



Editorial

Minorities in Japan

Minorities are usually defined as groups of people whose ethnic, linguistic or religious identity differs from the "majority" members of society. There are several such groups of minorities in Japan who have a history of being discriminated against in various forms.

Measures have been implemented to address the discrimination suffered by these minorities. Korean residents who arrived in Japan before the second World War and their descendants who were born and raised in Japan are given special visa status. Education about different cultures has been introduced in schools and public activities. "Ethnic" schools are also allowed, though they are not yet fully supported by the government.

The "Dowa Measures" were implemented to improve the physical condition of the Buraku communities.

New groups of minorities are becoming increasingly visible, particularly those based on sexual orientation and religion, which brings a new set of issues.

Whether old or new, the discrimination minorities face can be persistent; for minorities, the problem lies with the attitude of the majority.

Some members of minority groups may decide to avoid discrimination by simply refusing to be identified as a minority; others see the need to take pride in belonging to their respective minority group, which deserve the respect and protection of society as a whole.

There is still much to do to fully address the plight of minorities in Japan.

FOCUS Asia-Pacific is designed to highlight significant issues and activities relating to human rights in the Asia-Pacific. Relevant information and articles can be sent to HURIGHTS OSAKA for inclusion in the next editions of the newsletter.

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Present-Day Buraku Discrimination*

*Kenzo Tomonaga**

There is a conventional belief about the Buraku problem in Japan; discrimination based on social class was practiced in pre-modern society, not in modern times. If such a problem exists in modern times, it is a mere legacy of the past and should have disappeared with the passing of time.

Pre-modern discrimination based on social class certainly does not exist anymore, as social practices have changed and the Japanese Constitution and laws prohibit discrimination.

However, discriminatory attitudes have not been eliminated. Discrimination continues to manifest itself in various spheres of daily life, including marriage. Despite improvements made through various measures, the reality of discrimination can still be seen in social life, education and employment in present-day Japan.

Presently, there is an even more serious problem of discrimination against the Buraku people in view of the following:

- a. In 2002, the ending of the 1969 special measures to help alleviate the condition of the Buraku people
- b. The current widening gap between the rich and the poor in the country
- c. The stronger tendency among the people to support state power and maintain an anti-human rights opinion
- d. The media's strong projection against the anti-discrimination movement and the Buraku people.

Persistence of Buraku discrimination

A series of scandals in 2006 surrounding the Buraku liberation movement and the administration of government programs on human rights/Dowa led to an unprecedented large-scale coverage by the mass-media of the Buraku problem. Most of the news coverages provided unreasonable generalizations that amplified the negative perceptions of the Buraku people, the Buraku liberation movement and administrative services for Dowa and human rights issues.

Recent studies by several local governments show that the Buraku people still face many problems regarding living conditions, education and employment. The

general attitude of the public towards Buraku people has become more negative. There are malicious discriminatory incidents that continue to occur, such as:

- discovery of new Buraku List¹ versions, including an electronic version
- propaganda and incitement to Buraku discrimination on the Internet (several perpetrators have been convicted of defamation in Aichi and Hyogo prefectures)
- cases of avoidance of the Buraku communities in the purchase of property and reorganization of school districts.

There is a shortsighted opinion that increasing inter-marriage between Buraku and non-Buraku people in recent years aided the resolution of Buraku discrimination. What is missing in this opinion is the fact that behind this trend are many cases of engagements being cancelled and married couples facing strong opposition or rejection from relatives of non-Buraku spouses, for example through refusal to attend the wedding ceremonies. Furthermore, some couples have been prevented from associating with the relatives of non-Buraku spouses for many years even after having children.

There is also a problematic view that Buraku discrimination is being resolved with the move of non-Buraku people into public housing facilities in recent years (due to cheaper rent)² while some Buraku people with relatively stable income leave these facilities. This view fails to consider the fact that there is no assurance that those people who leave the Buraku community will not be subjected to Buraku discrimination. Private investigative agencies can be hired to check the personal backgrounds of people by illegally accessing the family registers to uncover whether or not they originate from a Buraku area. Also, some of those who have moved into Buraku communities move out when they discover that they are in a Buraku community. There is also the fear that, with the aging of the Buraku population, Buraku communities may attract increasing number of people with financial difficulties, causing further discriminatory attitudes towards Buraku residents from neighboring communities.

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Discrimination against designated places

A survey conducted by the Osaka prefectural government of residents of the prefecture on their human rights awareness and attitudes reveals that more than 90% are aware of the Buraku problem. To the question regarding how people in general identify a person as Buraku, most respondents answered, "If a person lives in a Buraku area," "his/her relatives live in a Buraku area," or "his/her family record is registered in a Buraku area." These answers indicate that Buraku discrimination today takes the form of discrimination against designated places or districts that affect both the current residents and those with Buraku backgrounds who have transferred elsewhere. This explains the continuing illegal acquisition of family registers to check people's personal background.

Resolving the Buraku problem

The ways to resolve the Buraku problem are generally divided into two methods.

One method is to make the Buraku districts physically disappear and does away with teachings about the Buraku problem. The other method allows the Buraku districts to continue to exist and eliminates the discrimination against Buraku people (even if they openly identify themselves as having Buraku origin).

These methods parallel those prescribed to eliminate discrimination against people with disabilities. In the first method, discrimination against people with disabilities can be resolved by getting rid of the disabilities themselves. This requires monitoring fetuses to detect disorders and subsequently aborting those found with disorders.

The second method does not aim at freeing people from disabilities, but at changing discriminatory attitudes against disabilities. It aims at removing all barriers in education, employment and daily living that restrict people with disabilities.

The first method aims to resolve the Buraku problem by stopping the Buraku liberation movement, dispersing Buraku districts, and imposing silence about the problem. However, the genuine solution to the Buraku problem rests with the second method, i.e., creating a society where nobody faces discrimination due to their Buraku origin even if Buraku areas still exist and people openly identify themselves as having Buraku origin. Indeed, this is the position taken by the

Declaration of the Levelers' Association in 1922.³

The first method conflicts with a number of factors:

- a) Historical facts can never be erased, such as people who were called *eta* (extreme filth) and *hinin* (non-human) existed during the pre-modern period, the National Levelers' Association was founded and their Declaration was adopted in March 1922, the Cabinet Dowa Measures Council made its report in August 1965 and the Law on Special Measures for Dowa Projects was enacted in July 1969, followed by various projects taken under the law.
- b) Although residents in a community change, the Buraku districts themselves do not disappear.
- c) The Japanese traditions of returning home during the New Year holiday and visiting ancestors' graves during the *bon* festival are still strongly followed. Thus people's own communities have to continue existing.

The individual's decision on this issue must be respected. Therefore, a person's commitment to his/her Buraku identity must be respected, just as a person's decision not to identify with his/her Buraku origin must also be respected.

Requirements for future efforts towards the solution of the Buraku problem:

Based on the provisions of the International Covenant on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), there are five requirements for the future efforts to resolve the Buraku problem.

1) Prohibition of discrimination by law

Discrimination is a cruel and antisocial action that can drive people to commit suicide. Marriage discrimination in particular has led to the suicide of many young Buraku people. Many people have also suffered mentally. Buraku discrimination must therefore be prohibited by law, as there is currently no law prohibiting discriminatory behavior and acts against the Buraku, Japan must urgently ban discrimination by law with reference to ICERD and related laws of other states.

2) Effective compensation for victims of discrimination

Discrimination causes significant damage to those subjected to it. Compensation to the victims of discrimination is therefore required. While the court is

the ultimate institution that can award such compensation, resorting to any court process requires money and a long period of waiting for the judgment. Also, those who file complaints in court suffer again as they testify on the damage they suffered as a result of discrimination. These factors mean that many people would not go to court to seek redress, and instead bear the discrimination in silence. An independent and expert human rights commission is therefore required to allow victims of discrimination to seek compensation through means other than court proceedings. Japan does not have such an institution. A law prescribing compensation for damages caused by human rights violations and creating a human rights commission is urgently needed.

3) Improvement of the poor living conditions through special measures

Buraku areas traditionally suffered from very poor conditions that affected their capacity to get employment - very few jobs were offered and were not regular jobs. Due to poverty, many people found it difficult to give their children the basic education (primary and junior secondary education) they needed. This was the result of discrimination against the Buraku people that was not resolved under the then ordinary or general measures of the government. This situation was the reason for the implementation of a series of special measures under the special measures law of 1969. These special measures were necessary to eliminate discrimination. However, the special measures were not limitless, and the law lapsed as soon as its objectives were achieved. The special measures for the Buraku areas ended in March 2002. Subsequent improvement of the actual conditions of discrimination should be made under the general measures of the government.

4) Elimination of discriminatory ideas through education

Discriminatory ideas do not disappear by themselves. Such ideas are transmitted from person to person as part of people's daily routine. Because of this, efforts are required to wipe out such ideas through education and awareness-raising. These efforts should take advantage of the United Nations World Programme for Human Rights Education (launched in January 2005) at the international level, and the 2000 Japanese Law Concerning the Promotion of Human Rights Education and Awareness-Raising. Human rights education and awareness-raising must be promoted in

Japan.

5) Harmonious living with mutual respect for identity

Apartheid, which once existed in South Africa, was an overt form of discrimination. The assimilation policies that pre-war Japan imposed on the Korean population during its colonial rule (for example, the enforced use of Japanese language and visits to Shinto shrines) also constituted clear discrimination. In efforts to eliminate discrimination, each group must respect other groups' identities (such as their history and culture) and live in harmony and solidarity. To this end, initiatives for community building involving Buraku districts and neighboring communities are essential for the full realization of the human rights of all people.

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Endnotes

*This is a shorter and edited version of the article entitled "How We Perceive Present-Day Discrimination in Japan" that appeared in the *Buraku Liberation News*, 3rd quarter 2007, no. 145, pages 3-6.

1. The Buraku Lists refer to lists of Buraku communities and their residents, which were used by private companies in checking the personal background of job applicants. The purpose of the lists was to help the private companies avoid hiring Buraku people.

2. The expiration of the Dowa Special Measures Law in 2002 led to the adoption of public housing regulations that only those with low income can occupy public apartments. The new system requires rent for the apartment to be determined according to household income.

3. This is the *Suiheisha Declaration* of 1922, visit http://blhrri.org/blhrri_e/blhrri/ebooks001.htm for the full text of the declaration.

Japan and Sexual Minorities

*Sam Shoushi**

Hikage (meaning shadow) is one of the words used in describing the situation of sexual minorities¹ in Japan. Compared to other countries, Japan is more accepting of its sexual minorities. Nevertheless, they face many issues that remain in the *hikage*, largely ignored by the mainstream society and even by the sexual minorities themselves.

Sexual minorities in Japan

A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community exists, and continues to grow, in Japan. "Gay Areas" are found in various parts of the country with *Shinjuku ni-chome* in Tokyo, and *Doyama* in Osaka as the most well known. "Gay Groups" such as the Japan Association for the Lesbian and Gay Movement (popularly known as Occur) and MASH (Men And Sexual Health), an HIV information center with a community space called *dista*, exist along with other groups that support sexual minorities. Members of the sexual minorities and other individuals who do not necessarily belong to the community support Pride Parades, Film Festivals and other events held every now and then.

Interviews with members of the community and people who visit the areas and join the events reveal the absence of serious issues facing sexual minorities in Japan.² Several people who were interviewed said that they were more or less satisfied with their lives at the moment and that there were "no major difficulties in being gay in Japan."

Japanese culture and the major religions in Japan do not have a history of hostility towards LGBT people. Japan is not usually described as "homophobic" (or anti-gay/homosexual).³ "Pre-modern" Japan (till mid-19th century) has a history of tolerance towards same-sex sexual conduct and relationships (mainly between males).⁴

The political and social reform of the Meiji period (1868-1912) started the prejudice and discrimination against LGBT people. Thoughts and structures introduced, encouraged, and standardized through modernization made the male-female (heterosexual) model for families and relationships a norm in Japanese society.⁵

Origin of LGBT Discrimination in Japan

Futsuu in Japanese means normal. And a *futsuu* lifestyle usually means that one settles down by getting married and having children. In general, sexual minorities do not (and often cannot) follow this lifestyle; they often do not have heterosexual relationships, they are not privileged with the right to marry their same-sex partner, and most couples do not have children. Not belonging to the *futsuu* (normal) lifestyle makes one *futsuu-yanai* (abnormal) - a word usually used by the mainstream Japanese society to describe sexual minorities. Other expressions such as *okama* (literally means pot, but used as derogative word for male homosexuals), *kimochiwarui* (uncomfortable/disgusting), and *seidouitsuseishougai* (an official medical and legal term for Gender Identity Disorder but considered controversial when used in some situations, particularly when generalizing all LGBT members) are also used in society when referring to sexual minorities.⁶

Some LGBT people choose to live the "normal" lifestyle but eventually find themselves living two "lifestyles" at the same time. Actually, it is said that a lot of LGBT people in Japan are "heterosexually" married but secretly, some openly, go to "Gay Areas" or have same-sex partners outside their marriage. This rigid social system creates a problem because it can force people to live double lifestyles; the normal lifestyle expected by society, and the homosexual one, usually kept discreet in the *hikage* to avoid discrimination from society.

The Japanese government notes the problem posed by the concept of *futsuu* when it states that

Since homosexual and bisexual people are of a minority there is a tendency for them not to be considered normal and they may even be forced out of their workplaces. Although discrimination based on such sexual preferences is acknowledged as unjust these days, prejudice and discrimination have still been taking place, and, therefore, it is necessary to carry out human rights promotion activities to protect the rights of homosexuals and bisexuals.⁷

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Discrimination against LGBT People

A person identified as abnormal in society is usually discriminated against. The portrayal of LGBT people in Japan as abnormal is perpetuated through the ignorant and derogatory comments used in the mainstream Japanese society and reinforced by the mainstream Japanese media. Different Japanese television programs and shows present, or rather misrepresent, sexual minorities. Most of these representations are limited to cross-dressers who are shown for the irony and the laughs. Although efforts to diversify LGBT representation in the Japanese media exist, many of the characters being showcased still misrepresent and offend many members of the sexual minorities community.⁸

Discrimination at school and work are also present in Japan. Although people interviewed for this article are not the main victims of such discrimination, there are anecdotes of LGBT people being bullied at school or experiencing tension at work. Moreover, many LGBT people, including the ones interviewed, are not "out" at their school or workplace; some are afraid of discrimination, and others are simply unwilling to bring aspects of their personal lives to such environments. This decision to "stay inside the closet" or decide not to reveal sexual identity reflects the common experience among minorities in Japan who have the possibility of "passing off" as "mainstream Japanese", such as the Korean residents and members of Buraku communities, in order to live as members of the majority.

Accommodation is another issue for sexual minorities in Japan. Although there are no discriminatory policies toward LGBT people seeking accommodation, individual landlords might discriminate against them. A famous example is the Fuchuu Youth Hostel case in 1997. The Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education, which manages the hostel, argued that it was against their policy to allow LGBT groups to use the facility. Occur, the gay and lesbian group, sued the Board and won the case.⁹ Since then, this example has been used to signify change in discriminatory attitude towards LGBT people seeking accommodation. But this changed attitude has yet to spread in the different parts of the Japanese society.

Inheritance is another issue mainly concerning same-sex couples. Since same-sex marriages are not permitted in Japan, homosexual couples are deprived of legal rights and protection provided to their hetero-

sexual counterparts. Some members of the LGBT community have dealt with this issue through the adult adoption system that permits an older person to adopt a younger one who is over twenty years old. Although this method grants inheritance rights to the couples, this option nevertheless implies a form of discrimination against sexual minorities in Japanese society.

Issues inside the LGBT community

Several issues arise from within the LGBT community itself. This occurs when people attempt to define the community. Who represents the sexual minority community and who does not? What are the community's rights and obligations? What should or shouldn't it be active in, etc. In between asking the questions and answering them, voices of some groups and individuals are lost. Another *hikage* veils people within the sexual minority in Japan who are ignored and marginalized in their own community.

Those who express satisfaction in living their life as LGBT have the means to do so. Socially, they are able to break through the heterosexual social structure and enjoy their life as LGBT. They have access to places where most of the members of the community gather and hold their activities. They also have the financial means to meet the groups, participate in the events and activities, and obtain relevant information. This situation does not cover those who have less economic means and social connections to enjoy life as LGBT, and whose plight is ignored whenever the more visible members of the community express the view that there are no difficulties in being gay in Japan.

Most of the gay-oriented areas, groups, and activities in Japan cater to the male members of the community. This situation marginalizes the women members of the community, especially since they are generally economically disadvantaged compared to their male counterparts. Worse, while men's groups often receive funding from the government for HIV research and sexual health services, women sexual minorities are disqualified from receiving such subsidies and financial aid because they are not considered the main victims in this matter.¹⁰

Bisexuals and Transgenders constitute other groups that are ignored in the discussions about sexual minorities. While the growing gay rights movement in Japan has been a driving force in promoting sexual minority rights and awareness, it is often criticized for

excluding bisexuals and transgenders. The "Tokyo Lesbian and Gay Parade" title was criticized for ignoring sexual minorities who are neither lesbian nor gay. Thus it was changed in 2007 to "Tokyo Pride Parade."¹¹ The use of binary categories also excludes those who do not belong to any of the categories. Thus the change of the "male or female" category into "homosexual or heterosexual," "gay or lesbian" marginalizes and ignores sexual minorities who do not belong to these categories.

The activists for sexual minority rights are a minority inside the minority. Not all LGBT people fully appreciate the efforts of the activists. In fact, most of the objections to sexual minority rights activism come from within the LGBT community. This happened when members of the sexual minority community objected to holding the Kansai Rainbow Parade in Osaka.¹² Many consider LGBT activism, which presents the community and its issues to the public, as aggressive and unappealing. Moreover, many in the community, especially people who feel comfortable with being a sexual minority in Japan, believe that the efforts of activists are not only unnecessary, but also harmful, causing more discrimination against, and segregation of, the community.

LGBT issues as national concern

Legal provisions on non-discrimination (from the Constitution, to national laws and local ordinances) in Japan do not yet explicitly cover sexual orientation issues. On the other hand, the court (at least in one case)¹³ and the government, on the other hand, recognize the right against discrimination of people with a certain sexual orientation.¹⁴

Measures of the Japanese government regarding education against discrimination (which include education on sexual minority issues¹⁵) have hardly been seriously implemented. And the conservative perspective within the Japanese educational system prevents discussion of the rights of sexual minorities.¹⁶

Moreover, there are several issues such as sexism, heterosexism, and the gender binary system that have rarely been dealt with by the government. These issues affect not only sexual minorities, but also people (especially women) who live "alternative" lifestyles (such as opting to live together without getting married or opting not to have children). The issues faced by the LGBT people in Japan should not only concern members of the sexual minority and

those who have "alternative lifestyles," but of the Japanese society as a whole.

For further information, please contact HURIGHTS OSAKA.

Endnotes

1. In this article, 'sexual minorities' encompass Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) people.
2. On 25 March 2008, the author interviewed sixteen people, eight of whom consider themselves as members of the LGBT community.
3. Interview with Hibino Makoto, one of the organizers of the Kansai Queer Film Festival (website: <http://kansai-qff.org/>)
4. Dean Poland, "The Beautiful Way" in *Kansai Time Out*, February 2008, Osaka.
5. Ibid. Gay studies use the word "heteronormative" to describe a society which upholds the belief that there are only two sexes - male and female, and that a certain set of behaviors and expectations follow from one's sex. See Derek Leschas, *Heteronormativity*, in <http://io.uwinipeg.ca/~taylor/Heteronormativity.htm>
6. Refer to note 2.
7. See Ministry of Justice, Human Rights Bureau in www.moj.go.jp/ENGLISH/HB/hb-03.html#3-13
8. Mark McLelland, "Male Homosexuality and Popular Culture in Modern Japan", *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context Issue 12*, January 2006.
9. Interview with Shingo Iizuka, Occur staff member. (www.occu.or.jp/)
10. Mark McLelland, *Queer Japan from the Pacific War to the Internet Age*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, New York, 2005.
11. See <http://parade.tokyo-pride.org/6th/english/>
12. Interview with Akeyoshi, one of the organizers of the Kansai Rainbow Parade (www.kansaiparade.org/)
13. See Hiroyuki Tanaguchi, "The Legal Situation Facing Sexual Minorities in Japan", *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context Issue 12*, January 2006 in <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue12/taniguchi.html>
14. See note 7. Japan's *White Paper for Human Rights Education and Awareness Raising* (2007) mentions educational measures regarding sexuality and sexual minority.
15. See the 2002 *Basic Plan for Human Rights Education and Awareness Raising* of the Japanese government, and reported by the Ministry of Justice in its annual white paper on human rights education (note 14).
16. Interview with Kagida Izumi ("Bubu"), a staff member of *dista* community space (www.dista.be/)

The Everyday Life of Muslims in Japan

*Yeseul Christeena Song**

Muslims in Japan have widely retained their sense of religious and cultural identity and have generally been established as members of Japanese society; however, the Japanese public must continue to accept these religious and cultural differences in order to maintain a functional society in which the rights of all people are protected.

Muslims in Japan

There are an estimated 70,000 Muslims in Japan, out of which 90% are male resident foreigners coming mainly from Indonesia, Pakistan, Iran and Bangladesh, and 10% are Japanese.

Many of the Japanese Muslims are women who converted to Islam through their marriage to Muslim men.¹ Muslims in Japan often encounter the problem of finding *halal* food products that are permissible according to Islamic law. These products usually exclude pork, alcoholic beverages, and also refer to the method used in animal meat preparation. Women, both foreign Muslims and Japanese Muslims, also face the issue of wearing the *hijab*, a cloth cover that covers different amounts and areas of the woman depending on individual interpretation, teachings, cultural backgrounds, etc.² Though there have been several instances of harassment towards Muslims in Japan,³ it appears that these incidents are gradually decreasing through time.

Mosques and the Media

As mosques are the only places that are exclusively for Muslims, mosques in Japan play a vital, multi-purposed role. A hundred years ago, there were only two mosques in Japan, now there are around forty. As both land and construction is expensive in Japan, many office and residential buildings are converted into mosques, usually with a separate place reserved for women and children.⁴ Mosques are used not only for congressional prayers, but also for social gatherings.

During Ramadan, the month of fasting, many Muslims come to the mosques in order to celebrate with their fellow Muslims. Mosques are also used to hold Islamic study sessions and weddings, with space for offices and places for relaxation. Mosques are places where Muslims can gather, worship, and socialize, though not all Muslims go to mosques. Other than information distributed by mosques and Muslim Associations,⁵ the majority of information on the Islamic world the Japanese public receives is through the mass media. After the September 11th tragedy, which killed twenty-four Japanese citizens, the relatively indifferent Japanese perception on Islam has become tinged with fear.⁶ More than ever before, it is imperative to separate the media's cloudy political influence from real experiences of the human heart.

Going Mainstream

Muslims in Japanese society face no particular maltreatment, as all foreigners in Japan must deal with similar forms of discrimination. As it is with many societies, those who adapt to a new society's way of life are far more likely to be accepted. Japan is no exception; most Japanese people do not have a particular discriminating attitude towards Muslims. However, those who openly bring their religion to not only the public, but also their work place, may be faced with cultural barriers. Though these incidents are rare, they still present a problem for practicing Muslims. Especially in the work place, devout Muslims who pray five times a day for ten-minute intervals will find it difficult to fit into a culture in which constant hard work is expected and highly valued.⁷ Though this may be a source of discomfort for some, many Muslims have found ways to compromise by making up prayers after work that may have been missed during work hours. Liza, an Indonesian Muslim studying at Kyoto University, says that many

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practicing Muslims can "collect" prayers that have been missed during certain parts of the day or night. In this way, many Muslims have managed to adhere to both Japanese and Muslim lifestyles.

Many Japanese Muslim converts may find it difficult to conform to strong cultural expectations while simultaneously fulfilling their religious duties and rules. The Islamic faith prohibits the consumption of alcohol and pork which conflicts with behavioral expectation at Japanese welcoming parties or end of the year festivals. Many Muslims state that when given an explanation, their colleagues politely accept this refusal of alcohol.⁸ However, there are wide ranges of individual experiences regarding religious rules; some Muslims have met with understanding, others have met with criticism. The Japanese public must accept these differences in order to create an understanding society which functions with little friction between diverse groups. Generally, it appears that these problems are becoming less severe and may eventually be obliterated all together. Ali, a college student at Tenri University, has met with largely positive responses regarding his religious duties. His friends at Tenri University respect his reasons for refusing alcohol and even point out certain Japanese foods that are *halal* so that Ali may know which foods are safe.

Adapting Inside and Out

Though Islam is not the predominate faith in Japan, there are many restaurants, grocers, food servers, and catering services which serve both imported and local *halal* food. There are several websites that list the location, contact information, and the owners of specific areas where Muslims may find *halal* food suppliers. Through this growing availability of *halal* food, Japanese society is showing an adaptation to Islamic laws and what society has not yet managed to provide, individuals have made their own adaptations. Khalida, a Japanese woman who married a Muslim and converted to Islam, personally feels that there are no problems within her new lifestyle, finding it easy and enjoyable. Khalida packs a *halal obento* for her children, as public schools do not yet provide *halal*

lunches. In the near future, it is probable that Japanese schools will begin to see the need to adjust to this growing demand for religiously acceptable food and eventually supply this demand. It is important to understand that many Muslims are flexible; Ali feels that it is acceptable to buy meat from local supermarkets, as there are a limited amount of *halal* shops and none in his area. Ali says his own blessing for his food and by doing so, still adheres to his religious beliefs. Muslims who live in convenient locations can purchase food from *halal* shops and Muslim Associations scattered around Japan that also supply *halal* food. The degree of adaptation differs for each individual. Liza wears her *hijab* wherever she goes, even at the hotel where she used to work, and has met with very few unfriendly encounters. Other Muslim women prefer to wear their *hijab* only during prayers at their respective mosques; these differences in adaptation and interpretation are what make Islam a diverse, accepting, and accommodating faith.

Obstacles in Daily Life

It is difficult to surmise experiences of the entire "Muslim Community" in Japan, as there are several ethnic groups, nationalities, religious divisions, sects, languages, and economic backgrounds, among others within this community, with no major, leading group.⁹ However, throughout the diverse range of community characteristics, there are issues and barriers that many Muslims have encountered and may continue to face in the future. The direction and implication of Japan's treatment of foreigners rests in the hands of today's students, parents, workers, and all those who consider themselves a part of the fabric of Japanese society.

Imam Mohsen Shaker Bayoumy who came to Japan after studying at Al-Azhar University in Cairo in order to be the Imam of the Kobe Muslim Mosque, pointed out the severe issue of graveyards. Japan has two Muslim graveyards, one in Kobe and one in Tokyo. The Tokyo graveyard is a private graveyard, belonging to the Japanese Muslim Association. The graveyard in Kobe was given to Muslims by the government under the agreement that only Muslims from Kobe may be buried there. As the population grows

and becomes older, burial is becoming a greater issue, as Islamic law decrees that Muslims must be buried in a certain way, which is vastly different from the traditional Japanese burial. Other than the problem of burial, the Imam feels that there are few problems living in Japan as a foreign Muslim and encourages Muslims not to isolate themselves from society in an effort to integrate themselves into whatever culture they find themselves in. The Imam feels that it is important for Muslims to become strong members of the community so that they may feel less lonely in a country where they are the minority.

Other Muslims in Japan face far more direct problems; Iman, a woman of impeccable grace and dignity, says that anyone can be a Muslim anywhere, in any society; however, she has met with difficulties in the work place. As a devout Muslim, Iman wears her *hijab* everywhere. Though she has every right to wear her *hijab*, it has caused her difficulty in finding a job; there have been situations where she found a satisfactory occupation, but was not hired merely because of her *hijab*. However, Iman's troubles at work have not deterred her from her faith. Iman explains that many Japanese women who have Muslim boyfriends, fiancés, or husbands come to the Kobe Muslim Mosque in order to receive advice and guidance. Iman is a pillar for these women, giving them advice on how to have a fulfilling relationship or supporting them through their problems and troubled times. Members of any community are welcome at Kobe Muslim Mosque; those who feel that they can no longer face their difficulties alone may come to the mosque in order to receive support, aid, and strength. Iman cherishes a hope that one day, her fellow Muslim sisters will be able to choose to wear their *hijab* to work without fear of rejection or judgment. Wearing the *hijab* is not so much considered a religious duty, but rather a personal choice, an aspect of freedom, and a right as a human being.

Conclusion

Though there are few Muslims in Japan, today's Japanese public has generally accepted them as members of Japanese society. For the most part, Japanese

people have accepted their cultural differences as colorful aspects of the world and have understood that these cultures are actually not very different from their own. Mothers such as Khan, a Japanese woman who married a Muslim, lived in Pakistan for several years, and has three children, are not very different from the other Japanese mothers. Khan is very fashionable, with her flowery pink and white *hijab* and long, dangly earrings; people who have met Khan enjoy her energetic company and embrace the life that she has chosen. It is this understanding, this openness, and this innate compassion that is essential in fighting for the rights of all people and the preservation of human dignity.

For further information, please contact HURIGHTS OSAKA.

Endnotes

1. Sakurai, Keiko, "Muslims in Contemporary Japan" in *Asia Policy*, 5, 2008, 69-87.
2. Hopfe, Lewis M. and Woodward, Mark R., *Religions of the World*, 10th edition (Prentice Hall PTR: 2006).
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Human Rights Education in Northeast Asia: Challenges and Possibilities

Anti-discrimination education in Japan, civic education in Mongolia and Hong Kong, law-related education in Taiwan, and the recent human rights education program in South Korea comprise the major features of the Northeast Asian experiences in human rights education in the school system.¹ However, a number of factors, provide a mixed picture of the situation. Educational policies in Japan, Mongolia and Taiwan provide support to human rights education, but a proposed law on human rights education did not pass the legislature in South Korea, while a working group on human rights education in Hong Kong was disbanded. The mere existence of educational policy supporting human rights education does not ensure proper teaching of human rights where there are problems in definition of human rights and/or human rights education, or where the government does not have the political will to implement the policy.

A review of the situation in Northeast Asia revealed a number of challenges, opportunities and measures to support the development of human rights education in the subregion's school systems.

Challenges

The full development of human rights education in Northeast Asian schools is affected by a number of issues. At the macro-level, the following are some of the major issues:

a. Globalization and localization

The current wave of globalization raises the problem of the loss of national (or local) identity while at the same time paving the way for multiple identities (particularly identities of nationals who were born and raised in other countries, and non-nationals who reside

in the different countries in the subregion). Concern for the negative effects of globalization (such as the pervasive influence of modern lifestyle among the youth which seemingly aims at promoting individualism, selfishness and crass materialism) prevents the appreciation of ideas (such as human rights) that are part of the global discourse.

b. Fear of human rights as a Western imperial idea

Human Rights is still seen as an European and Northern American idea, which promote imperialist domination of the peoples in the subregion. This relates to the idea that "Asian values" differ from those in Europe and America, and human rights are mainly European and American values (that is, human rights are seen as conflicting with traditional values such as Confucianism).

c. Managing change among powerholders

Since human rights relate to powerholders in society, particularly those in the government, there is resistance to make the powerholders accountable for human rights violations as well as to change systems towards respect for human rights.

d. Lack of resources to support human rights education

There remains the challenge of providing educators in the subregion appropriate teaching materials, textbooks, standards for human rights education, and funds. This situation indicates the poor implementation of human rights education policies of the governments.

e. Problematic policies on human rights education

Existing educational policies tend to support a "weak" version of human rights education. The policies interpret human rights education as part of such "educations" as moral education, values education and life education, resulting in the loss of focus on international human rights standards.

e. Unclear differentiation between morality and human rights

There is a certain degree of confusion about the concept of human rights among people in the government (particularly in the Ministry of Education) and in the schools. They equate human rights with morality.

At the micro level, human rights education faces the major challenge of the indifference of students, parents, and teachers, or people in general.

Students fail to appreciate human rights in relation to their daily life, and are more concerned with the competitive nature of the education systems in the subregion. Teachers resist human rights education due to lack of knowledge and training of human rights, and also due to the lack of appreciation of the value of changing power relations inside the classroom. Some people resist the idea of equality and regard human rights as benefiting only the minorities such as sexual minorities, criminals, etc.

f. Human rights are often depoliticized such that only social, economic, and cultural rights are addressed while civil and political rights are neglected.

Opportunities

On the other hand, there are opportunities for an appropriate development of human rights education in the Northeast Asian school systems.

Parallel to the lingering view that human rights are Western ideas, there is a noticeable increase in the

awareness of people about their human rights. This human rights awareness can be tapped to provide better support for human rights education.

There are initiatives to reinterpret traditional ideas and values to explore how traditional values overlap with human rights values. The traditional Chinese thinking of "respecting the teachers, respecting ideas," for example, can be used to examine ideas that do not seem "traditional" and find out how they relate to the current situation or to understand how they differ from "traditional" ideas. This reinterpretation of a traditional thinking supports the teaching and learning of the idea of human rights.

There are human rights education initiatives that use different approaches, such as the collaboration between schools and civil society, or the use of resources within the local community to teach human rights.

There are institutions in society that support human rights education, such as national human rights institutions, non-governmental organizations, teacher training institutes, and government agencies that help develop human rights education initiatives or improve existing ones.

Feasible responses to the challenges and opportunities

In response to some of the challenges and opportunities in Northeast Asia on human rights education, several ideas were raised that reflect the current initiatives in the subregion:

1. On globalization:

- Promote the idea that globalization and localization enrich each other, that there is a need to respect/appreciate/celebrate different identities within an embracing global identity as human beings with undeniable human dignity and human rights

- Use globalization in a positive sense through the use of modern technology to understand the situation and people in other countries in the subregion
- Promote globalization as a positive influence in people, adding new and useful ideas to what they already have in a mutually enriching process.

2. On conflict between human rights and other values including traditional ideas/values:

- Dialogue with postmodernists to review their stance against international principles
- Promote an interdisciplinary perspective on human rights
- Root human rights in local thinking and cultures to counter the perception that human rights are merely Western ideas.

3. On competitive education, redefine the idea of education based on human rights principles. Education as defined in human rights instruments is meant to facilitate the full development of human potentials and learn respect for human rights. In this sense, education cannot be limited to obtaining high marks in order to pass examinations for higher levels of education at the expense of developing other potentials of the students and engaging them in other pursuits (such as participating in community activities that promote human rights).

4. On educational policies, study the "weak versions" of human rights education in educational policies to identify their strengths and weaknesses. For good educational policies, create a system to monitor their implementation. In case there is no educational policy on human rights education, seek government support for its adoption.

5. On teachers' role in human rights education:

- Develop materials that are useful for teachers and crucial in making them teach human rights
- Raise teachers' issues in addition to other human rights issues in schools

- Motivate teachers.

6. On relationship between schools and the authorities in society:

- Disseminate challenging experiences that deal with issues such as power/authority
- Promote the use of issue-based approach - using experiences of resolving real problems in schools by finding a balance between rights and power.



In relation to different players in society:

- Non-governmental organizations - promote the continuation of their programs on teacher training for human rights education
- Teachers groups/unions - support their effort to promote human rights education, make them become aware of the idea that the school is part of civil society, enhance their participation in the initiatives of the civil society on upholding human rights
- Business community - in getting its support for human rights education, promote corporate social responsibility under the Global Compact scheme of the United Nations, use the 3Ps (planet, people, profit) framework as an entry point for promoting human rights, and promote existing fair trade systems.

Possible steps

As possible steps to promote human rights education in Northeast Asia, the following are suggested:

- Introduce good national human rights education

frameworks to counter the "weak versions" of human rights education in educational policies

- Collect human rights education examples (experiences) and analyze them in terms of strengths and weaknesses to be able to develop

* reference standards

* examples of adaptation of materials produced in other countries/regions

* human rights syllabus for each (compulsory) subject in the school curriculum (using integration approach)

- Promote the use of the United Nations' World Programme for Human Rights Education (WPHRE) first phase plan of action as an over-all framework in analyzing the current national/local human rights education initiatives

- Create a mailing list to continue the exchange of information among educators engaged in human rights education; provide internet-based interaction among students

- Provide avenues to demonstrate good human rights education experiences by students

- Support evaluation study on impact of human rights education programs on both students and teachers

- Develop a network that collects/puts together materials and other information on human rights education programs to facilitate exchange/collaboration among countries

- Organize training activity(s) for the subregion on particular area(s) of human rights education

- Showcase a few good (such as Taiwan and Mongolia) and bad human rights education experiences through subregional activities (such as country visits) to know them more in-depth

- Advocate for a human rights education policy development - subregional campaign by the institutions involved - and link with individuals who are involved in policy development

- Continue the dialogue on universal values (human rights) and particular values in order to identify core values on diversities within unities

- Seek United Nations (OHCHR, UNESCO,

UNICEF) support for activities in the subregion.

Experienced educators from South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan and Mongolia undertook the review of the situation in Northeast Asia. They met in a meeting organized by HURIGHTS OSAKA on 11-13 March 2008 in Osaka city. This meeting was a follow-up to the 2006 "Osaka Conference on Human Rights Education - Dialogue Among Asian Educators," organized under the aegis of the United Nations' World Programme for Human Rights Education. The 2006 conference brought together educators from various countries in South, Southeast and Northeast Asia, who discussed the need to support the development of human rights education through various means including the sharing of ideas and experiences within and among countries.

For further information, please contact HURIGHTS OSAKA.

Endnote

1. This Northeast Asian situation is qualified by the lack of discussion on the situation of human rights education in the school systems of the People's Republic of China as well as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. An invited participant from the People's Republic of China was not able to attend the meeting.

Prefectural Policy Change and Human Rights Work: The Case of HURIGHTS OSAKA

With a new Prefectural Governor, the policy of the Osaka prefectural government on human rights and other issues changed drastically. The newly-elected Governor Toru Hashimoto, acting on a campaign promise before the February 2008 elections, went on with the drive to slash financial support for programs and institutions that he did not consider relevant to the daily life of the people in the prefecture.¹

The beginning

The establishment of HURIGHTS OSAKA reflected the wish of a Japanese United Nations officer² who, in 1982, urged the establishment of a human rights information center based on the strength of the "people and the local governing bodies."

Both the prefectural and city governments in Osaka sponsored the establishment of HURIGHTS OSAKA, making it the third member of local-government-supported institutions - LIBERTY OSAKA (a human rights museum) and PEACE OSAKA (a peace museum) - that bear the name "OSAKA" to indicate its location. Another city in the prefecture (Sakai city) later also provided support to HURIGHTS OSAKA.

The civil society composed of human rights organizations, labor unions and religious groups that support human rights provided counterpart fund for the trust fund of HURIGHTS OSAKA. The corporate sector also contributed to the trust fund.

The financial issue

While the financial problem of the Osaka prefectural and city governments has been well-known for several years now, there was no expectation that a solution to this problem would consist of sudden withdrawal of financial support to institutions that were working on human rights and other fields (culture, education and sports).

The identification of institutions to be subjected to withdrawal of financial support came out unexpectedly and seemed to have been decided during the elections campaign period.

There was no proper process of discussing the merit of the institutions that would suffer financial problems, nor serious consideration of their existing programs and activities.

The Osaka Gender Equality Foundation (popularly known as DAWN Center³), which enjoys the support of many women's organizations in Osaka, may have to stop much of its programs with the withdrawal of financial support. Thousands of local supporters signed petition-letters asking Governor Hashimoto to spare the DAWN Center from a possible closure.

HURIGHTS OSAKA is much in the same situation. As a much smaller institution, it cannot match the number of local supporters of DAWN Center but it has nevertheless the support of many individuals and organizations in Japan and other countries.

The final decision

The final decision of the prefectural government on the fate of financial support for human rights institutions in Osaka will be made when the prefectural legislative assembly adopts the final financial plan of Governor Hashimoto within the year.

The prefectural government has already adopted a plan to reduce the annual financial support for the human rights institutions from the second half of the current fiscal year (August 2008-March 2009 period).

The future

The almost certain cessation of annual financial subsidy from the Osaka local governments provides a new chapter in the life of HURIGHTS OSAKA. The Board of Trustees of HURIGHTS OSAKA decided on 25 June 2008 to use its trust fund for the center's operations starting in April 2009, subject to its approval of a new budget plan before the start of the next fiscal year and the amendment for this purpose of HURIGHTS OSAKA charter as a foundation. In this context, HURIGHTS OSAKA faces the challenge of continuing to achieve its objectives under a new system.

Endnotes

1. For a media account of the issue see Eric Jonhston, "Hashimoto's cost-cutting plans under fire," The Japan Times in <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20080328f1.html>
2. He is the late Yo Kubota who died on a United Nations mission in Africa in 1989.
3. The Osaka Gender Equality Foundation manages the facility owned by the Dawn Center.

HURIGHTS OSAKA CALENDAR

HURIGHTS OSAKA will make available in September 2008 the printed version of its *Directory of Human Centers in the Asia-Pacific*. The directory includes the profile of more than one hundred eighty human rights centers operating in various countries in the region.



PRINTED MATTER

AIR MAIL

May be opened for inspection by the postal service.

HURIGHTS OSAKA, inspired by the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, formally opened in December 1994. It has the following goals: 1) to promote human rights in the Asia-Pacific region; 2) to convey Asia-Pacific perspectives on human rights to the international community; 3) to ensure inclusion of human rights principles in Japanese international cooperative activities; and 4) to raise human rights awareness among the people in Japan in meeting its growing internationalization. In order to achieve these goals, HURIGHTS OSAKA has activities such as Information Handling, Research and Study, Education and Training, Publications, and Consultancy Services.



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