

# Strengthening the Role of Teacher Training Programs in Human Rights Education: the Case of Japan\*

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ONE of the fruits of the United Nations' Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004) was that Japan's Diet passed the "Act for the Promotion of Human Rights Education and Awareness" (2000). Even with this law, however, human rights education has not been given proper support from the government. Given this sporadic promotion of human rights education nationwide, we argue that promoting human rights education in higher education, especially within teacher training courses, is crucial for its (human rights education) wider promotion in the Japanese school system.

Currently, it is difficult to assess how far the promotion of human rights education has progressed in Japan's higher education system due to lack of basic data. Therefore, the preliminary stages of our research required us to conduct a quantitative survey of the prevalence and nature of human rights education in Japan's higher education institutions.

We restricted our inquiry to teacher training courses, taught in Japanese universities and colleges. Specifically, we gathered data to show how many courses support human rights education, and the quality of the human rights education provided. We also examined how the teaching of human rights education in higher education institutions has developed, before looking at what best practice in teacher training courses would look like.

## Human Rights Education in Japan

Japan's *Diet* (parliament) enacted the "Act for the Promotion of Human Rights Education and Awareness" in 2000 that defined the duties of both central and local governments to support human rights education inside and outside the school system.

\* This article is based on the presentation made by the authors at the 8th International Conference on Human Rights Education, Montreal, 2 December 2017.

However, despite the passage of this law, human rights education has not been taught as a subject in Japan's official national school curriculum. Schools have no textbook on the official content on teaching human rights, nor allocated time within the curriculum for human rights education. There are also few specialists in human rights education. The phrase "Human Rights" appears only a few times in the guidelines of the curriculum (*Gakushu-shido-youryo*).

The teaching of human rights in the Japanese school system happens mostly because schools and teachers voluntarily undertake the task. In these schools, human rights education is usually addressed within subjects such as social studies, moral education, and integrated studies (studies on specific topics).

In 2008, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) drew up guidelines for teaching human rights. The guidelines defined human rights education, its target and an outline on how to promote it in schools. They also stated that human rights education should be holistically incorporated into all aspects of education in schools.

Three recent important laws that also relate to human rights education have been enacted, namely:

- Disability Discrimination Act (2013, Act No. 65);<sup>1</sup>
- Act for the Measures Against Hate Speech Towards Immigrants (2016);<sup>2</sup>
- Act for the Measures Against Burakumin Discrimination (2016).<sup>3</sup>

These laws have provisions on raising awareness on the rights of the people concerned – people with disabilities, foreign immigrants and *Burakumin*.

The law against hate speech, for example, provides the following:<sup>4</sup>

(Enhancement of Education, etc.)

Article 6

(1) The national government shall implement educational activities in order to eliminate unfair discriminatory speech and behavior against persons originating from outside Japan, and shall make the necessary efforts therefor.

(2) The local governments shall implement educational activities in order to eliminate unfair discriminatory speech and behavior against persons originating from outside Japan in accordance with the actual situation of the region, taking into ac-

count the sharing of appropriate roles with the national government, and shall endeavor to make the necessary efforts therefor.

(Awareness-raising Activities, etc.)

#### Article 7

(1) The national government shall spread awareness among the general public about the need to eliminate unfair discriminatory speech and behavior against persons originating from outside Japan, and implement public relations activities for the purpose of furthering understanding thereof and other awareness-raising activities, and shall make the necessary efforts therefor.

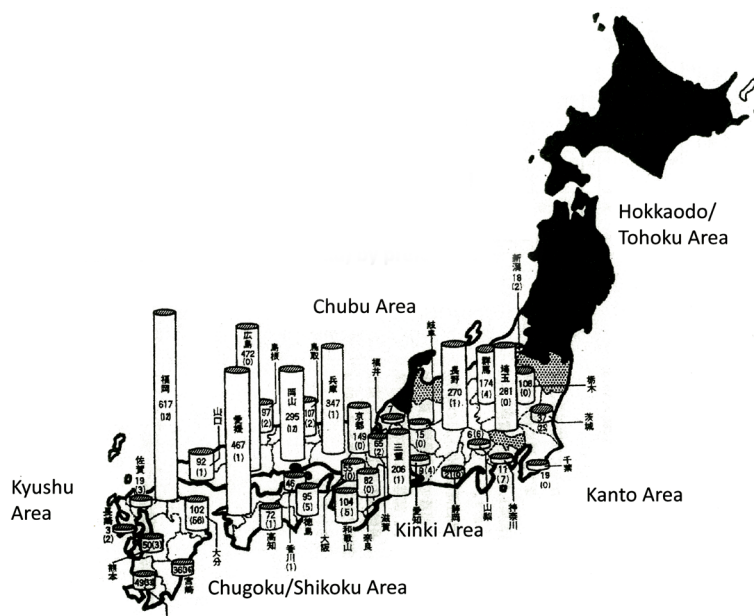
(2) The local governments shall spread awareness among the local residents about the need to eliminate unfair discriminatory speech and behavior against persons originating from outside Japan in accordance with the actual situation of the region, taking into account the sharing of appropriate roles with the national government, and implement public relations activities for the purpose of furthering understanding thereof and other awareness-raising activities, and shall make the necessary efforts therefor.

However, these laws have been criticized for lacking penalties for acts of discrimination.

### Anti-discrimination Education

Regional and local government policies impacted human rights education practice, particularly in areas where minority rights have long been fought for by activists and grassroots movements (e.g., western Japan's Buraku Liberation Movement). These activists and movements promoted education against discrimination of Japanese who were identified as *Burakumin*. This anti-discrimination education, known as "Dowa Education," resulted from a teachers' movement to improve the education for *Burakumin*. This teachers' movement worked closely with the Buraku Liberation Movement.

*Buraku* means hamlet; at present these hamlets are sometimes called *Dowa* districts. The people living in these districts are known as Burakumin (People of the Hamlet). The *Burakumin* are one of Japan's major ethnic minorities. Thought of as outcasts during the Edo Era (1603-1868), they still suffer discrimination and higher rates of poverty till the present.



Number of Dowa districts (Buraku) by prefecture.

“Dowa Education” is considered to have made a positive impact on the promotion of human rights education.<sup>5</sup> Dowa Education is the result of a teachers’ movement to improve the education for *Burakumin*.

### Government Support

The Japanese government has repeatedly cut funding for national universities since 2005. In 2014, meanwhile, 45.8 percent of private universities also failed to recruit their targeted number of students (MEXT 2015). This situation is linked to the government’s financial reforms and Japan’s decreasing population.

The government has not required higher education institutions to teach human rights in teacher training courses. Human rights education classes are optional and voluntarily offered by the teacher-training institutions.

Also, with limited funding, higher education institutions reduced the number of teaching staff and their classes. Human rights education easily became a target for removal whenever restructuring in the university was on

the table. For example, the Fukuoka University of Education cut classes with “human rights education” in their name, from four to two classes.

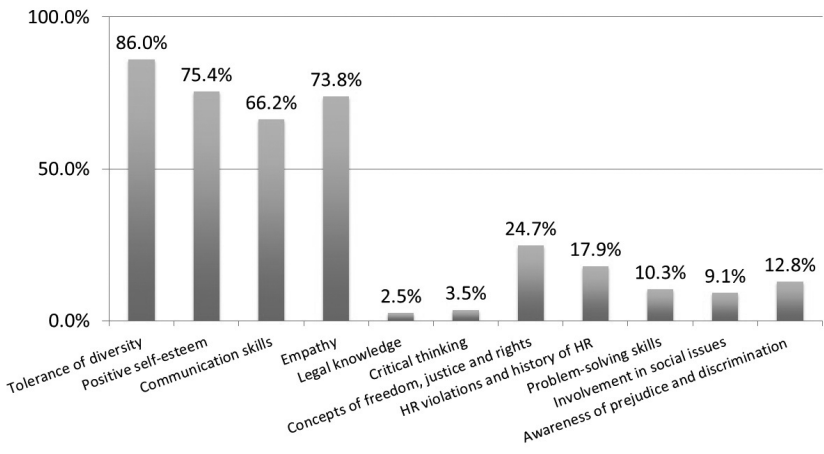
### **Survey on Human Rights Education**

The MEXT did a survey of primary, secondary and special education needs (SEN) schools in 2013 to find out how widely human rights education was promoted among schools. Questionnaires were sent to, and collected by, all local boards of education in Japan’s forty-seven prefectures and 1,785 cities and towns. In addition, 1,872 publicly-funded primary, lower secondary, upper secondary and SEN schools were chosen by random sampling.

The following are the key results of the survey:

- 89 percent of local boards of education had formulated promotional guidelines or plans for human rights education, and 87 percent had monitored the progress of human rights education in their respective areas;
- 84 percent of schools had introduced human rights education teacher trainings and 75 percent had formulated their own annual plans for human rights education;
- Schools complained of “few materials” and “little time” for human rights education;
- On contents of human rights education – majority of the respondents mentioned “tolerance of diversity,” “positive self-esteem,” “empathy,” and “communication skills” as contents. See Graph 1 for other information.

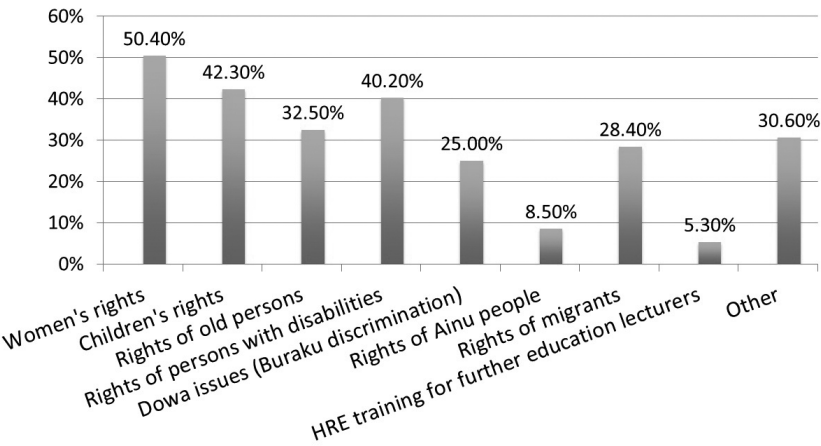
**Graph 1. Which human rights education competencies and skills are taught in your school?**



MEXT did a survey in 2012 on human rights education in universities' curricular reform. The survey inquired if universities offered subjects on specific human rights issues. Out of the seven hundred sixty-six Japanese universities that received the survey questionnaires,

- Five hundred thirty-five universities (71.9 percent) offered classes with human rights or human rights education component,
- Two hundred nineteen universities (29.4 percent) have at least one of these human rights/human rights education classes offered as a compulsory subject. See Graph 2 for more information on survey results.

**Graph 2. Percentage of universities offering classes on specific human rights issues (pre-filled options)**



From the MEXT research we find that many schools insisted on teaching human rights but they put more importance on behavior and attitude such as being tolerant, being confident, or being kind to others, and put little emphasis on skills and knowledge. Also, we find that universities focus most on women's rights. However, ethnic minorities' issues such as *Buraku*, *Ainu* and immigrants are taught in relatively fewer classes.

## **Research Purpose and Design**

Considering the policy on human rights education in the Japanese school system as well as the current situation, the support of teacher training programs in this field necessitates an inquiry.

The research project on teacher training programs, started in 2015, is founded on the view that promoting human rights education in higher education institutions, especially within teacher training courses, is crucial for its (human rights education) wider promotion in schools.

Currently, there is a lack of basic data on institutions that have formally incorporated human rights education teaching into their curriculums.

The preliminary stages of the research required the conduct of a quantitative survey of the prevalence and nature of human rights education in Japan's higher education institutions.

The research was limited to teacher training courses taught in universities and colleges. Specifically, the research gathered data to show the number of courses that provide access to human rights education and the quality of human rights education provided.

It also inquired on how the best practice in human rights education in teacher training courses would look like, in order to formulate suggestions how it should be developed in other higher education institutions.

## **Research Methodology**

The project employed both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The quantitative research started in 2015 and involved the following:

- Examination of MEXT data, specifically looking at human rights/human rights education in teacher training courses;
- Preliminary study involving distribution of questionnaires on classes concerning human rights and minority issues in the two hundred sixty-seven teacher training courses in Japan; and
- Examination of syllabuses (where publicly available) to know the content being offered in cases of failure of institutions to reply to the questionnaire.

Qualitative research was done during the 2016-2017 period by interviewing professors concerned with human rights education in their respec-

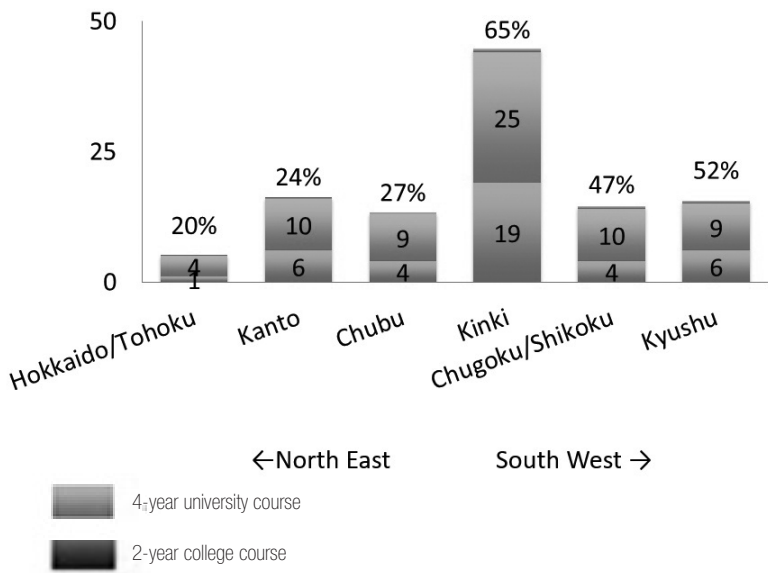
tive higher education institutions. The professors were chosen based on their general reputation on human rights education work. Professors from seven universities were interviewed. The programs of two visited universities are presented as case studies below.

Research Results: Content analysis of syllabuses

The analysis of syllabuses revealed the following findings:

- One hundred seven out of two hundred sixty-seven (40 percent) teacher training courses offer subjects with titles containing the words “human rights(人権)” or “right(権利)”.
- Offerings differed by region (see Graph 3 below).

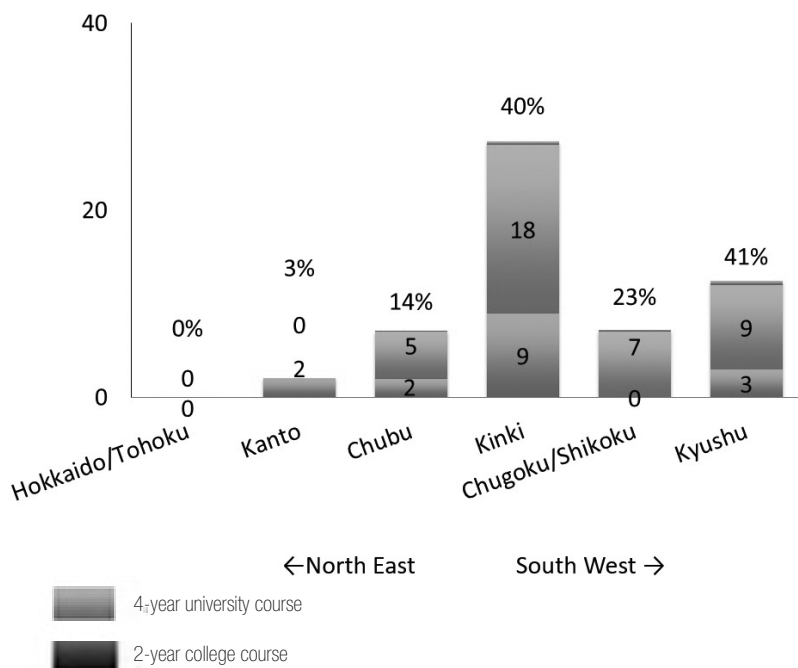
Graph 3. Number of institutions offering subjects with titles containing the words “human rights”





The influence of the Buraku Liberation Movement is seen in the subjects offered in teacher training courses.

**Graph 4. Number of institutions offering subjects with content on Dowa issues (Buraku discrimination) by region (n=267)**



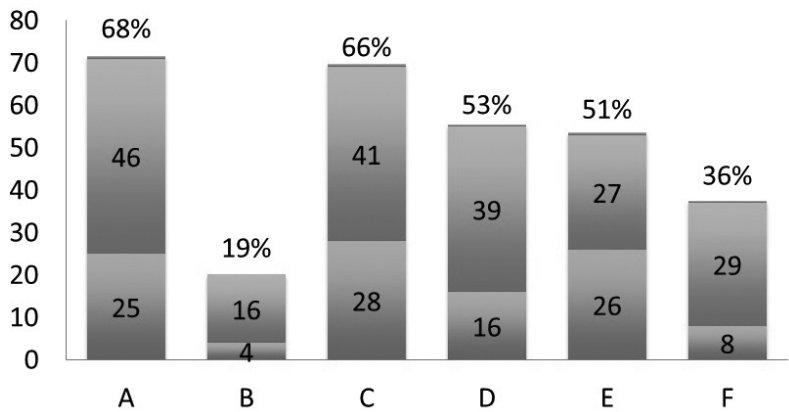
An analysis of one hundred four syllabuses of higher education providers (universities and colleges) revealed six categories of human rights/human rights education content, namely:

- Concepts of human rights;
- Human rights laws, conventions, documents, and knowledge and skill for protecting human rights;
- Respect for diversity and resolve to support anti-discrimination initiatives;
- Dowa Issues (*Buraku* discrimination);
- Realizing and teaching human rights in school; and
- Child rights.

The syllabus analysis revealed that most of the universities and colleges reviewed offered courses on “Concepts of human rights” and “Respect for diversity and resolve to support anti-discrimination initiatives.” For universities, the “Dowa Issues (*Buraku* discrimination)” content was also offered more often.

Graph 5 provides information on the number of universities and colleges that offer the different categories of human rights/human rights education content.

**Graph 5. Percentage of higher education providers offering human rights content, by content area (n=104)**



Note: A - Concepts of human rights; B - Human rights laws, conventions, documents, and knowledge and skill for protecting human rights; C - Respect for diversity and resolve to support anti-discrimination initiatives; D - Dowa Issues (*Buraku* discrimination); E - Realizing and teaching human rights in school; and F - Child rights

**Other Findings and Conclusions**

The research project also found that

- Human rights subjects were compulsory in 26 percent of universities (four-year courses) and 41 percent of junior colleges (two-year courses).
- 60 percent of teaching staff in charge of subjects concerning human rights worked full-time in universities; while colleges have 65 percent of such staff worked full time.

Considering the research findings, the following conclusions are drawn:

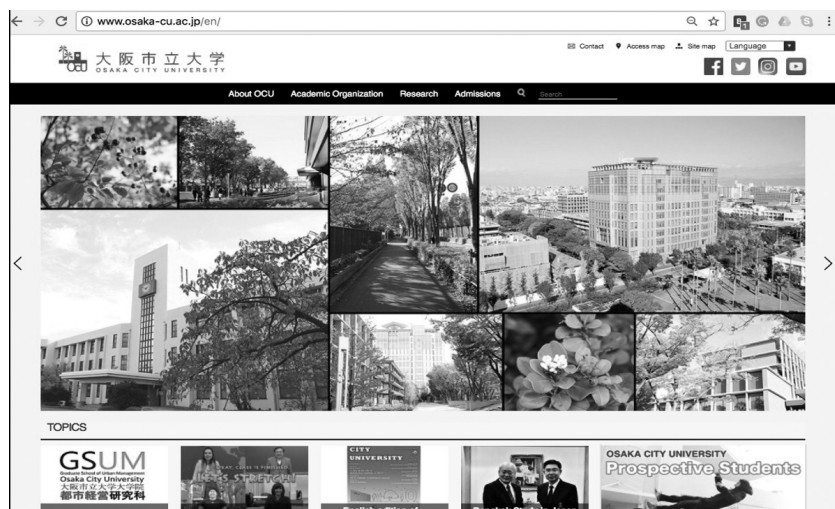
- Human rights education offerings in teacher training institutions were not significantly different from those offered by general universities;
- There are regional differences in higher education human rights education offerings;
- Approximately 40 percent of human rights teaching staff are employed on a part-time basis, which limits the ability of higher education institutions to take a holistic and organized approach to implementing human rights education program.

## Research Results Part II

The research project included a search for best practices in human rights education in colleges and universities. Two universities were selected for having good practice: The Osaka City University and the Kyoto Seika University.

### Case Study One: Osaka City University (OCU)

The Osaka City University (OCU) is located in Osaka city, the biggest city in west Japan with a long history as a commercial and industrial city, has the largest *Buraku* area (Dowa district) and a strong *Buraku* liberation movement.



OCU traces its origin to the Osaka Commercial Training Institute that was founded in 1880. In 1928, it became the first city-founded university in Japan. Two Noble Prize winners have worked at OCU: Professor Yoichiro Nambu (Physics, 2008)<sup>6</sup> and Professor Shinya Yamanaka (Medicine, 2012).<sup>7</sup> OCU has eight undergraduate faculties and ten graduate schools with more than 8,000 students and 2,000 staff. Its teacher training courses are optional add-ons in many faculties.

### Good Practices in OCU

OCU has good human rights/human rights education practice for the following reasons:

- Many human rights classes are available to all students
  - Sixteen classes concerning human rights can be accessed by all students, plus an extra two compulsory classes for students in the teacher training course.
- Whole university approach to human rights
  - It has the Research Center for Human Rights (RCHR) that plays a central role in organizing many research projects, academic and educational events, and in the education of students and training of staff;<sup>8</sup>
  - It has a Human Rights Committee (with members from all faculties) that is responsible for discussing and managing human rights issues within the university;
  - In 2001, it adopted the Osaka City University Declaration of Human Rights 2001 which is publically accessible online.<sup>9</sup>
  - Support to minority students
  - The university provides easily accessible support to victims of human rights violations and students with disabilities.

The human rights classes in OCU (some of which are compulsory for students in the teacher training course) are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1. Human rights classes**

Contemporary Buraku Issues	Media and Human Rights	Frontier of Buraku Liberation	History of Buraku Discrimination
Minorities in the World	Disability and Human Rights I	Disability and Human Rights II	Peace and Human Rights
Peacekeeping Studies	Gender and Society I	Gender and Society II	Ethnic Studies I
Ethnic Studies II	Corporations and Human Rights	Global Citizenship and Human Rights	Seminar on Human Rights and Diversity

These classes are taught by full-time tenured, full-time non-tenured and part-time teachers.

78 percent of all students in OCU completed at least one of the classes above (2008 OCU survey).

Students in the teacher training course must also complete the following courses:<sup>10</sup>

- Human Rights Education and Career Education I
- Human Rights Education and Career Education II.

These courses are meant to raise the minorities’ (mainly *Burakumin*, Korean residents and the persons with disabilities, but other foreign residents are covered as well) educational achievements and ensure their career in the future after leaving school.

The Research Center for Human Rights (RCHR) has the following staff: one full-time tenured teacher, three full-time non-tenured teachers, fifteen teaching staff holding a post in other OCU faculty, six non-paid research assistants and three non-teaching staff.

RCHR organizes research projects and study tours for staff. It started a human rights education exchange program with Taipei Soochow University in 2016.

It organizes the “Salon de Human Rights” eight to nine times a year and the “Film de Human Rights” three times a year for staff, students and the general public.

“Salon de Human Rights” is a public lecture featuring a special guest, and has been held at least one hundred thirty times (as of February 2017).

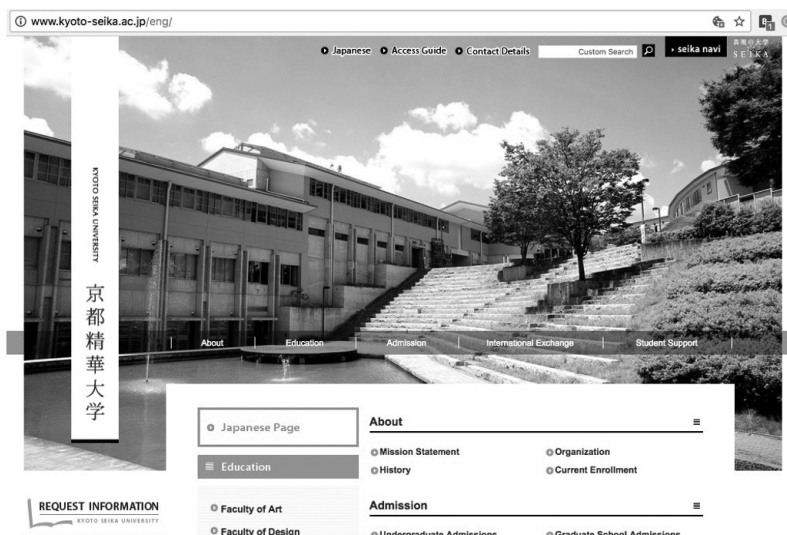
RCHR publishes an annual bulletin called *Human Rights Issue Study* since 2001. It replaced the *Dowa Issue Study* publication that was published during 1977-2001 period.

OCU's Human Rights Committee organizes:

- Orientation on Human Rights and Discrimination for all freshman students;
- Lectures and symposiums, during the annual Human Rights week;
- Publishes the newsletter *The Frontier of Human Rights* and distributes copies to all freshman students and new staff;
- Publishes the book *Human Rights Handbook* (five volumes so far) and distributes them to event attendees. The five volumes consist of the following themes: 1. Buraku Issue; 2. Gender; 3. Migrants; 4. Environment and Human Rights; and 5. Persons with Disabilities.

The Committee started its human rights education activities in the 1960s, when student movements protested against racist and discriminative incidents in the campus. The OCU officials attempted to address these concerns but the incidents continued in the 1970s, prompting OCU leadership to take further action including human rights education and other measures.

## Case Study Two: Kyoto Seika University (Seika)



The Kyoto Seika University (Seika) is located in Kyoto city, the old capital city in west Japan. The city is host to many universities, and many politically liberal and highly educated people reside there.

Seika is a small private university and composed of five undergraduate faculties and four graduate schools. It has more than three thousand students and one hundred fifty-six teaching staff in the Humanities, Art, Design, Manga and Popular Culture Faculties.

It was founded in 1968 with the strong leadership and ideals of the first President, Okamoto Seichi, who imagined and created a progressive, liberal, and humanistic alternative to other universities existing at that time.

Some people unofficially called Seika a university of the “new left”, particularly during the time of the student movement in the 1960s to 1970s.

### Support for Minorities and Equality

Seika adopted the Declaration for the Promotion of Diversity in 2015 to promote support for minority students and to reduce discrimination against minorities such as LGBTQ students.<sup>11</sup>

It also has several initiatives to support minority students and staff such as the following:

- Employment benefits applying to same-sex couples (childcare leave, condolence payment, etc.);
- Plan for more universal toilets;
- Allowing the change of names and sexes in university registrations;
- Non-inclusion of sex in university-issued certificates;
- Introduction of *Halal* food in the lunch café;
- Support for related research projects with funds from the university President, such as “Career Support for Students with Developmental Disorders.”

### Research Results

The research project found several common features of good human rights education program in Japanese universities:

- Many of these universities developed human rights education programs during the 1960-1970 period in response to social movements prevailing at that time;
- They offer multiple opportunities for learning about human rights - not only in classes and university events, but also via other methods

such as during ceremonial occasions (for example, giving guidance on human rights during the enrollment ceremony);

- There is strong leadership by university presidents and executives that allow the human rights education programs to flourish;
- They employ the whole university approach, sometimes via a Human Rights Committee;
- They develop guidelines and adopt declarations on protecting and promoting human rights;
- They have dedicated organizations/centers for promoting human rights education, with specialist staff in human rights;
- They have many general teaching staff with strong understanding of human rights education.

### Some Conclusions and Suggestions

The research project provided data on the state of human rights education in Japanese universities. The analysis of the gathered data supports an initial set of conclusions and suggestions regarding further research on human rights education in Japanese universities:

- There is limited research on human rights education in higher education institutions in Japan. This project constitutes the initial analysis of human rights education in these institutions in the country;
- Due to lack of access to older data, there can be no certainty on the human rights classes that existed and how they changed over time. However, current data show 40 percent of Japanese teacher training courses include human rights issues, which we think is inadequate. Further, legal knowledge and skills are rarely taught in teacher training courses;
- Human rights education in Japanese schools places more emphasis on attitudes, not on knowledge and skills;
- The inadequate number of university courses with human rights content means that learning about human rights education is dependent on on-the-job training, rather than in the formal education setting.

In recent years, right-wing voices have become increasingly powerful within Japan's political establishment. As in much of the Western world, human rights education in Japan is under threat, as we see racist, xenopho-



bic, exclusionist and pro-eugenics arguments go largely unchallenged in the mainstream media. In the current environment, it is not easy to encourage central and local governments or civil society to engage proactively with the promotion of human rights education. As a consequence, so far there has been little attempt made to monitor the prevalence of human rights education in higher education institutions or to evaluate its practice.

Our research takes a step towards resolving this, making clear what has been achieved in Japan during the second phase of the UN's World Programme for Human Rights Education and outlining what more needs to be done in the next phases in order to strengthen the role of teacher training courses in promoting human rights education to the wider society. Case studies of existing good practices can be used to guide institutions wishing to promote and expand their human rights education programs. The results of this research project will be disseminated as reference material for universities and colleges interested in improving their human rights education programs.

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## Endnotes

1 For a presentation on the contents of the law see Chapter 1 - Basic Policy for Eliminating Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities, [www8.cao.go.jp/shou-gai/english/annualreport/2015/pdf/s1-1.pdf](http://www8.cao.go.jp/shou-gai/english/annualreport/2015/pdf/s1-1.pdf).

2 See full text of the anti-hate speech law at Ministry of Justice, [www.moj.go.jp/content/001199550.pdf](http://www.moj.go.jp/content/001199550.pdf).

3 See HURIGHTS OSAKA, "Law Against Buraku Discrimination," FOCUS Asia-Pacific, Volume 87, March 2017, [www.hurights.or.jp/archives/focus/section3/2017/03/law-against-buraku-discrimination.html](http://www.hurights.or.jp/archives/focus/section3/2017/03/law-against-buraku-discrimination.html).

4 Text from Ministry of Justice, [www.moj.go.jp/content/001199550.pdf](http://www.moj.go.jp/content/001199550.pdf)

5 For information on the Dowa education history and initiatives, read the following:

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6 The Nobel Prize in Physics 2008, Noble Prize, [www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/physics/laureates/2008/](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/physics/laureates/2008/).

7 The Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine 2012, NoblePrize.org, [www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/medicine/laureates/2012/](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/medicine/laureates/2012/).

8 See the profile of the Research Center for Human Rights (RCHR) at <http://hurights.pbworks.com/w/page/11947509/Japan-Centers#ResearchCenterforHumanRightsRCHR>.

9 This document is available at [www.osaka-cu.ac.jp/en/about/declaration2001](http://www.osaka-cu.ac.jp/en/about/declaration2001) and also at HURIGHTS OSAKA website: [www.hurights.or.jp/archives/other\\_docu-](http://www.hurights.or.jp/archives/other_docu-)

ments/section1/2001/12/osaka-city-university-declaration-of-human-rights-2001.html.

<sup>10</sup> They generally refer to *Gakuryoku-hosho* and *Shinro-hosho* in Japanese.

<sup>11</sup> See the text of the declaration in Japanese in [www.kyoto-seika.ac.jp/info/info/univ/2016/04/29/36854/](http://www.kyoto-seika.ac.jp/info/info/univ/2016/04/29/36854/).

## Annex A

### Part II Research Results: Case Study Two

#### Introduction of some Seika teaching staff

President, Prof. TAKEMIYA Keiko	Manga artist. Her work is known to include one of the earliest sexual expressions of gay boys. Published the university's declaration of diversity in 2015 to support all minority students.
Prof. Oussouby SACKO	The first Black African university president in Japan by 2018. Specializes in architecture and community development.
Prof. NAKASHIMA Masazumi	Specialized in multiculturalism. Teaches classes such as "Human Rights", "Human Rights Education" and "Modern Racism and Discrimination."
Prof. SUMITOMO Tsuyoshi	Specialized in education and law. Oversees the teacher training course, teaches many classes including child rights. Supports children and victims of poverty and violence.
Prof. Rebecca JENNISON	Specialized in literary criticism. Teaches gender issues.
Prof. YAMADA Sohei	Specialized in urban sociology. Gay activist. Teaches LGBTQ issues.
Prof. HOSOKAWA Komei	Anthropologist. Studies Aboriginal Australians. Involved in the anti-nuclear movement.
Prof. SHIRAI Satoshi	Specialized in political philosophy. Studies post-war Japan, and Lenin.