's defeat in 1945.

Turning now to the cultural aspects, the concepts of purity and impurity borrowed from Shintoism and Buddhism, historically created the identities of the majority and the Buraku people. As a result, the Buraku are not only at the bottom of the society, but also they are considered polluted. Moreover, people fear and avoid polluted people. A similar process can be seen in caste

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<sup>23</sup> I cannot deny that this system successfully led Japan to one of the most industrialized

society. As a result, the Japanese people unconsciously consider the Buraku communities and people untouchable. Most citizens prefer to avoid the subject of the Buraku people even in conversation. This subject is almost never aired in the Japanese media, and foreign books that touch on the Buraku problem have all references to it deleted when they are translated into Japanese. Media tend to avoid this topic as well. Partly, the silence that enshrouds the way that these concepts sustain deep discrimination against a segment of society reflects the embarrassment at the existence of a tormented minority in their supposedly harmonious society. The lack of attention given to the Buraku works to sustain the attitudes of prejudice and hostility. A correct understanding of the Buraku situation should be spread among the public.

Additionally, many Japanese, especially in the East part of Japan where there are not many Buraku communities, have come to believe that discrimination has disappeared and certainly the intensity of the social exclusion of the Buraku varies considerably from region to region. Eliminating discrimination in education is proceeding on various levels. However, not all prefectures include Dowa education in school curricula. The national school curricula do not focus on the Buraku. I personally had only had a one hour lecture on the Buraku at my elementary school. According to Takagi (1991: 289), roughly 60 percent of schools have classes that discuss the Buraku. Dowa education should be spread across Japan, in order to transmit correct understandings of the conditions surrounding the exclusion of the Buraku

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nations especially in the strong economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s.

people. Local governments should continue to try to educate the public more. Moreover, the Ministry of Labor has instructed, in the form of administrative guidance, that data unrelated to job applicants' ability -- such as detailed addresses of family members, parents' occupation, etc. -- be omitted from job application forms. This kind of guidance should be continued.

The other reason why the Buraku problem is not discussed is the denunciation practices of the Buraku organizations. Media and authors are afraid of these denunciations and, as a result, they try not to discuss the Buraku. Denunciations prevent free discussion of the Buraku. Extreme denunciations by the Buraku organizations, which infringe on freedom of speech, should be regulated. In other words, one of the most important tasks of Buraku organizations and the government in bringing about change lies in attracting public interest in the issues, and convincing the public of the real necessity of changes.

Through these efforts, the Buraku situation should be made visible first. That would lead to better understandings and solutions. Moreover, it should be realized that discrimination against the Buraku people cannot rely solely on elimination of the economic gap. We should keep in mind that exclusion of the Buraku extends to various aspects -- economic, religious, and psychological areas and that the concept of racialization is considerable.

Recently, the Japanese government has submitted an official report on the situation of racial discrimination to the United Nations. It is too new for me to access it. However, the United Nations Commission on the Elimination of All

forms of Racial Discrimination has provided a criticism of the official government (Nihon Keizai Shinbun, 2001). Based on the fact that Japan does not have the special laws which directly punish discriminatory actions or remarks which promotes racial discrimination, the Commission pointed out the necessity of legislation of laws to prohibit discrimination, and strongly urged the government to take serious measures against discrimination. It also pointed out that the Japanese official report did not include the Buraku people because of the government's view that the Buraku case is not one of racial discrimination. Therefore, the Commission criticized this point and requested the government to protect the Buraku people's rights (Nihon Keizai Shinbun, 2001)<sup>21</sup>.

As we have analyzed in the second chapter, most definitions of race do not apply to the Buraku people. However, the concept of racialization can be applied to the Buraku case. Treating the Buraku case as a dramatic example of racialization, could be useful in raising popular awareness. The Constitution, which claims to protect human rights, needs to be realized in practice:

All of the people are equal under the law and there shall be no discrimination in political, economic or social relations because of race, creed, sex, social status or family origin (Article 14). Freedom of assembly and association as well as speech, press and all other forms

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<sup>21</sup> Kenneth L. Port mentions that "although often considered by some to be a rather insular and racist society, as we have examined the government's efforts, Japan has made much more progress in conforming to and applying international human rights norms" (1996: 551). As we have examined, the Japanese government has made efforts to eliminate discrimination, although there are still criticism from international organizations.

of expression are guaranteed (Article 21). Every person shall have freedom to choose and change his residence and to choose his occupation to the extent that it does not interfere with the public welfare (Article 22).

The fundamental solution lies in strengthening human rights education as a whole, and enlightening people on the Buraku case within that broad context.

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