



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

Japan's Forsaken People

Burakumin in contemporary society

Ritgerð til B.A.-prófs

Kristín Mist Sigurbjörnsdóttir

Janúar 2012

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Japanskt mál og menning

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Abstract

The Burakumin is a minority group in Japan that has, since ancient times, been suffering from occupational and social discrimination from the grand majority of Japanese citizens. There is nothing that visually or technically distinguishes them from the rest of the mainstream community. Trivial things like occupation or a specific location played a significant part in the discrimination against the Burakumin from pre-Nara times to modern day civilization. Occupations that dealt with death were considered contaminated and resulted with the exclusion and avoidance of the Burakumin from common villages.

This thesis asks the question whether such or similar discrimination still exists in a society that claims to be as close to homogeneous as is possible. In order to obtain such an answer, first it is necessary to dig deeper into the origin of the problem, starting at the medieval period in Japan and then steadily work our way up, to the present day Japan. The history of the prejudice will be examined from early historical background as well as the religious origins pertaining to the Buraku discrimination and will end at couple of years after the Meiji Restoration, where the government issued the Emancipation Edict in 1871.

After the introduction of the Emancipation Edict, the focus is on the numerous actions that the Burakumin took in order to free themselves from their plight, starting with their own and then ending with the government's aid when its legal actions put forth the Special Measures Law in 1969.

Insight will be given into the lives of the Burakumin in modern day Japan and the problems they have had to endure, despite the vigorous fights from the Buraku Liberation League for emancipation. It will also describe the relationship between them and the mainstream Japanese as well as briefly examine the Oyabun-Kobun system.

Numerous ideas and answers to the discriminatory problem have been expressed, both by the Buraku Liberation League as well as from local Burakumin and hence, we will look into some of the answers and possible solutions and ponder whether they can be put into action, by the Burakumin themselves, the government or the mainstream Japanese.

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1 Introduction

Before my year-long stay in Japan between 2010-2011, I had the innocent preconception that the Japanese people were not people of prejudice. The only type of prejudice that I was aware of, was the kind that Japanese tended to inadvertently direct at foreigners, which usually was the result of common curiosity and the lack of communication.

When I was visiting Kyoto in March 2011, I came across several „shacks“ or blue tents that were commonly found underneath bridges and it occurred to me that, like in every other major city in the world, here resided people who did not have enough money to properly sustain themselves. It was interesting to note that unlike certain poor people elsewhere in the world who sit on the corners of a street well populated by tourists and beg for money, these unfortunate people did not engage in such activities but were nonetheless ignored by the majority of the Japanese citizens. The notion puzzled me at the beginning but since I was a tourist myself in Kyoto, I paid it no further heed.

It was in my Japanese Society course where I discovered that some of these people that I had noticed in Kyoto were classified as „Burakumin“ and these people who had been suffering from discrimination from the mainstream Japanese since ancient times.

Upon further investigation, I learned that Buraku is short for *Tokushu Buraku* („special hamlet“), referring to the communities in which Buraku people resided. The idea of using the term „Tokushu Buraku“ was to „negatively distinguish former outcaste communities from other areas“¹. According to the Buraku Liberation League, Burakumin, who are about 3 million, or about 2 percent of the general population, are „the largest discriminated-against population in Japan. They are not a racial or a national minority, but a caste-like minority among the ethnic Japanese“. It means that there is very little, if anything, that would visually distinguish them from the rest of the Japanese society.

¹ Buraku Liberation League, *What is Discrimination?* <http://www.bll.gr.jp/eng.html>

Things like occupation or a specific location played a significant part in the discrimination against the Burakumin during ancient times. It has been argued by a number of scholars that the initial source of discrimination towards the Burakumin arose by handling corpses, slaughtering animals or practicing any kind of occupation that had to do with death or was considered unclean. That often meant that because of the uncleanliness, people of that group were not allowed to step inside the actual village and therefore had to seclude themselves several miles away. The act of killing, the notion of bleeding or even giving birth to a child were viewed as pollution by religions such as Shinto and Buddhism and any contact with a person who engaged in such acts, would pollute the community in which they resided in.

Hence the question arose if the Burakumin were so heavily prejudiced in the past, how is the situation for them in modern-day Japan. Have they been liberated from discrimination that has been going on since the medieval period, or are their descendants still suffering in a society that claims to be as close to homogeneous as is possible?

In order to obtain an answer for that question, first it is necessary to dig deeper into the origin of the problem, starting at the medieval period in Japan and then steadily work our way up, to the present day Japan. Chapter 2 will cover the historical and religious origins of the Buraku discrimination and will end at couple of years after the Meiji Restoration, when the government issued the Emancipation Edict in 1871.

In chapter 3 the focus is on the numerous actions that the Burakumin took in order to free themselves from their plight, starting with their own actions and then ending with the government's aid when its legal actions put forth the Special Measures Law in 1969.

Chapter 4 will give an insight into the lives of the Burakumin in modern day Japan and the problems they have had to endure, despite the vigorous fights on behalf of the Buraku Liberation League for emancipation. It will also describe the relationship between the Burakumin and the grand majority of the Japanese society and briefly explain the *oyabun-kobun* system within the lower class Buraku community.

Numerous ideas and answers to the discriminatory problem have been voiced, both by the Buraku Liberation League as well as from local Burakumin and in chapter 5 we

will look into some of the answers and possible solutions and ponder whether they can be put into action, by themselves, the government or the mainstream Japanese.

Then the quest for a sufficient answer begins with another question: How did a community such as the Burakumin, who are no different from the regular Japanese, end up being viewed with contempt or disgust by the majority of modern Japanese society?

2 The origin of Burakumin

As was mentioned above, there is a need to look into the deep past of Japanese history and culture in order to obtain a sufficient answer to our question. In which case, we would first have to peruse the period that is called the Nara period (710-794), for it was in Nara that the Imperial Court had settled with its various degrees of economic, military and political control into vast areas around its chiefdom.

2.1 The historical aspect – Occupations and the names that followed

During the Nara period (710-794), the *Ritsuryo* (legal codes) system² was established within the Imperial Court's territory and the controlled areas around it. Within the *Ritsuryo* system, there were slaves (who had become such because of things like crimes, conquest or debt) either owned by prestigious families of the Imperial Court or by public upper class communities and those slaves were classified into five categories, known as *goshiki no sen*³: tomb guards (*ryouko*), government cultivators (*kwankou*), temple and private servants (*kenin*), government slaves (*kunuhi*) and private slaves (*shinuhi*). Due to the regulations in the *Ritsuryo* system, the slaves were not allowed to marry normal citizens, that is the *ryoumin*, and neither was marriage allowed within the first three categories or the latter two. Amongst the slaves, a community called *bemin*⁴ were assigned the task of agriculture for the Imperial Court but in other cases, they were required to perform other forms of tasks, such as weaving, smithing, pottery, and leatherwork. According to John Price, a scholar who contributed to George De Vos' book *Japan's Invisible Race*, „All occupations tended to be hereditary for *be* communities as well as for *be* individuals“ (Price, 1972: 16). Hence it is safe to say that there were early developments of an hereditary system.

During the Heian Period (794-1185) people of the *be* communities and the slaves whose work involved slaughtering animals or any kind of work that was resulted in death became objects of discrimination due to the intense belief that occupations involving death was polluting and contagious to normal citizens. Therefore it is believed

² A structure borrowed from the Tang Dynasty in China wherein people were officially divided into 'citizens', that is *ryoumin*: good citizens and *senmin*: outcasts (Amos, 36)

³ the five kinds of outcasts

⁴ people of *be*

that they were to become the main body of outcasts in Japan at that time. Others who had been forced to leave their villages because of crimes they committed, disease, extreme poverty and the likes, were often called *kojiki-hinin*⁵ which was actually an appropriate name for them as *hinin* literally means „non-humans“ or „not people“. They were known to wander from one community to another, therefore becoming rootless. As Nagahara Keiji notes that „to be excluded from their communities, the base of all ordinary social and economic activities in medieval Japan, was to lose even the minimal social and economic privileges enjoyed by all. Therefore in a social sense, they ceased to be „persons““ (Nagahara, 1979: 389). Despite that *kojiki* means beggar, it did not necessarily mean that they begged for money in order to survive. Nagahara claims that the term *kojiki* was used for a social status at that time, meaning that they were not a part of any community, specifically social community (Nagahara, 1979: 389-90). Furthermore there is evidence that some beggars were known to have had a steady income by doing various jobs. For example in *Konjaku Monogatari*⁶, a son of a noble falls in love with a common girl and when he goes to visit the house she frequents, he discovers that the one holding the girl captive is a beggar but a beggar who lives in a big house (Nagahara, 1979: 389). From that excerpt, it is safe to assume that some *kojiki* were well-off.

Another group of outcasts that the normal citizens of Japan discriminated against were the *ransou-tosha*. According to Nagahara's take on *Chiribukuro*⁷ that is said to have been written in the late Kamakura Period, the *ransou-tosha* were considered beggar-monks but „their conduct is so wicked that no one can believe that they are indeed monks (Nagahara, 1979: 390), which is why they were deemed as *ransou*⁸. *Tosha* literally means „those who kill“, which conveys the fact that they were people who were active in killing animals and skinning them. In accordance to the whole pollution of death, the *ransou-tosha* were avoided by the commoners and in result, were usually forced to live near or in dry river beds.

⁵ *Kojiki* means beggars and *hinin* means social outcasts

⁶ Translated as „Anthology of Tales from the Past“. A Japanese collection written during the late Heian Period (794-1185).

⁷ a 11-scroll book about the origins of things

⁸ literally translated as uncontrolled or unruly monks

Due to many outcasts being forced out of their communities because the commoners thought they were contagious with the pollution of death, as the preceding paragraph points out, most had no choice but to live on dry river beds. With that, they came to be known as *kawaranin*⁹. Just like the *ransou-tosha*, they specialized in animal slaughter and skinning them but one can speculate that they might not necessarily have been monks.

By looking at these three types of outcasts, it is clear that the majority of the common Japanese shunned them out of fear of becoming polluted just like them. However there are examples of other occupations that had nothing to do with death that the majority considered as belonging to a very low status and therefore subject to discrimination. Price points out that one segment of the *be* communities, called the *kakibe*, was not under the control of the Imperial Court but was however divided into two categories and „one of these segments was engaged in ‚degrading occupations‘ such as tomb watching and caring for birds“ (Price, 1972: 19). The nobles enjoyed the sport of falconry and a group of people called *etori* were assigned to take care of the birds and gather food for them, which may have involved slaughtering small animals. Other occupations such as artisans, beggars and various performers were looked down upon for numerous reasons: people despised their wandering nature of never settling down in one place. They were exempt from having to pay taxes to the nobles in exchange for their services and some of them performed unorthodox religious actions that planted fear into the commoners (Amos, 2011: 38). On account of this they were despised by the commoners. Many of those non-polluted-by-death outcasts were forced to live in the same village or community as the occupational outcasts. After settling in the community, they would usually take up jobs that were similar to the ones they previously had held, for example the *etori* would have to become *tosha* (butchers) when the nobles could no longer enjoy falconry because of the popularity of Buddhism entering the country.

In the mid-eleventh century, the feudal lords were steadily increasing their *shoen*¹⁰ which meant that the *kokugaryou*¹¹ were transforming into holdings that were similar to

⁹ people from dry river beds

¹⁰ Manors

¹¹ Publicly held land

the *shoen* that the nobles owned. By collecting regular fees from the *kokugaryou*, the fees became the personal income of those nobles, temples and shrines that were in control of the lands. Within the structure of this system, the position of the people held under discrimination at that time changed significantly. Since the ones residing in the publicly held lands were paying their fees to either the nobles or the temples, the occupations of the discriminated ones shifted into jobs that concerned the temples and shrines. Two sources reference this; one appearing in an entry in *Shoyuki*¹² with the expression: „*Gion shishi soso hoshi*“ which loosely translates into „monks or priests concerned with matters pertaining to funerals in the Gion area“. The other evidence comes from a historical record dated 1344 and states that „In the second year of Enkyu (1070) during the reign of Emperor Gosanjo, the Gionsha, that is, Yasaka Shrine, received from the government the dry river bed of the Kamo River between Shijo and Gojo. This river bed was given by the shrine to the *hinin*. These *hinin* called *inu-jinin*, serve the shrine in all matters relating to festivals“ (Nagahara, 1979: 392). Based on these two sources, it is safe to assume that the *soso hoshi* and *inu-jinin* were one and the same group as descriptions from both sources list their occupations to the Gion area and both having something to do with jobs that were undesirable by the rest of the society. Nagahara adds that the *inu-jinin* performed other various tasks that were not particularly connected with the notion of pollution of death, such as creating bowstrings and other similar military equipments and selling them to the nobles. Nagahara even hypothesizes the possibility that such tasks as creating bowstrings and leather for the military, the *kawaranin* explained earlier might have been the predecessors of the *inu-jinin*. (Nagahara, 1979: 392).

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the status of the samurai emerged more fully within the old medieval framework of the Emperor and its nobles. The status of the samurai was defined by the shogunate as the important duty of military servant to the state. Their role was first and foremost to kill or to defend in case of an attack, in order to protect their supervisors as well as to hunt animals in order to improve their combat skills. It is therefore interesting to note that given their high status within the medieval framework, the samurai were not subjected to discrimination nor did they have to worry about the possible pollution of death that resulted from killing

¹² A diary written by Fujiwara no Sanesuke, known to have thorough knowledge of customs and rites.

men and animals. While the samurai were not discriminated against, themselves, they did find use for the outcasts during the sixteenth century when the *daimyo* domain system was established.

The *daimyo* domain system was described thus „a *daimyo* ruled as a undisputed lord over all the land and men within his domain and undertook to reorganize the socioeconomic structure that existed when he first began to exercise power“ (Nagahara, 1979: 398). The samurais were gradually broadening their rule over larger areas throughout the country due to their military strength. Because of that military strength, there was great need for military equipment and that is where the outcasts stepped in. As an example on how they functioned within the *daimyo* domain system, we can look towards eastern Japan in 1526, where a *daimyo* called Imagawa Ujichika of Suruga gave one *cho* five *tan*¹³ of river bed to a man called Kawata Hikohachi so that he would be able to construct a house there. Judging from the name it is certain that Kawata specialized in creating leather goods. However in exchange for giving him land and protection, Kawata was to provide Imagawa with leather goods every year. By providing these leather goods to Imagawa, the Kawata household received immunity from taxes as well. (Nagahara, 1979: 399-400). There have also been other examples where the *daimyo* lords invited the leather makers into their castle towns in order to secure their annual supply of leather goods for the army. As seen from the example above, the *daimyo* recruited those earlier stages of Burakumin solely for the purpose of receiving the necessary amount of leather for their armors or sufficient amounts of bowstrings. However despite the *daimyos* taking advantage of their occupations it is safe to say that the *kawata* were the most fortunate ones of the outcasts. Because of the association with pollution of death, *kawata* people monopolised occupations such as leather production and tanning, and because of their agreement with the *daimyo* they owned several properties and overall had a stable community life (Price, 1972: 21). Sadly it did not mean that they were treated as equals by the *daimyo* or the rest of the common folks. The belief in pollution caused by death was still strong, even during the Sengoku Period, and the *kawata* who were engaged in animal slaughter and tanning were still required to live in dry river beds and subjected to limitations within the location.

¹³ An old Japanese term for land allotment

All the way towards the Tokugawa Period (1603-1868), outcasts moved into the castle towns in hopes of getting protection in exchange for supplying leather crafts and tanning goods to the feudal lords. However since this feudal period is known for its relative era of peace, it meant that the services of the outcasts were no longer in high demand and most were forced to step out of their traditional occupations and take up agriculture instead. The shogunate of the Tokugawa period were adamant in keeping the fixed communities that the *daimyo* had organized intact. In order to do that, they constructed a strict system of social and legal status, often called the *shi-no-ko-sho-eta-hinin*¹⁴ system, which placed the nobles on the same level as the warrior class. It classified the outcasts such as *kawata* as *Eta* and the more mobile and diverse group of beggars and outdoor performers as *Hinin* and marked the two classes as of the lowest status (Amos, 2011: 81).

By becoming a distinct community the *eta* and *hinin* suffered numerous discriminations that were legalized by the shogunate. For example the *eta* were only allowed to marry within their class, and were restricted to remain within their own village. Moreover their right to wear the conventional hairstyle of the time and to wear *geta* sandals were denied. In addition to that, „when approaching the home of a commoner, they were ordered to take off their headgear (if they had any) and footwear before entering the courtyard; and they were not allowed to cross the threshold“ (Price, 1972: 23). Furthermore the civil court of the Kanto district issued that the life of an *eta* was 1/7 worth of a regular commoner after a young *eta* was killed in a fight between *eta* and commoners, literally saying: „If you would have me punish the guilty party, let him kill six more of your fellows“ (Price, 1972: 24).

In order to preserve their previous monopolies from invading commoners, the *eta* and the *hinin* both had to fulfill duties that were considered undesirable by the commoners. In 1657 the *eta* were ordered by the Edo¹⁵ town elders to build „an embankment to be used in the beheading of several people found guilty of pickpocketing“ (Amos, 2011: 84). When the *eta* refused to do so, the town elders banned them from selling their leather goods at the market until they agreed. Thus the duty of executioners and becoming the guards of the executed bodies befell on the *eta*.

¹⁴ warrior – peasant – artisan – merchant – tanner – beggar

¹⁵ Old name of the capital which is now Tokyo

The *hinin* or moreover the leaders of *hinin* were sent to assemble all vagrants and beggar travelers that were around the city of Edo into places specifically assigned to them or to banish them altogether from the city. The *hinin* also took on jobs concerning criminals and prisoners, for example they were ordered to confine young criminals and the severely diseased, they became torturers in judicial trials, they were in charge of permanently branding a criminal in the means of tattooing and they were the ones who had to execute all the sentences against Christians (Price, 1972: 24). While the *eta* were allowed to maintain the previous occupational monopolies, the *hinin* were given a small salary for their duties and sometimes they were given areas where they could beg. It is fascinating to know that if the *hinin* ever broke the rules assigned to them, they would be subjected to various penalties, one of which was tattooing but then again as stated previously, some *hinin* were or had been criminals (Price, 1972: 27). Lastly, in order for the commoners to be able to identify the *eta* and the *hinin*, they were made to wear significant clothings that tied them together within their occupation, for example the leather workers had to sew a patch of leather on their kimono or tie their hair together with straw (Price, 1972: 11).

The Tokugawa Period (1603-1868) became an era consisting of complicated combination of political, economic, religious and ideological beliefs that set forth a strong system of categorisation. David Chapman notes that this system „was facilitated greatly by the various population registries that systematically differentiated status and rigidly anchored people to locality. Without going outside of the registration system, migration between social and geographical position was virtually impossible because of the strict application of identification” (Chapman, 2011). However in the late Tokugawa period, Japan was forced withdraw from its seclusion to the world and to open up to western intrusion. With westerners came modern medicine and weapons such as guns, and the shogunate saw no option but to modernize its army troops and overall culture. Conflicts arose within the shogunate government and several wars started because of the western influence upon the Japanese nation. The shogunate was dispelled and the emperor system was once again established during the Meiji Restoration in 1868.

With the nation unified under an emperor once again, legislations such as the Tokugawa social status system was abolished and “the majority of the population, besides the royal family which was not registered, were listed on registries as

commoners (*heimin*). The Meiji government also decreed that the *ninbetsuchō*¹⁶ and the registries of former outcast communities be merged” (Chapman). Under the Edict of Emancipation in 1871 the outcasts were to no longer be called under the terms of *Eta* or *Hinin* and were thus registered into the national family registry as *shin-heimin* (new commoners).

2.2 Discrimination in terms of religious views

As was referenced several times in the above historical section, religions such as Shinto and Buddhism can be considered a big part of the discrimination against the outcasts. Tasks that were viewed as causing religious contamination by the rest of the society had fallen unto the Burakumin since pre-Nara times. However before then, animal slaughter and meat eating had not been perceived as, as heinous an act as it did within Shinto and Buddhism. In fact, Price points out that animals were killed in agricultural rituals and were offered to the gods in order to receive rain for the harvest in return (Price, 1972: 17). Even before agriculture became one of the main food sources in the Japanese diet, consuming meat was vital for survival for the hunting groups that were prevalent during primitive times in Japan (Kitaguchi, 1999: 88). It should therefore be noted that religion took on a more offensive role in the medieval periods when it came to the outcasts.

In pre-Nara times, before the Imperial Court along with the Emperor engaged with their political and economic power upon the land, the Shintoist thought of ritual impurity (*kegare*) existed within the common people. According to the Encyclopedia of Shinto, when *kegare* „adhered to the individual it also brought calamities to society”. For that reason, people were adamant in avoiding (*imi*) things that resulted in ritual pollution. The forms of *kegare* were various but among the common types were death, childbirth, menstruations, diseases, wounds. In some extreme cases even physical filthiness such as soil or sweat were conceived as impure. Acts of purification were necessary to cleanse oneself where the main form of purification consisted of water. There are records of outcasts often named *sanjo-no-mono*¹⁷ who were the ones to perform the impure tasks, such as delivering a child and burning the hut in which the childbirth had occurred as well as burying the dead (Price, 1972: 17).

¹⁶ The Registry of Human Categories

¹⁷ Means people of Sanjo

Nagahara Keiji points out on the other hand that the outcasts were not the only ones responsible for performing purifications. The most important duty of the Emperor during ancient times was conducting the *Oharai*¹⁸: The *Oharai* described itself as a purification of large groups of people. The reason for that was “because at the very core of the political ideology of the ancient period was the belief that presiding over ceremonies worshipping the gods was the principal function of a ruler as the political hegemon” (Nagahara, 1979: 387). That meant that the emperor and the court at that time did everything in their power to avoid the pollution that resulted in death of human beings. As Buddhism however gradually merged with the initial Shinto beliefs of pollution, death caused not only to humans but also to animals became defiling. Hence the *Oharai* ceremony changed into one where it would involve *shokue*¹⁹. With the religious changes that occurred, the task of performing the ceremonies shifted to the slaves that belonged to the Court in the early Heian Period (Nagahara, 1979: 388).

The combination of Shinto’s *imi* (avoidance) and Buddhism’s compassion for all worldly beings was introduced in the sixth century and became widespread in the eighth and ninth centuries. Buddhism in general consisted of treating everything, plants, animals and humans, equally and the practice looked down upon actions such as taking the life of another and eating the flesh of an animal. The government during the Nara Period banned the consumption of animal meat of horses and cattle as they “feed people by working hard and they thus replace the work of people” (Price, 1972: 18). Consequently the people who were active in such actions were regarded in contempt and disgust by the common people, which evidently resulted in banishment from the normal society.

Kan Takayuki²⁰ argues that most of the outcasts, who were oppressed by the commoners as a result of the pollution of death, contributed important things to Japanese history and modern culture. The *hinin*, as we know, were a group of beggars, outdoor performers, artisans, criminals and wandering monks of various folk beliefs and given that they were rootless in society, they were free to roam from one place to another. Kan therefore insists upon the fact that these *hinin* were “spiritually free from

¹⁸ The Great Purification

¹⁹ touching pollution

²⁰ An historian, who has written books about the historical and socio-cultural relationship between the outcasts and the Emperor system

feudal ideology and became responsible for creating various unique aspects of Japanese culture such as *Kabuki*, *No*, *Kyogen* and *Ningyo-Jyoruri*” (Tanaka, 1987: 11). Another example on how the outcasts and the Buddhist segregation upon them had a certain influence on the history and culture of the Japanese nation is the revolt of the Ikko Ikki²¹ against the samurai class. During the Kamakura Period (1185-1333), a Kamakura Buddhist by the name of Shinran, who was from a family of butchers, approached the outcasts and brought forth revolutionary Buddhist ideas that would help bring salvation to the outcasts. Those ideas were in contrast with the original Buddhist principles and it was those promulgations that eventually led to the Ikko Ikki revolt (Tanaka, 1987: 11).

As has already been established, the *hinin* were generally considered a more mobile group than the occupational outcasts and within this group were monks or priests who practiced various kinds of folk religion. During the eighth century²² the general public came to view them as people holding mystical powers and in result, the monks of the *hinin* group were regarded as shamans or sorcerers. Kan Takayuki posits that the *hinin* might have been a threat to the Emperor of that era since the Emperor was the Master Shinto priest and therefore regarded as a living god possessing a direct contact with the other gods of the Shinto religion. It was due to myths such as those that the Emperor and the Imperial Court “segregated them from the *komin*”²³, categorized as *senmin* and put under the direct control of the Emperor or other powerful clans, but they were also exploited in order to enhance the Emperor’s power and were forced to regard him as a mighty god” (Tanaka, 1987: 9).

Both occupation and religion therefore contributed towards segregating the outcasts from the common people of Japan. The names of the outcasts might have changed throughout the years but they still remained in the defiling occupation of animal slaughtering and tanning the skins. However, being under control of the *daimyos*, the outcasts were seen to enjoy relatively stable lives within their communities, whilst the *hinin*, being rootless, roamed from village to village and were ultimately subjected to discrimination for having similar mystical powers as the Emperor. Although the outcasts suffered severe legalized discrimination at the hands of the shogunate and

²¹ Mobs of peasant farmers, Buddhist monks, Shinto priests and local nobles, who rose up against samurai rule

²² The Nara Period

²³ Another term for *ryomin*; good citizens in the *Ritsuyo* system

general public during the Tokugawa Period, they were not denied labor of any kind and the *hinin* were even paid salaries for their, albeit degrading, duties. Under the Emancipation Edict in 1871, they were stripped of the terms *eta* and *hinin*, put under the same category and given a new name – *shin-heimin* (new commoners). One can only assume that their lives might have turned for the better but did the discrimination cease at that turning point in their lives?

3 Burakumin's resolve

Despite the government issuing the Edict of Emancipation in 1871, declaring that the people of Eta-Hinin were no longer classified by their inherited status and caste and were therefore becoming members of mainstream society, it did not mean that the Burakumin's initial discriminatory problems had been erased entirely.

Due to the changes that the government brought about following the Meiji Restoration, a lot of the mainstream population suffered severe financial difficulties, especially Japanese farmers. The farmers feared that the liberation of the *Eta* would mean competition for land and in the process they would end up at the same outcast level as the *Eta*. Due to this fear as well as the frustrations over the new governmental legislations, the grand majority of the people usually turned on the former outcasts as scapegoats and riots against them were common during the ten years after the Restoration (Totten, George, and Wagatsuma, 1972: 34-36). The lives of the former outcasts, or the „new common people (*shin-heimin*)“ as they were now referred to, had changed very little compared to previous years; they were constantly afraid of attacks from angry townspeople and buraku children suffered social discrimination at school. Even though they were supposed to be liberated from such social discrimination, in 1880 the Ministry of Justice published *Zenkoku Minji Kanrei Ruishu* (*A Handbook of Japanese Customs and Folkways*), wherein the Burakumin were described as „Eta and hinin, the lowliest of all the people, almost resembling animals“ (Totten and Wagatsuma, 1972: 38).

Some people belonging to the Burakumin sought out other Burakumin to unite and work together in improving their way of life, so that the majority of the Japanese would approve of them and therefore cease discriminating against them. Unfortunately it had little effect in the beginning, there was still discrimination present. For example in 1902, a member of the Diet, Ozaki Yukio, objected to two bills that were occurring at the same time by saying: „A combined discussion of the tax problem and naval expansion is as incongruous as a son of a wealthy family walking hand in hand with an „eta“ girl.“ (Totten and Wagatsuma, 1972: 38). This continued social discrimination against the Burakumin across the country finally prompted the Buraku leaders to take action. In June 1903, over 300 Burakumin from all over Japan attended the inaugural

meeting of the *Dai Nippon Doho Yuwa Kai* (Greater Japan Fraternal Conciliation Society), where conditions such as the improvement of Burakumin moral training, customs and manners were approved, as well as general education, sanitary conditions, leadership, frugality and economic conditions. In other words, they thought that by accepting the idea that the problem lay within their own community and with the notion of „self-help“ from each other, such as receiving better education and employment, they would achieve acceptance from the majority. Although the movement failed to bring an end to discrimination, it did motivate the younger Buraku individuals to take more direct actions towards the government.

3.1 Birth of the Suiheisha and later BLL

Inspired by Marxist theory and socialist ideas, young Buraku intellectuals received advice and help from other Communist leaders who were active in the labour, agricultural and suffrage movements. The article „On the Emancipation of the Tokushu Buraku“ by Sano Manabu, published in 1921, expressed that the only way for Burakumin to receive true liberation, was the cooperation with labourers, who likewise were suffering from capitalist profiteers. The article strongly encouraged the young Buraku activists to go forth and create an independent movement. There were attempts from the government and the reconciliationists to bribe the Buraku movement in order to change their preferences but that only incited their plans even further, so that eventually on March 3, 1922, they debuted their first conference of the National Levelers' Society (*Zenkoku Suiheisha*), in which around 2000 Buraku representatives all across Japan participated (Totten and Wagatsuma, 1972: 43). Within the movement, there were three issues that were addressed and approved by the participants: Firstly, that the Tokushu Burakumin would acquire complete liberation by using their own methods and actions. Secondly, that the Tokushu Burakumin demanded economic and occupational freedom from the majority society and that they would obtain it. And thirdly, the Tokushu Burakumin would be aware of human dignity and that they shall march toward the full realization of human values (Totten and Wagatsuma, 1972: 43). It is appropriate to quote the whole Declaration of the Suiheisha, as it contains the dedication for action and yearning for freedom for all Buraku people:

Tokushu Burakumin throughout the country: Unite!

Long suffering brothers! Over the past half century, the movements on our behalf by so many people and in such varied ways have yielded no appreciable results. This failure is the punishment we have incurred for permitting ourselves as well as others to debase our own human dignity. Previous movements, though seemingly motivated by compassion, actually corrupted many of our brothers. Thus, it is imperative that we now organize a new collective movement to emancipate ourselves by promoting respect for human dignity.

Brothers! Our ancestors pursued and practised freedom and equality. They were the victims of base, contemptible class policies and they were the manly martyrs of industry. As a reward for skinning animals, they were stripped of their own living flesh; in return for tearing out the hearts of animals, their own warm human hearts were ripped apart. They were even spat upon with ridicule. Yet, all through these cursed nightmares, their human pride ran deep in their blood. Now the time has come when we human beings, pulsing with this blood, are soon to regain our divine dignity. The time has come for the victims to throw off their stigma. The time has come for the blessing of the martyrs' crown of thorns.

The time has come when we can be proud of being Eta.

We must never again shame our ancestors and profane humanity through servile words and cowardly deeds. We, who know just how cold human society can be, who know what it is to be pitied, do fervently seek and adore the warmth and light of human life from deep within our hearts.

Thus is the Suiheisha born.

Let there be warmth in human society, let there be light in all human beings.²⁴

The main objective of the Suiheisha was to denounce anyone who insulted the Burakumin with offensive words and deeds. It meant that if someone were to discriminate against Burakumin, the members of the Suiheisha would demand for the person to publicly apologize for his or her actions in the form of a published statement in a newspaper or in a printed statement that the Suiheisha would then distribute. According to George O. Totten and Hiroshi Wagatsuma, „69 cases were reported“ (1972: 45), but in other such incidents the discriminators refused to apologize.

One example is when the Suiheisha branch in Nara tried to abolish discrimination at an elementary school, where Buraku children were not allowed to sit next to non-Buraku children nor were they allowed to use the same restrooms. Cleaning duties, which is a normal activity in Japanese schools, were appointed to Buraku

²⁴ Harada, T. And Uesugi, S. (1981) *Long Suffering Brothers and Sisters Unite!* Osaka: Buraku Liberation Research Institute

children after school hours while the non-Buraku children were assigned less duties and some Buraku children were not allowed to advance to upper level schools, even though their grades were exceptionally good. The Nara branch made two attempts to erase the discrimination, one of the attempts had over hundred Buraku members for support, but the principal of the elementary school refused to do so in both attempts. This resulted in a physical altercation between the Burakumin and a district officer, where the latter was injured and the principal, who tried to stop the fight, got his clothes torn. In the end, a number of Burakumin got summoned to the police station but the teacher who discriminated against the Buraku children was assigned to another school. Even though struggles with discriminators such as the example above were common, a small victory such as the one with the teacher being reassigned worked as fuel for the newly appointed movement.

By keeping up with these radical actions, non-Burakumin people and other organizations soon found themselves eliminating or changing some apparent prejudice that was displayed around themselves, for example in textbooks. The organizations that were more into compromising with the government (the *Yuwa* movement) even lent a helping hand to the Suiheisha by coercing the government into giving more funds to projects that would improve public facilities in Buraku areas. The government was also pressured into opening economic opportunities – something that seemed like a far away dream for most well-educated Burakumin - as well as increase economic security coverage to Burakumin (Totten and Wagatsuma, 1972: 62). Even though the Suiheisha was dissolved in 1940 because of the overall concern for World War II, its leaders never ceased their plans for future actions and by the time the Allied nations won the war, a new Constitution was issued in Japan in 1946, stating that „all citizens were equal under the law in political, economic, and social relationships, and that they were not to be discriminated against for reasons of race, belief, sex, social status, or family background“ (Totten and Wagatsuma, 1972: 69). Which meant that with this new law, social outcasts such as the Burakumin were to be free from any prejudiced actions. Around the same year, the old leaders of the Suiheisha reformed their organization, but this time changing the name into the National Committee for Buraku Liberation (*Buraku Kaiho Zenkoku Iinkai*) or NCBL for short.

Under a new name, the NCBL directed their actions more towards the improvement of economic discrimination, where they urged local governments to financially aid them to improve various poor environmental conditions, such as improving Buraku holdings in agriculture, transforming slums into a better living environment in the cities as well as lower rent in public housings. The NCBL wanted the sewage and water supply to be thoroughly cleaned and wished for broader development in the terms of nurseries, clinics, work centers and other welfare programs. Lastly they urged for improvement in educational facilities and employment possibilities for young Buraku people as well as give loans to small-scale Buraku industries which were having difficulties competing against bigger, mainstream ones (Totten and Wagatsuma, 1972: 74). According to Ian Neary, Kyoto city, in which most of these problems were occurring, accepted the demands laid by the NCBL and took responsibility by „increasing its budget for Buraku improvements from nearly six million yen in 1950 to forty-five million yen in 1952“ (Neary, 2009: 70). By putting more emphasis on the ensuing economic problems for Burakumin, the NCBL gained immense popularity and by 1955, „over a thousand branches of the National Committee were to be found in twenty-six prefectures“ (Totten and Wagatsuma, 1972: 74) and it gave birth to a new name: The Buraku Liberation League (*Buraku Kaiho Domei* or BLL for short). With increased members and a new name, they continued on with their demands, only this time their desire was to let the national government issue a policy that would greatly improve Buraku conditions. The BLL received support from some political parties, for example the Japan Socialist Party, which pressured the Prime Minister into careful observation into the lives of the Burakumin. The Prime Minister then made the decision to form a committee with politicians, experts on society, bureaucrats and even some buraku people to look into the living conditions of Burakumin in various areas, study their situation and look for possible solutions towards their problems, and then report its findings.

The consequent report, called „The Report of the Dowa Policy Council“ published in 1965, described the problems that the BLL had been trying to show the government for decades, which can be seen below:

The dowa problem is an extremely serious and grave social problem whereby some groups of Japanese nationals are economically, socially, and culturally placed in a low social

position through discrimination that originated in the social status structure formed during the historical developmental process of Japanese society; and have their fundamental human rights violated even in contemporary society, in particular, failing to have their civil rights and freedom fully protected, which are guaranteed to all people as the principles of modern society (Amos, 2011: 160)

In this excerpt from the report, the committee clearly acknowledges the Burakumin as part of Japan's nation and therefore not different from mainstream Japanese, and as Ian Neary points out „it did not accept that the problem was simply a remnant of feudalism that would disappear with the development of advanced capitalism. It rejected the view that the best solution is to ignore the buraku issue since discussion of it or special action only served to perpetuate awareness of a problem that if ignored would disappear“ (Neary, 2009: 71). Emily A. Su-lan Reber adds that the report claimed that Burakumin were denied „freedom of occupational choice, equal educational opportunities, freedom of movement and freedom of marriage and social intercourse“ (Reber, 1999: 307) due to social and economical discrimination. In the last section of the report, it described the poor living conditions of the Burakumin, the low educational achievements and how very few burakumin were working in major companies. Lastly, the report concluded that it was the state's duty to take action in order to get rid of the problems, „beginning with the introduction of legislation that would enable government to address the social deprivation described in the report“ (Neary, 2009: 71). At the time, there existed no such law specifically for Burakumin, and some activists, mostly the ones that were supported the Japan Communist Party, were worried that if a special law was established just for Burakumin, it would divide the working classes of the nation. Matsumoto Jiichiro, one of the founding members and one of the leaders of BLL, feared that such a legislation would only give birth to corruption within the organization and that other „Buraku communities would become over-dependent on state provision, contrary to the Suiheisha aim to „emancipate ourselves““ (Neary, 2009: 72). Despite warnings from them as well as the Japan Communist Party, the rest of the BLL were elated when the government decided to authorize a „Ten Year Plan to Resolve the Buraku Problem“ in 1969.

3.2 Special Measures Law; the Government's answer in 1969

The „Ten Year Plan to Resolve the Buraku Problem“ was authorized by the *Dowa Taisaku Tokubetsu Sochiho* (Law on Special Measures for Dowa Projects – or SML for short). This legislation was divided into seven categories that were to be put into action: the physical environment; social welfare and public health; promotion of agriculture, forestry and fisheries; promotion of small and medium-sized enterprises; employment protection and social security; education; and human rights protection. Even though it was suggested that it applied to all Burakumin, it had some local variations.

All in all, these seven categories were merged into three main programmes or projects. The first project was the renovations of old streets, clinics, community centres and schools that belonged to Buraku areas as well as the constructions of new high-rise apartment that were to be replaced with the old housing stocks that many had to live in. The second project would involve the government giving financial grants to Buraku families. And finally the third one would revolve about education.

Both the Japan Socialist Party and the Japan Communist Party, who both had members within the BLL, agreed on the fact that Buraku children needed improved education and that non-Buraku children needed education on discrimination and how to deal with such an issue, should it arise in their schools. As both political parties saw it, the Buraku children were facing difficulties attending school due to financial problems²⁵, so in most cases, the BLL, which the JSP heavily supported, had always been demanding subsidies from the government to cover such minor educational costs for the Burakumin. John N. Hawkins notes that „both organizations agreed that *dowa*²⁶ education should basically seek to improve overall educational environment through financial subsidies, introduce educational programs to increase the social consciousness of both Burakumin and the general population, and improve the occupational opportunities for Burakumin in general“ (Hawkins, 1983: 217). It was also in their demands that Buraku children be able to achieve a higher education but due to discrimination within preschools and elementary schools, the chances of a child of Buraku descent of getting into high school or even university were rather slim. It was

²⁵ that is, not being able to buy things that were necessary for school – uniforms, textbooks, tuition etc.

²⁶ The government's term for Burakumin

for this reason that both Buraku organizations wished for the *dowa* education system to be implemented into the general school system.

3.3 The difference between Buraku Liberation League and Zenkai ren

As can be seen from above, both Buraku organizations from the JCP and the JSP agreed on some of the demands for Buraku liberation but when it came to the Special Measures Law, there was conflict between them. Neary points out that the legislation was „vague about who was to receive these benefits. It talked of the residents of the ‚target areas‘, ‚where security and improvement of the living environment had been obstructed for historical and social reasons“ (Neary, 2009: 72). The problem was that not only Burakumin lived in those „target areas“ that were specified in the legislation, but also *zainichi* Koreans as well as other poor Japanese who were not of Buraku descent. The JCP wished that all poor Japanese or poor people in general should be allowed to benefit from the projects but the JSP and the BLL were against it, stating that the reasons for which these programmes came into being, were because of their hard-work of campaigning and therefore it should only be eligible for Burakumin. Their views on discrimination varied as well. The JSP held on to the belief that „Japanese society and economy require a labor pool of exploited workers, so the system of discrimination is consciously maintained to provide a reference point justifying further exploitation of lower-class people“ (Hawkins, 1983: 213). The JCP disagreed, by saying that poor people in Japan had always been under exploitation, and that it only intensified during the Tokugawa period. In order for peasants to feel less inferior towards the upper-class statuses, such as merchants and the samurais, they made the Burakumin²⁷ into scapegoats so that they would have something to discriminate and look down upon themselves (Hawkins, 1983: 213).

Tension between the two political wings of the BLL started to rise while the Special Measures Law was being issued. The JCP was particularly afraid that if the legislation were to be passed, the Burakumin would be separated from „the wider working-class movement, thereby weakening opposition to the Liberal Democratic Party domination of the political system and the capitalist structure“ (Neary, 2009: 74).

²⁷ The Burakumin were called *Eta* and *Hinin* in the Tokugawa Period

Disagreements on the SML and other violent confrontations between the groups, especially with two school cases where members of the BLL and supporters of JCP caused a major scandal when trying to campaign against discrimination, caused the BLL to split, whereas excluded members from the BLL formed the organization National Buraku Liberation Alliance (*Zenkoku Buraku Kaiho Rengokai* or Zenkai ren for short) in 1979.

The Zenkai ren went out of their way to disagree about the BLL's demands and values. For example they were not satisfied that the BLL held all the administrative control over certain documents or resources that had information about the SML project. According to the Zenkai ren, it was alright for any member of the BLL to acquire these documents, while if anyone outside the membership or if a person belonged to the Zenkai ren, they would not receive access at all (Neary, 2009: 75-76). The BLL reasoned that they needed to have all the documents at the Kaiho Hall so that „*Dowa* policy did not become a means of conciliationism but one of liberation“ (Neary, 2009: 75).

From the 1980s, the BLL had had plans to make the government agree to a Basic Law on the Buraku Issue. According to Neary, Basic Laws have „a special place within the Japanese legal framework, midway between the generalities of the Constitution and the nitty-gritty of ordinary legislation“ (Neary, 2009: 76). The Basic Law that the BLL had in mind had three aims:

- 1) To institutionalize national commitment to the goals of the 1965 report and to establish a legal framework for a comprehensive approach to the Buraku problem;
- 2) To oblige the government to take action in a broad range of areas beyond urban renewal;
- 3) To prohibit a wide range of discriminatory acts and provide the statutory basis for direct legal attacks on discrimination by individuals and groups.

The government would be obliged to submit an annual report to the Diet and conduct a survey on Buraku conditions every five years. Moreover, a Buraku deliberative council would be created to investigate Buraku discrimination-related problems (Buraku Liberation Research Institute, 1994: 27).

The BLL was hoping that the government would agree on creating the Basic Law in 1995 but it did not transpire. However, two legislations were issued that could, in some way, help with the Buraku problem: the Law for the Promotion of Human Rights Protection in 1996, with the aim of getting rid of human rights problems as well as Buraku problems; and the Law on the Promotion of Human Rights Education in 2000, whilst a basic plan would be created by the central government and a report would be written on how the human rights programme is fairing. According to Neary, there has also been „a commitment by government to set up a National Human Rights Commission that would be able to deal effectively with a broad range of human rights issues, including dealing with instances of discrimination and similar infringements of human rights“ (Neary, 2009: 77). The BLL has made several more attempts at getting the Basic Law legalized but so far there has been no visible progress as of today. Which leads to the question: Has the situation become better for the Burakumin to live comfortably in modern society?

4 Burakumin today and the endured problems

Since the fight for liberation has been ongoing for decades, most of the BLL have come to admit that the discriminatory actions against Burakumin have diminished and with the continued funds from the government to aid the Buraku communities, some of the Zenkai- ren have even dared to say that the problem has been solved. Others argue against it though, saying that while the economic problems²⁸ have, to an extent, been solved in major cities, the socio-psychological problems are still around and that discrimination is still deeply rooted in the Japanese society's mindset.

Buraku discrimination today seems to focus more on the neighbourhoods that Burakumin reside in, as opposed to the impure occupational prejudice of the past. With that said, it doesn't seem to matter to the mainstream Japanese whether a person is from a Buraku descent or not; for as long as someone lives in those Buraku-designated areas, a non-Buraku might become labeled as one nonetheless. Furthermore, it has come to the point that people of Buraku descent conceal their real identities once they leave the designated areas in hopes of finding good employment or to get married. Those plans have at some point been foiled by business companies or in-laws that would often hire a detective to find out about their Buraku backgrounds.

4.1 Background checks.

Shortly after the Laws on Special Measures was issued in 1969, investigators and lawyers began to compile a number of lists called *Chimei Soukan*²⁹ to be used for business enterprises and sometimes well-off families. The lists comprised of „compilation of name, location, number of households and main occupations of the occupants, of some 5,300 Buraku throughout Japan, grouped according to prefecture” (Reber, 1999: 311-312). It seemed that the lists became rather desirable for wealthy in-laws as pre-marriage investigations were popular, judging from a comment by a detective whose name is not known and is therefore referred to as Mr.T:

²⁸ Problems that revolved around renovating the old housing stocks, building youth centers and clinics, cleansing of the water supply and sewage systems

²⁹ Buraku lists

I have been operating as a private investigator since about 1965, and I can tell you here and now that 99% of all pre-marriage investigations are to see ‘whether or not there is any Buraku ancestry’. Since the Buraku thing has become such a hot issue, the words people use when they ask have changed to ‘see if there’s anything unusual about him/her’ or ‘it’s so difficult these days, but we just want you to find out whether or not s/he’s one of those people’. (Kitaguchi, 1999: 66)

The comment about the difficulty of acquiring any information about Buraku ancestry refers to the restrictions in obtaining personal information that were implemented with the legislation of the Special Measures Law, whereupon public access had been limited and questions that were required to list family finances and occupations in application forms such as for high school were erased (Reber, 1999: 312).

Despite how the Constitution³⁰ stressed the freedom to gain an employment, notable business enterprises, such as Toyota and Nissan were among the primary purchasers of the lists. Before the lists, it was common for an applicant to put a copy of his/her family register together with the job application which came in handy when a company wanted to identify a Burakumin. According to Reber, the reasons from the companies for not hiring a person with Buraku ancestry were as follows: “(1) Burakumin are looked down upon and thus would be detrimental to company images and customer relations; (2) excluding Burakumin from employment is necessary to maintain social harmony among employees who might harbor prejudice against Burakumin themselves; and (3) not having Burakumin would avoid potential problems with the BLL if a Burakumin were to be upset by being fired or by a discriminatory occurrence in everyday operations” (Reber, 1999: 312).

Nowadays, employers are allowed to ask which prefecture an applicant is from, as opposed to which city or suburb that used to be in the standardized application form but it is interesting to add that college or university students do not have to fill out the standardized application form and Kitaguchi assumes that “the logic being applied is that Burakumin applicants are far less likely than mainstream Japanese to have graduated from a college or university” (Kitaguchi, 1999: 20), meaning that the companies might have created a loophole in the system that makes them able to identify possible Buraku ancestry.

³⁰ http://www.solon.org/Constitutions/Japan/English/english-Constitution.html#CHAPTER_III

4.2 Interaction between Burakumin and the majority of Japanese

In the past the interaction between the Buraku community and the rest of society had not been on the most pleasant terms, as has been presented in the historical section. However some Burakumin have recently claimed that they have not themselves experienced discrimination on the hands of the mainstream Japanese. Despite that positive claim, the lack of true understanding the Burakumin and their ordeals, including a great deal of misunderstanding as well as various myths have given the majority of Japanese society a reason to look down on them or have misconceptions of their true character and their living conditions.

4.3 The negative side

Nowadays it is probably easy to find a Japanese person and posing the question of whether there is discrimination against the Burakumin in modern society, he will inform you that he harbors no ill will towards them. But as soon as he is asked about his feelings of having a Buraku person in the family, he is likely to instantly change his previous claim, just like one university-educated housewife in Tokyo absolutely refused to marry her daughter to a Buraku man, her reason being that “they’re dirty and they’re not really Japanese” (Kristof, 1995). Opposition with intermarriage between a Burakumin and non-Burakumin is one of the main negative attitudes currently expressed. There are numerous examples of in-laws opposing a marriage, usually after discovering the Buraku background through acquiring the above mentioned list. Despite the objection, the younger generation generally ignores it but as a result, the initial disapproval can turn into severe discrimination. A good example is the story of a 34-year-old housewife who had been married to a non-Buraku man but she had not set foot inside her in-laws’ home for 16 years. Her husband was disowned by his parents and their marriage was not registered in the in-laws’ family register. It was the same when they had children – their births were not registered in their family registers. It wasn’t until the children were starting school and based on numerous discussions with the father that they gave in and registered the children as their grandchildren. The number of exclusions continued even after the death of the father-in-law. Her sister-in-law even overtly foulmouthed the housewife, saying things like “I can never get married because of you” and “You’re a filthy bitch. You’re scum; don’t ever come near our house again”

(Kitaguchi, 1999: 50). It even came to the point that she had to hide her Buraku background from their friends, in order to avoid further prejudice towards them and their children. This example clearly demonstrates the frustration of the mainstream Japanese when it comes to intermarriage and the Burakumin's plight. Such is the apparent negative attitude that the mainstream Japanese uphold in regards to the Burakumin.

Other scholars, however, claim that most of the mainstream Japanese do not know why they discriminate against the Burakumin. Ito Takuya explains that the reason why they cannot clarify their discriminatory behavior is because they are projecting their own "shadow" onto the Burakumin. In Jungian psychological terms, "shadow" refers to the unconscious complex that is the opposite of the conscious aspect, or ego. It is all of a person's traits, and everything which a person does not want to recognize about him or herself. 'Projection' implies to project one's own 'shadow' onto another person" (Ito, 2005). The type of "shadow projecting" that is common among the mainstream is a form of aggression. In fact, they directed their aggression against the Burakumin during the Meiji Period when the Emancipation Edict was passed, when mainstream farmers, frustrated by the financial difficulties, broke into riots against the Burakumin as means of relieving their frustrations.

Fear is a common attitude among the common people when discussing the Burakumin. Because of the social problems within Buraku communities that usually are to do with alcoholism and minimum wages, people tend to associate the Burakumin with the *Yakuza*³¹. Fabricated stories about their barbaric sides and their attitudes towards committing a crime were spread, such as this story that is a popular legend in Toyoda City:

It was customary prior to the turn of the century for Eta to wash the bodies of deceased "commoners" in return for an offering of sake. After the Eta began to realize their emancipation, however, they frequently requested money from clients in payment for the washing services. Sometimes the demands were exorbitant. When the sum was refused, the Eta would threaten the family by vowing to drink the water used in bathing the body of the family ancestor. The people were usually frightened into relenting to the Eta demands (Donoghue, 1957: 1004).

³¹ The Japanese Crime Syndicate

With this myth, the townspeople of Toyoda believed that if they would not meet the demands of the Burakumin, they would commit blasphemous acts like defiling a body, thus indicating their supposed barbarous behaviors. Another myth would include giving birth to a misshapen child if someone were to marry a Buraku girl. Another folk belief involved, associating the Burakumin with animals (most probably due to the animal slaughter occupations), hence sentences such as “they have one dog’s bone in them”; “they being animals, dirt does not stick to their feet when they walk barefooted” were common (Price, 1972: 11). Sadly that classification still persists in modern day society. In 2001, Nonaka Hiromu, who had always shown pride in his Buraku roots, was almost elected to become the president of the Liberal Democratic Party and even prime minister. His political rivals made derogatory remarks about Nonaka’s lineage, one rival even “holding up four fingers of his right hand without the thumb” (Onishi, 2009: 2) which is a symbol indicating a four-legged animal. Nonaka declined the offer for prime minister as he was concerned that the exposure would cause harm to his family.

In the 1980s, discriminatory graffitis started appearing in various places. A sudden change since from the 1970s, discrimination from the mainstream Japanese consisted mainly of spoken comments and, even further from the past where people merely blatantly avoided the Burakumin. A notable example of such graffitis is the poster incident in Osaka City in 1980. The graffiti was pinned on the notice-board outside the Kaiho Hall at the BLL’s regional offices:

“Such and such a place is where Buraku filth and ‘those people’ live. If you go near there, you’ll be killed . . . those scum are poisoning us by bleeding us dry in taxes . . .”

“Our government must use the power of the army immediately to control all eta filth . . .”

“Send them to the loony bin . . . NOW! . . . send them to the gas chamber . . .”

“To all decent citizens . . . take up arms . . . eliminate the eta filth . . . Buraku maggots . . .”

(Kitaguchi, 1999: 141)

According to Kitaguchi, the reason for such derogatory remarks displayed for all to see, is to encourage the common people in their continued discrimination against the Burakumin, saying that is “quite alright for people stuck at the bottom of society’s heap to use graffiti to discriminate against Buraku people” (Kitaguchi, 1999: 150). That kind of act is very similar to the actions that the peasants displayed in the past when their farming taxes rose and they vented their frustrations towards the outcasts.

Unlike some pro-BLL Burakumin, who deny the fact that they cannot escape from their social plight, the lower class Burakumin groups view themselves as a community that was predetermined by the Japanese society and that that notion is permanent. The following example from an interview with a lower class Burakumin clearly shows how they regard themselves:

Q: Are you the same as common people (*heimin*)?

A: No. We kill animals. We are dirty, and some people think we are not human.

Q: Do you think you are not human?

A: (long pause and then) I don't know.

Q: Are the common people better than you?

A: Oh, yes!

Q: Why?

A: They do not kill animals. They do not live here (Eta – Burakumin quarters). They are good people.

Q: Do you think you or your children will ever leave this district or change occupations?

A: No, we are new common people (*shin-heimin*).

Q: Do you think outsiders will ever come to this village and treat you as friends?

A: No, people on the outside don't like us. Things haven't changed for a hundred years.

Q: Do you believe this is right or fair?

A: (long pause) I don't know; we are bad people, and we are dirty (Donoghue, 1957: 1014-15).

Judging from this example, the lower class Burakumin seem to view their own status in indifference and acceptance. This difference on how the groups view their status in society has created tensions and conflicts. Continued campaigns and programs against prejudice are still in place in most Buraku communities. However the lower class groups find those programs hard to adjust due to them accepting their bitter destiny. This results in feelings such as contempt and embarrassment coming from most Burakumin that is then directed towards the lower class, while the lower class considers the actions and demands of the movements unreasonable.

The lower class Burakumin's inability to change their attitudes as well as their persistence to remain in their community is contributed almost entirely of the *oyabun-kobun*³² system. This system is described as "persons not usually related by close kin

³² *Oyabun* means parent status while *kobun* means child status

ties enter into a compact to assume obligations of a diffuse nature similar to those ascribed to members of one's immediate family" (Donoghue, 1957: 1012). Basically a wealthy Buraku person has complete ownership of the leather and fur industry, controls the employment of the industry and owns the houses of his employees, which happen to be the homes of the lower class people. The lower class group whose general income comes from working at the leather industry has no choice but to work under him and pay him rent for the housing and thus they become financially dependent upon him. The responsibility of the *oyabun* is that he is "committed to aid impoverished families, to assign jobs to clients in proportion to need, and to assure a certain minimum income to the families under his protection" (Donoghue, 1957: 1013). With that he is guaranteed obligations from his tenants and employees. It is not a bad agreement as the people have been known to give him praise and blessings for his acts of kindness.

Dependence on the support from the *oyabun* is therefore, a major catalyst for lower class Burakumin to remain in their Buraku community. But there are also other conditions that prevent them from moving. Because of their distinct dialect, mainstream Japanese from urban dwellings, who use the standard Japanese form of speech, are able to recognize the difference and therefore mark the lower class as "rustics". Furthermore the lower class are well aware of the differences between them and the majority, which results in lack of interaction as there are often tendencies to withdraw from any situation that requires them to socialize among non-Burakumin.

Generally today, neither the public nor the multimedia shows any apparent interest in discussing the problems of the Burakumin. The reason seems to be that they do not wish to deal with denunciations from the BLL. Kenichiro Tatsumi, head of the Buraku Liberation League in Kobe says that "there've been arguments in which burakumin said some very tough things, and so people became afraid of us" (Kristof, 1995: 3). Because of lack of open discussion, the Burakumin continue to be treated as invisible by the public.

4.4 The positive side

While the examples displayed above regarding intermarriage have been on bad terms, it does not mean that all intermarriages are like that. Masuharu Okuda, owner of dry-

cleaning store in a Buraku neighbour hood in Kyoto, has a daughter-in-law who came from the outside and after marrying she moved in to their household where he claims that “there have been no problems (of discrimination)” (Kristof, 1995: 1). McLauchlan adds that “the mixed marriage phenomenon is far more common among younger couples, reflecting today’s more enlightened attitudes and the determination to avoid prejudice and discrimination in selecting a marriage partner” (McLauchlan, 1999: 9).

Although some common people, who carry some derogatory notions of the Burakumin, might not perceive it as a positive thing, many non-Burakumin have moved into Buraku communities and neighborhoods because of the relatively cheap accommodation. Some Burakumin encourage that, as they feel that it will give the general public insight into the living environment of the Burakumin and therefore might see that there is nothing to discriminate against. With the funding from the government, most Buraku neighborhoods have become clean and non-Burakumins are welcome to use the public facilities. One unnamed Buraku resident who was interviewed by McLauchlan, runs a youth club for Buraku children in his neighborhood and has achieved success in bringing mainstream children into the program as well. He says “we want them to visit us, meet the residents and then they will change their minds. You can’t just dislike something without trying it and you can’t have an opinion about us without seeing us on our turf” (McLauchlan, 2003).

Amongst the actions following the Special Measures Law, was to provide adequate education to the mainstream students on Burakumin issues. In 1972, textbooks that contained information about the Buraku problems were distributed to various schools (McLauchlan, 1999: 12) within Buraku communities. Due to low self-esteem as well as concerns for the future and not being able to afford various things related to school, such as textbooks or field trips, Buraku children would often skip school. Teachers at those schools would then make home-visits and try to encourage the children to keep attending their classes. “Liberation begins and ends in education”³³ which suggests that leaders of the BLL have strong hopes that by implying educational programs about the Buraku problems, the wrong conceptions about them and their living standards might become eradicated..

³³ Dowa Education, Buraku Kaiho Kenkyusho, 1995

5 Ideas and Possible Solutions towards eliminating today's discrimination

The general attitude of the mainstream Japanese people have been presented in the previous chapter, where it is clearly shown that while the Burakumin are no longer discriminated against in regards to their occupations, the social and psychological prejudice still remains. A situation leading to „approximately one-third of all *burakumin* families report having experienced at least one incident of anti-*burakumin* prejudice or discrimination³⁴”. The BLL is doing everything in their power to get its Fundamental Law approved by the government while Zenkai ren, however, has stated that prejudice has been gradually diminishing and that there is no need for the harsh activities that the BLL have been carrying out over the past decades. While light has been shed upon the actions of the liberation movements, there have been no general opinions from the Burakumin themselves. What do they think of their situation? Do they feel overpowered by the aggressive prejudice done by the mainstream Japanese or have they accepted their plight from the start? Is there any solution to the Buraku problem that can be resolved without dire consequences on either part?

Alastair McLauchlan, who recently conducted his research on a Buraku community in Osaka, living there for 6 months as well as conducting in depth interviews, had similar questions in his mind when he began interviewing 21 Buraku residents in east Osaka, in which the BLL movement is very active in its denunciation actions and media censorship. He found that the residents voiced their opinions on the prejudicial matter and were ready to come up with solutions to the anti-Buraku problem. Their reasoning behind the solutions was mainly “for the sake of their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren and that they think in terms of future generations is a positive sign in itself, in spite of 19 out of 21 predicting that the problem will not be solved in the next 100 years” (McLauchlan, 2003). These suggested solutions will be discussed here while exploring the possibility of whether they can be achieved by the Burakumin themselves, the liberation movements or by the government.

³⁴ Buraku Kaihō Kenkyūjo, 1991 112-113

Figure 1.

| Figure 1 Solving Prejudice -The Residents' Solutions | |
|---|----|
| 1. Get mainstream people in here to see for themselves | 17 |
| 2. Introduce legislation | 16 |
| 3. Blame the government | 17 |
| 4. <i>Buraku</i> people must also change | 5 |
| 5. The liberation philosophy matters | 19 |
| 6. Various messages for mainstream Japan | 63 |

Figure 1 shows the solutions that the 21 residents suggested. According to them, the mainstream Japanese society, the liberation movements as well as the Burakumin themselves should all partake in solving the anti-Buraku problem. The last idea includes messages directed towards members of the mainstream society and will be dealt with and expanded further in the last part of this chapter.

Out of 21 residents, 19 individuals agreed that the philosophy regarding liberation was important. Since the community they resided in was heavily influenced by BLL's theories and instigation, this influenced them in their firm belief in the notion of making the younger generation aware of their past lineage, whilst strongly opposing Zenkairen's „let sleeping dogs lie“ view of letting things slide and hoping people might forget about the discrimination in time, a notion that is evident both among mainstream society and Buraku people. Kitaguchi points out that the problem with the „let sleeping dogs lie“ theory within Buraku communities is that by „identifying yourself as being from the Buraku is to put yourself at a social disadvantage, to be pressured by society and to lose control of your own destiny“ (Kitaguchi, 1999: 68). The reason for which some Buraku parents do not wish to tell their children of their ancestry, might stem from the parents' own experiences of discrimination along with it, their wish for their child will not to share the same bitter experience. Kitaguchi proposes that the only way to pave way for Buraku liberation is to stand proud of their heritage and tackle any problems head-on. One elderly woman from the Buraku residence agreed on that part, saying that „the path to solving the problem is by discussing the problem, openly and accurately, not by hiding it“ (McLauchlan, 2003).

While there is nothing wrong about showing pride in one's own heritage, it is not clear whether that would be enough to solve the anti-Buraku problem. For one thing, the idea of Burakumin being "dirty" and "dangerous" is still heavily implanted in the mainstream Japanese's psyche and it might take more than just discussing the problems for that idea to evaporate. Kitaguchi feels that for that reason "it is absolutely essential to provide primary school children with accurate information about Buraku issues. A society free of prejudice will only come about when all people have a genuine understanding of the history of anti-Buraku feeling, current Buraku circumstances, and the pain and distress felt by people who have been disenfranchised" (Kitaguchi, 1999: 71).

The second proposed solution is closely related to Kitaguchi's opinion as the 17 out of 21 residents emphasised that the mainstream Japanese needed to come to their communities and see for themselves that the Burakumin and their neighborhood are in fact no longer dirty nor dangerous to the public. With all the funds coming from the government, the area in which those Burakumin reside in have become equipped with facilities such as a pre-school facility, swimming pool, youth club, job search service, library, human rights centre, health centre, problem solving counseling and a retirement home and since those facilities were built with money from the government, the general public is free to use those facilities as they like. Q, a 43-year-old male resident expressed his desire for mainstream Japanese to visit them, saying "we want them to visit us, meet the residents and then they will change their minds. You can't just dislike something without trying it and you can't have an opinion about us without seeing us on our turf" (McLauchlan, 2003). However very few people outside the neighborhood visit the Buraku community and McLauchlan adds that the health centre that was built close to the Buraku neighborhood is "so poorly patronized by mainstream residents that it is in danger of closing" (McLauchlan, 2003). There were even events, like a Sunday festival, that the general public would take longer routes to the neighboring park instead of walking through the Buraku neighborhood. Some of the residents have the feeling that the reason why the outside people do not wish to visit their community is because "they would then realize that there is nothing there to discriminate against and they would no longer know how to justify their prejudice" (McLauchlan, 2003). Another hypothesis would be that the public does not want to enter the Buraku premises for fear

of being reprimanded for saying or doing the wrong thing or perhaps they are afraid of being “bombarded by the huge number of aggressive slogans and notice-boards on every available fence and wall” (McLauchlan, 2003) that are provided by the BLL, indicating their demands for liberation and retribution against the discriminators.

It is a great thing to know how much the Buraku communities have changed for the better and are starting to resemble any other regular neighborhood and it would be a big progress for their psychological liberation were the mainstream Japanese come and visit their communities. However for that to be done, most of the Burakumin and the BLL would have to become less threatening and more open to discussions on both ends. In that particular area, it would perhaps be wise to lessen the aggressive slogans, especially the ones indicating retribution against transgressors. It is highly unlikely that people of mainstream society, who perhaps have not participated in any kind of discriminatory actions, would like to step into a Buraku neighborhood where they are being bombarded by slogans saying all members of society should take the blame and repent for what they have done.

There are therefore very few people among the Burakumin that think that it is also up to them to do something about their own actions by helping „to create a better understanding“ (McLauchlan, 2003). According to some of the residents, the main thing was to correct the image that the mainstream Japanese have of them as well as change how the Burakumin tend to accept their own bitter destiny. C, a 32-year-old male resident expressed his opinion as such: „There are some things which so-called *burakumin* have to do to help get rid of prejudice...some of them are just plain lazy. They have got to look at themselves and say “look at me...I’m nothing...I can’t do anything...that’s why I am stuck here like this”. They have got to start looking forwards and helping create a future for themselves” (McLauchlan, 2003). The 4 (including C) out of 5 residents who expressed this particular opinion, turned all out to have received education beyond secondary school³⁵ and seemed to be quite successful in life whilst doing various Buraku youth work. This kind of achievement indicates when given the opportunity, they are able to shake off the stereotypical Buraku image, and that the

³⁵ See McLauchlan’s *Solving Anti-Burakujūmin Prejudice in the 21st Century: Suggestions from 21 Buraku Residents*, table 2

education as well as life experiences they have received have helped them view the problem in another perspective.

However, according to McLauchlan's research those 5 individuals were relatively younger than the rest of the respondents and seeing as since the 1970s the government has been funding Buraku children for the necessary things for school, it is safe to deduce that these 5 individuals were given a better chance to rise in life than the rest. It is true that in order to succeed in life, it is necessary to have the motivation and passion to go through life's hard levels and if most Burakumin have accepted the fact that their lives are doomed to begin with, then the stereotypical image will remain unchanged. Taking this into consideration, there is no need to solely blame the mainstream Japanese and the government for a problem that is partly their fault as well.

Some residents do feel the need to push the blame on to someone else though, namely the government, and hence most of them feel that it is necessary to issue a legislation that will eradicate Buraku discrimination once and for all. 13 of the 21 residents felt that the legislation should be the Fundamental Law that the BLL has been trying to get approved now for over twenty years. The law contains functions that would help benefit the housings of all Buraku areas in the country as well as improving the levels of education and tenure in employment. The legislation would also draw attention to the importance of Buraku discrimination awareness education and enlightenment, where schools, media and literature would become an important part of bringing information to the Buraku problem. The last part and the one that the Buraku residents found particularly important is the legal part, where there would be the possibility of invoking "legal procedures against anti-Buraku personal background investigations and other equally pernicious discriminatory practices" (Kitaguchi, 1999: 176-177). The government so far has not approved BLL's Fundamental laws and there are no signs indicating that they are willing to do so in the near future. McLauchlan assumes that the reason for that is because "such a move would be tantamount to surrender to the demands of a most unpopular, left-wing activist group" (McLauchlan, 2003). The reason BLL is so unpopular in the eyes of the government is probably due to the aggressive denunciations that the BLL has been performing over the past decades.

Legislation of any kind would become a positive factor for the Burakumin, especially in the two parts where the environment and education could be further improved. The problem, however, lies with the legal procedures against anti-Buraku discrimination. There were no further explanations as to what kind of legal procedures discriminators would have to endure and furthermore, what kind of punishment would await them if found guilty. The Fundamental Law was created by the BLL for the liberation of Burakumin but in composing then they neglected to consider the mainstream and what they might think of the law and its repercussions. F, a 37-year-old male resident came with a good solution to this dilemma that would probably become a better option: “Legislation would help the cause, if not by changing the way people behave, then at least with some form of “publicly approved punishment” for transgressors” (McLauchlan, 2003). By communicating with the public about the problem and the Fundamental Law, they might be able to come up with common solution together as a whole. For that, there are certain messages that the Burakumin would like to distribute to the mainstream Japanese.

Figure 2.

| Figure 2. A Message For Mainstream Japan | |
|---|-----|
| We are denied human rights | 12 |
| We are human beings too | 7 |
| Come and talk to us | 15* |
| Mainstream Japanese are victims too | 8 |

Figure 2 above clearly shows that 15 interviewees once again stressed the point that the mainstream Japanese should try to take their time and either communicate with the Burakumin or learn about them in special seminars or textbooks. The information that the outsiders gather are usually false and the BLL claims that the reason why they are given such little information about the Burakumin is because the overall school boards in the country have not really dealt with the issue. History books regarding Japanese history „mention only the *shi-nō-kō-shō* four tiers of the caste system, almost inevitably with no reference at all to the outcast groups of *eta* and *hinin*” (McLauchlan, 2003). Moreover, the Emancipation Edict is not indicated nor the situation of the

Burakumin in the past and how they are suffering in modern times. The correct information that the BLL has gathered over the years has only so far been presented in schools which are relatively close to Buraku areas. The problem lies with how fast-paced society has become. Generally the mainstream Japanese would not have the extra time to attend seminars about the Buraku problem and it is doubtful that they would make extra time for it, unless it would be included within company policies. Furthermore, the mainstream Japanese probably feel that they would not benefit much from it or become confused as they have been under the impression that the Burakumin discrimination had been eliminated a long time ago (McLauchlan, 2003). Perhaps if the third part of the Fundamental Law would be passed, proper education about the Buraku problem would be issued in both schools and companies, therefore distributing accurate information of it.

However, 8 individuals felt that because of the false information that is being spread within the mainstream Japanese society, they in turn become victims of involuntary distribution of social prejudice. They particularly accuse mainstream parents of spreading rumors about the Burakumin to their children, advising them not to approach the Burakumin as well as their neighborhood because they are either “dirty” or “dangerous”. Those rumors are then implanted into the mainstream children and it will come up to the point where they, as adults with families, will forward those rumors to their future generation, thus keeping the cycle alive and active. B, a 33-year-old female resident was rather accurate with her comment on the cycle: “[often] people don’t even realize what they are doing and saying...and they certainly don’t understand the effect they have on other people. How can they...all they are doing is what society has taught them to do. So many Japanese people say and even believe that the problem has been solved, simply because the *buraku* areas have been rebuilt. If they have been misinformed, either deliberately or by accident, can we really blame them?” (McLauchlan, 2003). Hence it is necessary to establish proper education to replace the information that the greater society has taught the mainstream Japanese.

Most Burakumin have gotten the impression that the mainstream Japanese do not realize the gap between them, the gap that makes the mainstream Japanese seem human while the Burakumin are viewed as less than humans, which is demonstrated in the mainstream Japanese’s continued social attitudes that they present towards the

Burakumin. Thus, it is the reason why the Burakumin generally feel that they are denied human rights. On that issue, the 73-year-old male resident called N expressed his lament: “We are Japanese citizens. Surely our human rights need to be protected too. If human rights were a priority in Japan, anti-*buraku* prejudice would be quickly solved” (McLauchlan, 2003). As McLauchlan’s interview research was conducted in 2002 and the Law on the Promotion of Human Rights Education was issued in 2000, it is safe to deduce that human rights programmes have not been progressing that much, especially for Burakumin since these residents still claim that their human rights are continuously violated.

6 Conclusion

After close examination, I can safely say that while the economic conditions of the Burakumin have progressed immensely for the greater good, there is still the problem of social as well as psychological discrimination present in modern day Japan. The Burakumin are still identifiable, no longer because of their occupation, but more by their places of residence, their communities. Even though the national government had been granting the Burakumin financial aid until 2001, it has not been active in assimilating the Buraku neighborhood into the regular ones which causes the Burakumin ultimately to go into hiding from social discrimination. Furthermore, judging from the comments of the 21 residents in east Osaka, the government has not been paying much attention towards human rights programmes as well as whether those programmes are carried out successfully or not. The positive aspects regarding interaction between the Burakumin and the grand majority of Japanese society are present but they are so overshadowed by the negative ones that one can't help feeling sympathetic towards the Burakumin.

It is evident that the younger generation has received a better life conditions due to continuous campaigns from the BLL as well as broadening their horizons by moving out of the Buraku communities, but how will that help the Burakumin to get recognition from the public if they insist on hiding their true heritage? With the situation as it remains today, it is clearly safe to deduce that only a few Burakumin have high hopes for their future.

However introducing legislation would probably be beneficial for the Burakumin but it should not necessarily be the 'Fundamental Law' as it contains the flaw of legal punishments. That new legislation would place emphasis on presenting accurate information of the Burakumin's current situation into public schools and companies nationwide as well as further improve Buraku housing so that they would blend into the general environment. Should it be passed, it might become a stepping stone for the Burakumin's recognition. At this point it is unclear whether those blue tents that I saw in Kyoto will someday disappear and transform into adequate houses for the Burakumin. It seems that the future of the Burakumin will still remain clouded with uncertainty.

Moreover the possibility of ever getting accepted into the mainstream society is still a far-fetched goal but one should never give up hope for something worth believing in.

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