

ZENDOKYO: Japanese Teachers Struggling Against Discrimination*

KATSUMI FUJISAKI

If all the educators in Japan got together and swore involvement in Dowa education, we would democratize Japan, and the door to solve the Dowa problem would open wide!¹

The National Dowa Educators' Association (ZENDOKYO) was established in Osaka on 6 May 1953. It celebrated its 50th year in 2003, when it held its 55th research meeting in Fukuoka, where the literacy movement in Japan started. Held during the first year of the International Decade of Literacy, the meeting was attended by more than 20,000 people. A new member, Human Rights Education Research Association of Shimane prefecture, was accepted. ZENDOKYO held a symposium and visual presentation on its history, and published a book, *ZENDOKYO, What a Good Thing!* and a memorial (500th) issue of its newsletter, *Dowa Education*.

Organizing ZENDOKYO

After World War II, some teachers in Osaka were shocked that some students were often absent from school. They had been ignored and abandoned.

The teachers started visiting the students' homes. Though suffering from poor working conditions themselves, the teachers continued their home visits to encourage the students to go back to school. They noticed that though the students wanted to go to school, harsh realities prohibited them from doing so.

Using democratic education as a framework, the teachers analyzed the discrimination against children in Buraku districts. The teachers started improving conditions by developing appropriate curriculum content, the origin of Dowa education. A sign symbolizes this: "We should not

ignore prolonged absence." The teachers organized research associations on Dowa education in Osaka, and later on in every prefecture and city in Japan. Dowa education spread to many parts of the country after ZENDOKYO was established.

A series of events led to the establishment of ZENDOKYO. A 1951 novel in the magazine, *All Romance*, which discriminated against Buraku; a 1952 discriminatory lesson given by a teacher in Yoshiwa Junior High School in Hiroshima prefecture; and discriminatory remarks made by a Diet (parliament) member from Wakayama prefecture all pointed to the important role of education in eradicating discrimination.

Pioneer educators in nine prefectures and two cities established ZENDOKYO. A brochure called on all educators to try harder to eradicate discrimination and to strengthen cooperation among themselves:

* Translated from Japanese by Shin-ichi Hayashi.

Human beings discriminate against human beings. Fundamental human rights are violated. Feudalism in Japan still exists, and so more effort should be made to fully attain our liberation. We can clearly see this reality in the Dowa issue. Solving it is the most significant task for Japanese people born after the war. We cannot achieve a democratic Japan without doing so.

We define democratic education based on the concepts of liberty, equality, and dignity of individuals. If individuals are deprived of liberty and their dignity trampled upon, advocates of democratic education should protest and struggle against these violations. This means that democratic education should naturally focus on Dowa education. Thus we call on all educators to make every effort to democratize Japan. We are firmly determined to establish the National Dowa Education Research Association. We do hope that all educators in Japan will join this association.

The day following the first general assembly of ZENDOKYO, about 400 participants joined the first research meeting in Osaka Municipal Labor Hall. The main theme was “The Present Situation of the Unliberated Buraku Districts, and Educational Tasks.” Though heated discussions ensued, the education supervisors of the Ministry of the Education said they learned much about the significance of Dowa education. In November 1953 the second research meeting was held.

For half a century, ZENDOKYO has tried to liberate Japanese society from discrimination, cultivate a scientific viewpoint and thinking, build up a system that guarantees human rights, and enrich educational content. ZENDOKYO developed a methodology that recognizes the reality of discrimination, and educational practices to eradicate it. This methodology is expressed as, “We merge reality and practice.”

Dowa education is at the center of human rights education in Japan, playing an important role in creating a human rights culture.

However, though the 21st century is called the century of human rights, human rights violations, including Buraku discrimination, have not abated in Japan, while massacres, terrorism, and wars occur in other countries. This situation may lead the Japanese people to think about arming themselves. Indeed, it is a long way to go before we realize a society where human rights are guaranteed. We should bear in mind and realize the following lessons learned through the two world wars: human rights do not exist without peace, and peace cannot be realized without human rights.

We should reaffirm the purpose for organizing ZENDOKYO. This strengthens our practice, and makes more educators help realize a society that guarantees human rights and peace.

The 55th Research Meeting

The following are some highlights of the many reports presented during this meeting.

“The History of Asunaro Liberation Class,” a special report by Sanae Nogami, highlighted the importance of the literacy movement. Nogami was a student of the Asunaro Liberation Class in the Fukuoka Conference Branch of Buraku Liberation League.² Noting the school information sheets given by teachers, she said, “[T]he school information sheet is useless even if I hand it to my parents. Neither my father nor my mother can read.” She narrated how one student told a teacher about the school information sheets being jammed into the students’ school bags. When the teachers understood the situation, they started teaching Nogami’s parents how to read and write. That was the time when no teachers were in charge of Dowa education.

Another report, “How Interesting Misaki College Is! The Literacy Movement of Misaki Branch that Supports Individual Self-Realization,” was presented by the members of Misaki branch of Tsukushi district committee of Buraku Liberation League. The report traced the history of literacy movement in Misaki, the good

results obtained, and future tasks. The report asserted that literacy is not the only purpose of the movement but also the liberation of those involved in it. Thus, the report analyzed how the literacy movement strengthened the Buraku liberation movement. Teachers began visiting all the families in the Buraku district and compiled the following concerns of the residents:

- “We worry that our daughter will marry without informing her husband of her birth place [which will indicate that she is Buraku].”
- “A driver’s license is necessary to get a job. [So I need to become literate.]”
- “I want a stable job by getting some skills.”
- “I cannot have three meals a day because my wage is too low.”
- “It was hard to notice the reality of the discrimination.”
- “I want to get some training but the school is too far and I have no money [to pay for transportation fare].”
- “We want opportunities to share our experiences with others.”

After analyzing the problems, the Literacy Class Reform Committee formed four “faculties” to respond to needs such as meeting requirements for jobs and licenses; enjoying cultural activities; promoting health; and reviewing life, personal, and town histories. These “faculties” offer courses in computers, folk dancing, health, writing personal history, and so on. The literacy classes were designed so that children, youth, adults, and the aged could learn actively. This experience is unique and should be known by other literacy movements.

The literacy movement is a way of acquiring the literacy people are deprived of because of discrimination. The reports presented how literacy movements led to the establishment of a “town that respects human rights.” People in literacy classes accomplished their tasks and took political action.

What created the literacy movement was the Buraku liberation movement. Eighty years have

passed since the people of Fukuoka and other prefectures established the All-Kyushu Levelers’ Organization, 30 years before the establishment of ZENDOKYO. Jiichiro Matsumoto, the first vice chair of the Upper House of the Diet, was the organization’s first chair and is called the father of the liberation movement. We must not forget that the literacy movement in Fukuoka had the Buraku liberation movement as its backbone.

The literacy movement continues to support the Buraku, Korean residents, people with disabilities, foreigners, and people who study at night schools.

In his message to the meeting, Bertrand Ramcharan, acting high commissioner for human rights of the United Nations, stressed that the activities of ZENDOKYO at the local and national levels contribute to the international effort to develop a society where the human rights of all are respected. We affirm that our practices correspond to the international efforts.

Dowa education centers on gradually developing writing and speaking skills and learning about human rights, including Buraku issues. Dowa education includes cultural festivals or plays about the eradication of discrimination and *ogari* (sincere appeals), and poetry reading on the experiences of Buraku people and their wish for liberation.

The cultural festivals, originally held for the residents of Buraku districts, have involved more people and become the means to strengthen human rights awareness in the school districts. Students of literacy classes actively participate in these activities. Nogami vividly presented how for 36 years the literacy class has contributed to “strengthening the human rights awareness of the citizens” and promoted solidarity with many people.

Guaranteeing academic ability, carrying out school-district projects, and promoting human rights in the community

The meeting organizers prepared activities, including exhibitions and exchanges of vari-

ous education materials, presentations on several themes, demonstration of different educational games, exchange of opinions on different issues such as child-assault prevention programs and scholarships, and “human rights evenings,” where students of Korean classes performed.

There were sessions on human rights, exhibitions on community-based projects on human rights awareness-raising and history of ZENDOKYO, and school visits where teaching human rights was demonstrated in three primary schools.

Children visiting the exhibitions were impressed by the photos, posters, and other materials on display, and by the documentaries. Parents and community residents also watched the teaching demonstrations.

The teachers evaluated their lessons by analyzing their success or failure in raising the academic ability of the discriminated-against students. The teachers aimed to help the students acquire and develop basic abilities through various materials and activities. The improved practices over a long time paid off because the students studied earnestly and enjoyed the lessons. Improving lessons as part of human rights education and guaranteeing the development of academic abilities are done in all subjects and in all fields. This is how Dowa education has been developed as human rights education.

The Dowa Education Research Association of Fukuoka prefecture understands that the academic ability of Buraku students cannot be elevated by raising anger against and awareness about discrimination alone. Thus, the association worked with the Fukuoka local government. The association saw the need to adopt policies on the following:

- raising the self-esteem of students;
- helping students learn by themselves; and
- involving the families and community members in education and strengthening cooperation between the families, the community, and the school.

The association proposed changes in the lessons and in the schools, publishing a brochure on how to bring up children, and strengthening the cooperative network in the communities (The Community Project), involving the families, the communities, and the schools in each junior high-school district.

Other participants presented reports on field studies and exhibitions on human rights. The field studies cover the following issues: coal mining in Chikuho and human rights, the liberation and labor movements in Omuta, the kidnapping and forced labor of Koreans and Chinese, and discrimination against workers who immigrated from Yoron island, Kagoshima prefecture. The human rights exhibitions were held in three halls. One exhibit held in the Fukuoka Human Rights Awareness Raising and Information Center was about the discriminatory court decision 70 years ago on a marriage case in Takamatsu and the All-Kyushu Levelers' Organization. The organization protested the court ruling, which found a Buraku man guilty of kidnapping for marrying a woman who was not informed before marriage that he came from a Buraku community. This case proved that the organization was willing to struggle against state institutions such as the court and local government to fight against discrimination. This experience provides lessons for other Buraku liberation movements.

Another 50 years and human rights education

In discussing the next tasks for human rights education, it would be good to recall the people of Yoron island at the southern end of Amami islands in Kagoshima prefecture. Yoron was returned to Japan by the United States (US) 50 years ago. Strong typhoons and drought successively struck the island in 1898, leading to widespread famine and death. Some died after eating poisonous root crops. People became so weak that some did not even have the energy to bury their dead. Survivors decided to go to Kuchinotsu, where they became coal-mine workers.

Before the end of the World War II, many of these island people migrated to Manchuria under a government program to claim the territory. But after Japan's defeat in the war, many of them were forced to commit suicide. Some went back to Japan and worked in Omuta, Fukuoka prefecture, the second time people from Yoron island migrated to Omuta. The first was in 1910, to work in Port Miike, where they suffered from hard work and poverty. They were discriminated against because of their language and culture. They were taunted and their dwellings were contemptuously called "Yoron tenements." They strongly fought against this discrimination.

Wherever they migrated, the Yoron strengthened their solidarity through cooperation, sincere and patient work, efficiency, and support of their companies. In Manchuria the Yoron endured severe cold and produced rice though many died in the process. In Tashiro they transformed primeval hill forest into tea plantations, surviving successive typhoons and droughts. The Yoron have a history they can be proud of, surviving numerous sufferings with pride and kindness. Their shared dream and mission of "building a second Yoron" was the reason for their success. This is depicted in the following proverb:

We do not mind being fooled. It is all right if we are bullied. The ears of rice stalks will be full of grains if the fields are plowed over and over again.

This proverb is based on this belief: "We would put up with discrimination based on differences of language and attitudes. We would put up with bullying. We would achieve our original goal. Work achieved through hardship is great and those who endured hardships are magnificent."

Yoron is called "the island of honesty," and its motto is "Sincerity." This is based on the teaching of Mencius: "If you cannot change the mind of your counterpart, it means your sincerity is not enough." This might as well be the

backbone of their life. Learning from the Yoron experience, sincere self-assessment is very important for Dowa education.

The story of the people in Amami and Okinawa islands should also teach us lessons. There are stories during the occupation by the US of Amami islands about poor students being deprived of school textbooks and forced to migrate to the Japanese mainland. The Okinawa islands were returned by the US 19 years after the return of Amami islands. On this 50th anniversary of the return of the Amami islands, it is important to study the tasks of human rights education related to Amami. It is also important to strengthen our cooperation with the Okinawan people through the human rights education that ZENDOKYO aims to achieve.

Follow up the achievements
and create a 21st century of human rights—
A review of the special sessions

Several lectures were delivered during the special sessions. The first session was on national human rights education policies. A representative of the Ministry of Education explained the 2002 Basic Plan for Human Rights Education and Awareness Raising, while a representative of the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare explained the activities under "Human Rights Awareness Activities to Realize Just Recruitment" to counter continuing employment discrimination. This session was the first to be co-organized with the local education board of Fukuoka.

We can further strengthen cooperation with local governments and national government agencies. Our activities are needed to realize national educational policies. We can propose new policies, get more educators involved in human rights education and enlightenment, and develop human rights culture.

The second session was a lecture by Hiroshi Nakao of Kyoto College of Formative Arts, "A Study of the Representatives of a Korean Feudal Clan—Pacifism, Equality, and Friendship."

He said that defining the Edo era (1600–1868) as the period when Japan was in “isolation” because of a national policy is wrong. Four gates were opened to other countries: Tsushima—gateway to Korea, Nagasaki—to China and Holland, Satsuma—to Ryuku (old Okinawa), and Matsumae—to the Ainu, a northern ethnic group. He said that Koreans regularly used the gateway of Tsushima-han (the feudal clan in an island in Japan Sea or East Sea of Korea). Proud of their Confucian culture, they established friendship and traded with Japanese shogunates on equal footing.

He argued that superiority complex and prejudice should be suppressed by developing proper communication and mutual recognition. There must be objective and scientific recognition and respect for our culture and of others.

There is a need to study the history of Koreans, who visited Japan in the past, and to understand the situation of Koreans living in Japan in the light of this historical background.

The third lecture, “The Oppression Against Japanese Christians and the Conflict Raised by Buraku Discrimination,” was given by Satoshi Uesugi of Kansai University. He said that a study of the relation between Buraku issue and Christianity is important, such as the study of the relation between Buraku issue and Buddhism. Buraku arrested and exiled the “hidden” Christians of Uragami in 1867, leading some Christians to fight the Buraku. This conflict was used by the ruling power to divide oppressed people. Uesugi concluded that both the church and the Buraku liberation movement should analyze and understand how Christian suppression and Buraku discrimination were intertwined historically.

Finally, the symposium “The History of ZENDOKYO and Human Rights Education in Japan” had as panelists Ryoichi Terasawa, adviser and former chair of ZENDOKYO; Eiichi Nakayama, ex-standing committee member of ZENDOKYO; and Kiyonori Konishi, incumbent chair of ZENDOKYO. The symposium coordinator was Masahiro Furukawa, ex-

chief secretary of ZENDOKYO. The speakers stressed the need to reconstruct Dowa as human rights education. Terasawa emphasized the incorporation of human rights education in all subjects and fields, best use of the integrated study subject, and use of ordinances and plans on human rights education through better planning and implementation by ZENDOKYO. Nakayama stressed the recognition of human rights issues not as other people’s issues but as our own, the improvement of scientific way of thinking and development of aesthetic sensitivity, and strengthening social education. Konishi gave some proposals on how to raise the academic ability of students, cooperate with members of the community, and develop communities that respect human rights. Symposium coordinator Furukawa ended the session by saying that he encountered problems doing Dowa education and expected more problems to come. Rather than ignore the problems, as he did in the past, he believes that as an educator he should do something to solve them and improve Dowa education. He said that in education the most important part is the educator.

Dowa education helps us acquire the truth, raises our humanity, and gives us courage. We want to realize the basic idea of Dowa education and enjoy its results. In the 21st century, we would like to build a society that respects human rights by developing human rights education based on Dowa education.

Notes

1. The Dowa problem refers to the discrimination suffered by people in Buraku areas. A Buraku area is a place traditionally known as inhabited by people who did the dirty work (garbage collection, disposal of bodies of dead animals, slaughtering animals, etc.) in feudal or earlier times. Because of this, they are considered dirty and are outcast. They still suffer from discrimination in marriage, employment, and education.

2. The Buraku Liberation League is the national organization of Buraku people fighting against Buraku discrimination. It was established in the 1920s.