Toward Equality:
Exploring the Dōwa Education's Role in Overcoming Buraku Discrimination in Japan

by

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Abstract

Despite the exact numbers being unknown, the Buraku people (Burakumin) are the largest minority group in Japan. Although the Burakumin are racially and ethnically Japanese, they have long endured discrimination due to their ancestral associations with “unclean” occupations during Japan’s feudal era. Discrimination against the Burakumin has profoundly impacted their lives in various ways. It has led to social exclusion, limited employment opportunities, and restricted access to housing and education. As a result, to address systematic discrimination and promote societal equality, Dōwa education was implemented in 1969. The system of Dōwa education provided support and resources to decrease the educational gap between Buraku communities and the wider Japanese society. Furthermore, as these initiatives required schools to teach about the Buraku problem, it fostered understanding and promoted equality. Currently, the Dōwa education has been considered pivotal in advocating for the rights and social integration of marginalized communities, particularly the Burakumin. However, the persistence of discrimination against the Buraku communities highlights the need for a deeper evaluation of Dōwa education initiatives in its role of eradicating discriminatory attitudes. This paper analyzes the educational value and the effect of Dōwa education implementation within schools. With the complex nature of Dōwa education and its multifaceted implementation, assessing its impact on Buraku discrimination is difficult and requires a nuanced approach that considers various factors.

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Introduction

The discrimination against Buraku people is not as widely recognized by foreigners as are other human rights issues in Japan. This is unsurprising as Japanese people are reluctant to talk openly about this issue, especially to outsiders.[1] However, discrimination against the Burakumin, the largest minority group in Japan,[2] is a known issue for Japanese citizens, especially in regions where Buraku-related problems are historically more prominent.[3] My mother used to tell me how, in her old company, the human resources department would use a book listing Buraku names and addresses to look into people's personal background and avoid hiring anyone from this community. This company practice was commonly used by other corporations as well. The book sold more than 200 copies, most of them bought by many well-known companies.[4] As there was agitation within the country to eliminate anti-Buraku discrimination, this book was "highly confidential,"[5] as the author stated, and was used discreetly. The purpose of such an evil practice came from the many negative stereotypes around the Burakumin, and many people feared the idea of having such people in their environment.[6] Discrimination against Buraku communities persists across various facets of life, such as in housing, marriage, and employment.[7]

In 1969, in response to the historical discrimination faced by the Burakumin in Japan, the Dōwa education system was initiated as a proactive measure to address and rectify the longstanding social biases against this marginalized community.[8] It played a crucial role in educating both the Buraku and non-Buraku children about the problem. Dōwa education was

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[1] Suehiro Kitaguchi and Alastair McLauchlan, *An Introduction to the Buraku Issue: Questions and Answers* (London: Routledge, 1999), 1, https://doi-org.uml.idm.oclc.org/10.4324/9781315073514.

[2] Akira Kobayakawa, "Japan's Modernization and Discrimination: What are Buraku and Burakumin?" *Critical Sociology* 47, no.1 (2021): 111, https://doi-org.uml.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/0896920520915493.

[3] Human Rights Bureau of the Ministry of Justice, *Buraku sabetsu no jittai ni kakaru chōsa kekka hōkoku-sho* [Report on the survey results regarding the Buraku discrimination], June 2020, 106-114, https://www.moj.go.jp/content/001328157.pdf.

[4] Hitoshi Okuda, "Kinkidaigaku to jinkenmondai (2) – 'burakuchimeisōkan sabetsu jiken'-" [Kinki Univeristy and human rights issues (2): Comprehensive list of Buraku area names incident], *Jinkenmondai Kenkyū Shiryō* 19 (March 2005): 58.

[5] Kitaguchi and McLauchlan, *An Introduction to the Buraku Issue,* 158.

[6] Japanese Bankers Association, *Zenginkyō CSR Report* (Tokyo: Japanese Bankers Association, 2015), 2, https://www.zenginkyo.or.jp/fileadmin/res/news/news271207.pdf.

[7] UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), *Concluding Observations on the Combined Tenth and Eleventh Periodic Reports of Japan*, September 26, 2018, CERD/C/JPN/CO/10-11, para. 19.

[8] Noah McCormack, "Affirmative Action Policies Under the Postwar Japanese Constitution: On the Effects of the Dōwa Special Measures Policy," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 16, no. 5 (March 2018): 1-4, https://apjjf.org/2018/5/McCormack.html.

implemented in elementary and middle schools with the specific aim of fostering empathy and understanding among those in schools.[9] After 50 years since the initiation of Dōwa education, we still observe Buraku discrimination in Japan. The Human Rights Bureau of the Ministry of Justice surveyed 10,000 people in 2020. Of these, 3,050 acknowledged that there is still discrimination against the Burakumin. There are many reasons for the persistence of this situation, however the most obvious reason is that people have simply accepted long-standing prejudices and discriminatory attitudes.[10] Accordingly, I would like to suggest that the past narratives and understanding people have regarding the Burakumin have a profound impact on the present way in which the Burakumin are treated. Was the Dōwa education then not effective in eliminating the discrimination against the Burakumin?

This paper will analyze the impact of Dōwa education on addressing and reducing discrimination against the Buraku community in Japan. In order to conduct my analysis, I must first provide a comprehensive account of the Buraku problem. I will do this by examining its historical roots, tracing the evolution of relevant discriminatory practices, and exploring the efforts taken to achieve equality. With a thorough understanding of the historical context of the Buraku problem, I will then examine Dōwa education and evaluate its overall effectiveness and roles. Finally, I will explore the challenges associated with Dōwa education and propose potential solutions.

Section 1: Buraku Problem

According to government data, there are about 4,600 Buraku communities with a population of 1.2 million people.[11] However, further research has estimated that there are about 6,000 Buraku with a further 3 million Burakumin.[12] This discrepancy arises from difficulties associated with identifying who Buraku are as it pertains to both the individuals and the place

[9] Mariko Akuzawa, "Dōwa Education and Reforms in Human Rights Education in Japan: Access, Content, and What's Beyond," *Human Rights Education in Asian Schools* 2 (1999), https://www.hurights.or.jp/archives/human_rights_education_in_asian_schools/section2/1999/03/dowa-education-and-reforms-in-human-right-education-in-japan-access-content-and-whats-beyond.html.

[10] Human Rights Bureau of the Ministry of Justice, *Buraku sabetsu,* 131.

[11] Akira Kobayakawa, "Japan's Modernization and Discrimination: What are Buraku and Burakumin?" *Critical Sociology* 47, no.1 (2021): 111, https://doi-org.uml.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/0896920520915493.

[12] Suehiro Kitaguchi and Alastair Mclauchlan, *An Introduction to the Buraku Issue*, 29 & 30.

where they live.[13] To further understand the origins of Burakumin, we must first discuss the meaning of Buraku in the Japanese language.

1.1 Who are the Burakumin

Initially, the term *Buraku* held a neutral connotation, but its meaning underwent a significant change following the Meiji administration's introduction of the *Tokushu Buraku* (special hamlet).[14] The government adopted this new term to create a distinction for former outcast communities. Today, the term "Buraku" primarily refers to communities where historically discriminated against Buraku people reside, those commonly referred to as "Burakumin."

Despite being the largest minority in Japan,[15] identifying who is or is not a Burakumin poses significant challenges. This complexity arises from their shared racial and ethnic Japanese identity, language, and adherence to cultural and religious practices similar to those of the wider Japanese population.[16] Furthermore, Burakumin are bounded not by external traits but by shared history and collective experiences,[17] making their identification a matter of self-disclosure and shared narratives.[18]

"Burakumin" is a term that emerged in the twentieth century in Japan, serving to classify various socially distinct communities.[19] Social categorization is often influenced by cultural, historical, and societal factors that shape perceptions, interactions, and treatment of different groups within a community.[20] In the case of the Burakumin, they have been discriminated against over a long period due to societal stigmatization arising from their work in occupations historically associated with death, making them "unclean" and "impure." Buraku discrimination is deeply rooted in Japanese culture and is still prevalent even in the modern age.[21] To fully

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[13] Kobayakwa, "Japan's Modernization," 112.

[14] Timothy D. Amos, *Embodying Difference: The Making of Burakumin in Modern Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'I Press, 2011), 22.

[15] Kobayakwa, "Japan's Modernization," 111.

[16] Christopher Bondy, *Violence, Silence, and Self: Negotiations of Buraku Identity in Contemporary Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015), 15.

[17] Amos, *Embodying Difference*, 4-11.

[18] Bondy, *Violence,* 15.

[19] Amos, *Embodying Difference,* 22.

[20] Vivien Burr, *An Introduction to Social Constructionism* (London: Routledge, 1995), 2-4, https://doi-org.uml.idm.oclc.org/10.4324/9780203133026 .

[21] Amos, *Embodying Difference,* 4.

understand the Buraku problem and how discrimination against these people arose, we need to understand how societal perceptions, governmental policies, and cultural biases evolved over time.

1.2 Origins of Discrimination

Different theories exist about these "outcast" communities' emergence and the time period in which they originated. Some claim that society began isolating individuals in tainted occupations, while others contend that those who dropped out of society were forced to work in such occupations.[22]

As early as the Nara period (710-784), death was considered something that could taint society. Those who dealt with dead animals or humans, certain beggars, entertainers, and vagrants were considered "unclean" and "impure" due to religious beliefs. Some occupations, like makers of military equipment, provided necessary services and were cherished by feudal lords,[23] but this did not stop them from being segregated and treated as lower-level members of society.[24] Another theory holds that those displaced due to the internal conflicts in the Muromachi era (1336-1573) were forced to work in low-status jobs like public sanitation, which served to isolate them.[25] Both views are reasonable, as social customs from Japan's ancient and medieval periods created a discriminatory social system.[26]

However, it was only at the start of the Edo period (1603-1867) that discrimination became institutionalized through codification of the caste system.[27] Furthermore, this era is where we see the origin of the burakumin, as they are said to be descendants of the outcast communities created during time of the feudal system.[28]

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[22] Swapna Samel, "Burakumin – A Japanese Marginal Group: Japan's Hidden People Fight to Gain Equality," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 70 (2009-2010): 786, JSTOR.

[23] Mikiso Hane, *Peasants, Rebels, and Outcastes: The Underside of Modern Japan* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 140 & 141.

[24] Keiji Nagahara, "The Medieval Origins of the Eta-Hinin," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1979), 385, https://doi.org/10.2307/132103.

[25] Samel, "Burakumin," 786.

[26] Bondy, *Violence,* 17.

[27] Samel, "Burakumin," 786.

[28] J. Mark Ramseyer, "On the Invention of Identity Politics: The Buraku Outcastes in Japan," *Review of Law and Economics* 16, no. 2 (July 2020): 1-10, https://doi.org/10.1515/rle-2019-0021.

During the Edo period, the country had three social classes: warrior, peasant, and townsfolk.[29] However, the outcasts or those known today as the Buraku people were placed at the bottom of the society as *eta* (much filth) and *hinin* (non-human) classes.[30] People from these outcast communities were butchers, grave diggers, leather workers, sandal makers, and prison workers. Due to their contact with death or ritual impurity, mainstream society often ostracized them at large and avoided personal contact.[31] Strict regulations were imposed, significantly impacting various aspects of their lives. One burakumin shared a story of their ancestors and told how they were not treated as human beings. During this period, it was said that Burakumin were not allowed to leave their villages from sunset to sunrise or associate themselves with the general public. There were restrictions on the type of clothing they were allowed to wear, and they were not allowed to wear any footwear.[32] Marriages were restricted to only within their community[33] in order to keep bloodlines "pure," and Burakumin were also prevented from owning land. Furthermore, Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines were designated exclusively for their use in order to segregate them and further isolate them from society.[34]

Under the Tokugawa administration, people who committed crimes or violated the law and customs were also categorized as *eta* and *hinin.*[35] Consequently Burakumin were forced to share their low and alienated status in society with those considered undesirable. This low status persisted across generations. Descendants of Burakumin still retained their lower social status even if they were employed in "clean" jobs. Accordingly, there remained a large number of people working as farmers, fishermen, weavers, dyers, and laborers who still belonged to the outcast communities of the Burakumin.[36]

Strict segregation and discrimination were heavily encouraged by the government as it helped them to control the masses. This separation between the general population and the *eta*

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[29] Hane, *Peasants, Rebels, and Outcaste,* 141.

[30] June A. Gordon, "The Importance of Nonformal Education in the Success of Dōwa Education," in *Nonformal Education and Civil Society in Japan,* ed. Kaori H. Okano (London: Routledge, 2015), 37, Taylor & Francis Group.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Tetsu Tsuchikata, *Hisabetsuburaku no Tatakai* [The Struggle of the Discriminated Buraku] (Tokyo: Shinsensha, 1973), 11-12.

[33] Hane, *Peasants, Rebels, and Outcaste,* 142.

[34] Gordon, "The Importance of Nonformal Education," 37.

[35] Tomohiko Harada, *Hi-sabetsu no Rekishi* [History of the Discriminated Hamlets] (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbunsha, 1975), 36.

[36] Hane, *Peasants, Rebels, and Outcaste,* 141.

and *hinin* allowed commoners to feel a sense of relief and superiority by knowing of the existence of groups with lower status. Through this hierarchical social stratification, the government created a safety valve for the frustrations felt by commoners for the authorities, and it dissuaded them from planning any uprisings.[37]

1.3 Fight for Equality

In 1871, the feudal system collapsed and following the establishment of the Meiji government, the Emancipation Edict was issued abolishing the *eta* and *hinin*[38], and *allowing* the Burakumin to be treated as *heimin* (commoners) and not as an outcast community.[39] Unsatisfied with the result, the change precipitated many anti-Buraku riots throughout different regions of Japan. Physical attacks were made against Buraku communities, and many lost their lives and homes. Despite these attacks being irregular, the public tried to have the Burakumin go back to their old practices and accept their status as outcasts in the community.[40] For example, in 1874, Buraku communities in Nagano prefecture suffered heavy damage to buildings from a fire, requiring them to borrow money from the main village. However, after a decade of failing to pay back the debt, they were required to make a pledge. According to the terms of the pledge, Burakumin were required to acknowledge that they failed to pay the debt because they were poor. Furthermore, they stated that their only reason for their surviving was due to the village's help, leaving them indebted to the village and thus giving the villagers valid reasons to abuse them like they were lower-class citizens. Efforts to keep Burakumin "in place" were seen in other regions, even as late as 1916. Despite the Emancipation Edict, the marginalized population saw no changes to their living conditions or societal status. Many still lived in the ghettos where they had lived for generations and were labeled as Tokushu Buraku (special hamlets).[41]

Burakumin-focused political movements were formed when the government failed to support or assist in eliminating discrimination. In 1922, the National Levelers Association (*Suiheisha*) was formed.[42] They aimed to improve the living conditions of the Burakumin by

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[37] Ian Neary, *Political Protest and Social Control in Prewar Japan: The Origins of Buraku Liberation* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1989), 20.

[38] Kobayakawa, "Japan's Modernization," 112-113.

[39] Jeffrey P. Bayliss, *On the Margins of Empire: Buraku and Korean Identity in Prewar and Wartime Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013), 81-82.

[40] Hanae, *Peasants,* 143 & 144.

[41] Bondy, *Voice,* 19 & 20.

[42] Samel, "Burakumin," 788.

creating a more inclusive and equitable society while fostering a positive self-identity within the Buraku community.[43] Through their activism, in the 1920s and 1930s improvements were seen as subsidies were given to Buraku communities. However, this beneficence did not last long as the demands of World War II soon became the central issue for Japan, resulting in the dissolution of the *Suiheisha*.[44]

After the war, leaders of the *Suiheisha* met again in Kyoto to form the *Buraku Kaiho Zenkoku Iinkai* (National Committee for Burtaku Liberation), which later became *the Buraku Kaihō Dōmei* (Buraku Liberation League or BLL). The league was joined by socialists and communist parties[45] who demanded three things from the government: 1) support for Buraku areas that were extremely poor due to the government's negligence; 2) increased awareness of Buraku issues through modifications to educational policies; and 3) the adoption of anti-discrimination legislation.[46] Through much effort, the BLL achieved massive advancements in 1965, a year in which the government issued a public report acknowledging that Burakumin were discriminated against because their civil rights and freedoms were being ignored. Furthermore, the report clearly stated that it was the "responsibility of the state" to resolve the problem by creating policies to eliminate discrimination.[47]

As a result of this advocacy, in 1969, the Special Measures Law for Dōwa Projects (SML) was passed, which aimed to: 1) improve living conditions in the Buraku area; 2) increase social welfare; 3) develop industry in farming and fishing; 4) improve working conditions and job stability; 5) improve education quality; and 6) promote activities to protect human rights.[48] Within the first 16 years, the government spent 17.8 billion yen to improve Buraku's housing, business, and education.[49]

1.4 Present Situation

Discrimination is deeply rooted in Japan's history, resulting in a widespread belief that the issue will go away if no one talks about it. In Japan, a well-known phrase, "Neta Ko wo

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[43] Bondy, *Voice,* 22 & 23.
[44] Samel, "Burakumin," 788 & 789.
[45] Ibid, 790.
[46] Bondy, *Voice,* 25.
[47] Nobuaki Teraki and Midori Kurokawa, *A History of Discriminated Buraku Communities in Japan*, trans. Ian Neary (Folkestone, Kent: Renaissance Books, 2019), 238-240, EBSCOhost.
[48] Ibid, 240 and Bondy, *Voice,* 27.
[49] Samel, "Burakumin," 790 & 791.

Okosuna" (Don't wake a sleeping baby) is used to describe people's attitudes regarding the Buraku issue, among others.[50] On this view, people believe that maintaining silence, avoiding discussions, and not addressing the Buraku issue explicitly will prevent the reemergence of the conflict.[51] If this is true, it means that the people who face discrimination are asked to live in secret and endure the pain. Furthermore, the "Don't wake a sleeping baby" theory works only if no one engages in discriminatory behavior, but is this even possible?

Some people also claim that they would not have known about the Dōwa issue if it had not been taught by their school. That said, even if we do not teach them about these issues at school, research shows that people still receive this information.[52] We must understand that people still hold negative attitudes towards the Burakumin, which can be passed down by parents and family members. This would inevitably influence how a child perceives this issue and create a cycle of prejudice.[53] Instead of "keeping the child asleep" and hoping the issue disappears, there is a need to talk about the Buraku problem[54] and provide children with accurate information.[55] Hence, having a human rights education in schools that accurately talks about the Buraku problem is essential. This approach is vital to prevent the perpetuation of negative views towards the Burakumin and break the cycle of passing them on to the next generation. As we will see in the next section, a form of human rights education has been implemented in schools to eliminate Buraku discrimination, but how effective has it been in eradicating the deeply rooted prejudices and fostering genuine understanding for Buraku communities?

Section 2: Human Rights Education in Japanese Schools

People start to learn about collective experiences and behaviors early in life, in places like schools. In Japan, when teachers discuss the Burakumin experience they give students insights into historical discrimination, societal marginalization, and the complexities of identity

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[50] Yasumasa Hirasawa et al., *Dōwa Education: Educational Challenge Toward a Discrimination-Free Japan* (Osaka: Buraku Liberation and Human Rights Research Institute, 1995), 34.

[51] Emily A. S. Reber, "Buraku Mondai in Japan: Historical and Modern Perspectives and Directions for the Future from the Perspective of an American Researcher," *Bulletin of Dōwa*-mondai 20 (1998): 51, https://dlisv03.media.osaka-cu.ac.jp/contents/osakacu/kiyo/DB00000782.pdf.

[52] Despite the majority of people learning about the Buraku issue in schools, it was found that many would also hear about it from family members, friends, coworkers, and neighbors. From Human Rights Bureau, *Report on Survey*, 117.

[53] Kitaguchi and McLauchlan, *An Introduction to the Buraku Issue,* 70.

[54] Reber, "Buraku Mondai," 51 & 52.

[55] Kitaguchi and McLauchlan, *An Introduction to the Buraku Issue,* 71.

formation in a diverse society. However, the absence of this discussion can lead to a significant gap in students' understanding of historical injustices.[56] Hence, as foundational institutions for education and societal development, schools play a crucial role in shaping perspectives and identities, as well as in nurturing inclusive communities. In this section, I will explore and analyze the educational approaches and policies concerning the Buraku community.

2.1 Background in the Japanese Education System

Before the Meiji era (1868-1912), education was only available at *hanko,* an educational facility designated for children of the warrior class, and *terakoya*, a private educational institution open to the general public.[57] As such, individuals from the outcast community were prohibited from acquiring literacy skills and other kinds of training offered by these institutions. In many cases, they faced legal consequences even for learning the alphabet. It was not until 1872 that the Meiji administration introduced a new law inspired by the Western education system to promote equal educational opportunity. The government's educational policy demonstrated success by streamlining compulsory education and ensuring an equitable distribution of job opportunities based on educational attainment. Despite the majority of individuals in Japan striving to optimize their access to education and opportunities for social advancement, the same did not hold true for the Burakumin. [58]

Until 1885, each Japanese community had to rely on its own resources and funding systems to establish schools and staff them with teachers. In the case of elementary schools, despite being compulsory, they had to rely on financial support from the tuition fees paid by the parents as well as funding from the community. Many poor communities found establishing schools with adequate resources challenging. As a result, until the early 20th century some Buraku communities were still known to lack access to educational facilities due to their inability to afford school construction or organize the logistics of educational establishment.[59]

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[56] Christopher Bondy, "Learning About an Identity: Schools and Buraku Youth," *Human Rights Education in Asian Schools 12* (2009): 87-88, https://www.hurights.or.jp/archives/pdf/education12/hreas-12-09-buraku.pdf.

[57] Kaname Yanagisawa, "Historical Background of the Japanese School," in *Schools for the Future: Design Proposals from Architectural Psychology,* ed. Rotraut Walden (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 2015), 41, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-09405-8_3.

[58] Hirasawa et al., *Dōwa Education,* 13 & 14.

[59] Ibid.

From 1885 onwards, the government shifted its policy towards providing subsidies to local governments in order to alleviate the financial strain caused by the increasing cost associated with expanding education.[60] However, eliminating the financial burden of creating schools in every community proved impossible. In response, the government created a new system to accommodate students from neighboring communities in existing school facilities.[61] Faced with this new system, many non-Buraku families expressed concerns about sending their children to the same school as Burakumin. As a response, the government made efforts to segregate schools, so that one might be explicitly for Burakumin children and another for non-Burakumin children.[62] These systems contributed to heightening distrust in schools and education, perpetuating social tensions. In response, some Buraku communities protested the discrimination seen in the educational sector.[63]

In 1908, the government ended the practice of having separate schools for Burakumin children and non-Burakumin children. Despite being able to attend the same school as non-Buraku children, Burakumin were still being placed in segregated classes or were forced to sit in the back rows of classrooms.[64] This continued discrimination within the school environment emphasized persistent societal bias against Burakumin, contradicting the notion of there being equal rights following the abolition of the status system.[65]

2.1.1 Burakumin Children in Schools

In a study conducted during the early 1900s in Hiroshima prefecture, it was found that many Buraku children quickly became targets of insults, taunts, and physical assaults from their peers. In that study, it was revealed that some Burakumin school children had to carry throwing rocks with them when they went to school to protect themselves. Frustration ensued, however, because whenever Burakumin got into fights with non-Burakumin students, their teachers would

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[60] Institute for International Cooperation and Japan International Cooperation Agency, *The History of Japan's Educational Development: What Implications Can Be Drawn for Developing Countries Today* (Tokyo: Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2004), 21, https://www.jica.go.jp/Resource/jica-ri/IFIC_and_JBICI-Studies/english/publications/reports/study/topical/educational/pdf/educational_02.pdf.

[61] Nabeshima, "Features of the Japanese School System," 14.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Hane, *Peasants, Rebels, and Outcasts*, 155 & 156.

[65] Nabeshima, "Features of the Japanese School System," 14.

punish only them while their counterparts faced no consequences.[66] Additionally, Burakumin girls felt inferior due to the poor condition of their clothing, bad feelings that made them prefer to stay at home and take care of their younger siblings.[67] In response to continual teasing from others, Burakumin children felt unsafe and unwelcome, impacting their motivation to attend school. Their academic performance suffered, and their overall educational experience was marked by emotional strain and a sense of exclusion.[68]

With children lacking motivation to attend school and their parents actively keeping them away, the attendance record of Burakumin children has historically been low.[69] While the high school attendance rate for the general population ranged from 60-70% in 1963, only 30% of Buraku children were actually enrolled in high school.[70] By 1973, the situation improved as the total number of Burakumin high school students rose to 64%, but this percentage remained below the national average since the attendance rate for the whole Japanese population was by this time 95%.[71] The community continued to struggle with illiteracy, and unemployment rates remained significantly high.[72] Furthermore, with social status closely tied to educational attainment, disparities in academic achievement often resulted in social stratification. Given the Buraku people's low educational level, they ended up with fewer chances to engage with society generally, leaving their social status unchanged. Mirroring the situation from the Edo era, the Burakumin would remain "outcasts" and see minimal improvements or changes in their life conditions even in contemporary Japanese society.[73]

2.2 Dōwa Education

In August 1942, the Ministry of Education's social education division released "The Path to National Conciliation," which claimed that the Japanese population was not originally formed from a single race but resulted from a blending process, emphasizing unity under the emperor's authority. According to this report, discrimination against the Buraku community had no logical

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[66] Hane, *Peasants, Rebels, and Outcasts*, 156.
[67] Ibid, 156 & 157.
[68] Ibid, 156.
[69] Ibid.
[70] John N. Hawkins, "Educational Demands and Institutional Response: Dōwa Education in Japan," *Comparative Education Review* 27, no. 2 (June 1983): 211, JSTOR.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Kitaguchi and Mclauchlan, *An Introduction to the Buraku Issue*, 14-17.
[73] Nabeshima, "Features of the Japanese School System," 15 & 16.

foundation despite being persistent. In response, the report's authors proposed a new system of "Dōwa Education,"[74] or assimilative education, intended to eliminate discrimination against the Buraku community.[75]

2.2.1 Features of Dōwa Education

The Dōwa Education movement was started by Zendokyo (the National Dōwa Educators' Association) in 1953. This group was founded post-World War Two by teachers who wanted to make education more democratic.[76] In response to the wide educational gap between Buraku children and the general population, teachers of this organization started interviewing people living in Buraku communities, studying their culture and history, and having Burakumin students write about their own experiences.[77] Such measures helped teachers gain a better understanding of Buraku prejudice and the aspirations of the people living in those communities. They started questioning the ideas of "equal educational opportunity" and "democratic education" when teachers noticed how many Burakumin students and parents had pessimistic views of the advantages of education due to their experiences and history of oppression in schools. As a result, many started to demand that Buraku issues and history be taught in schools properly.[78] The Zendokyo declared that such measures would help serve as a conduit for oppressed parents and students to fulfill their educational aspirations.[79] With the efforts made by Zendokyo in 1965, the Japanese government recommended that schools teach about Buraku issues.[80] By 1994, the Ministry of Education required all schools to have classes teaching about Buraku issues, fully and officially institutionalizing the principles of Dōwa education.[81]

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[74] Teraki and Kurokawa, *A History of Discriminated Buraku Communities*, 216 & 217.

[75] Hawkins, "Educational Demands," 205.

[76] Katsumi Fujisaki, "Zendokyo: Japanese Teachers Struggling Against Discrimination," *Human Rights Education in Asian Schools* 7 (2004): 43 & 44, https://www.hurights.or.jp/archives/pdf/asia-s-ed/v07/07Zendokyo.pdf.

[77] Yoshiro Nabeshima, Mariko Akuzawa, Shinichi Hayashi, and Koonae Park, "Japan: Human Rights Education in Schools," *Human Rights Education in Asian Schools* 3 (2000): 29, https://www.hurights.or.jp/archives/pdf/asia-s-ed/v03/04nabeshima.pdf.

[78] "What is Dōwa Education?" Buraku Liberation and Human Rights Research Institute, accessed December 22, 2023, https://blhrri.org/old/blhrri_e/dowaeducation/de_0003.htm.

[79] Nabeshima et al., "Human Rights Education in Schools," 30.

[80] Minoru Mori and Yasumasa Hirasawa, "Dōwa Education and Human Rights," *Human Rights Education in Asian Schools* 1 (1998), https://www.hurights.or.jp/archives/human_rights_education_in_asian_schools/section2/1998/03/dowa-education-and-human-rights.html.

[81] Miki Y. Ishikida, *Japanese Education in the 21st Century* (New York: iUniverse Inc., 2005), chap. 9, http://www.usjp.org/jpeducation_en/jpEdContents_en.html.

Dōwa education is a term that refers to all educational initiatives taken by society to eliminate discrimination against the Burakumin. It is currently regarded as one of the pillars of Japan's extensive human rights education program. However, defining Dōwa education can be difficult as both the government and the Buraku movement appear to differ in their understanding of the goals and motives animating it.[82]

The government perceives Dōwa education as a policy to improve Burakumin's school enrollment, achievement, and educational opportunities.[83] To these ends, the government has improved educational facilities and services under Burakumin's control.[84] It has also funded schools, enabling them to hire extra teachers to decrease classroom sizes and make available supplementary classes for Burakumin students after school. Efforts have also been made to provide financial aid to students from the Buraku community so that they may pursue their high school education.[85] Lastly, the government has distributed educational materials focused on Burakumin history and government efforts to resolve the issue.[86] For their part, Buraku stakeholders have tended to see Dōwa education as a way to democratize society by achieving true equality of opportunity for Burakumin and other marginalized groups.[87] They hoped to improve Buraku children's educational performance in schools,[88] foster critical thinking, learn skills,[89] and encourage community involvement in school settings.[90] The Buraku movement has traditionally seen Dōwa education as a policy that could overcome prejudiced views and promote human rights awareness.

The idea of Dōwa education evolved in such a way that each historical period in which it has been operational has privileged one particular objective over others. For example, in the 1970s, Dōwa education focused on increasing the number of Burakumin students enrolling and attending high schools. However, by the 1980s, its emphasis fell on improving living conditions

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[82] Ibid.
[83] Buraku Liberation and Human Rights Research Institute, "What is Dōwa Education?"
[84] Mori and Hirasawa, "Dōwa Education and Human Rights."
[85] Bondy, *Violence,* 59.
[86] Mori and Hirasawa, "Dōwa Education and Human Rights."
[87] Ibid.
[88] Hawkins, Hawkins, "Educational Demands," 219.
[89] Yasumasa Hirasawa, "Evolution of Dōwa Education and HRE in Japan: 1990s Onwards," *Buraku Liberation and Human Rights Research Institute,* September 2006, https://blhrri.org/old/blhrri_e/dowaeducation/de_0012.htm.
[90] Mori and Hirasawa, "Dōwa Education and Human Rights."

and environments in community education.[91] It is clear to see that the policy has lacked uniformity, despite the Dōwa education being overseen by a single entity, the Ministry of Education. Each school and community has had its own approach and priorities, and has carried out Dōwa education differently, as they saw fit[92]

2.2.2 Successful? Failure?

Measuring the effectiveness of Dōwa education is difficult as there are no straightforward criteria by which to evaluate success. If we consider Dōwa education's ultimate goal to be eradicating discrimination, this objective has yet to show significant success as we still see high levels of discrimination occurring. In recent years, we have witnessed an increase in derogatory and discriminatory content circulating through social media platforms, as well as ill-intentioned efforts being made online to disclose the locations of Buraku communities.[93] However, to eliminate discrimination, it is necessary to acknowledge that multiple factors are involved in causing it. We must also understand that evaluating the success of the Dōwa education is challenging because the outcomes being sought are not always immediately discernable or easily quantifiable, especially when there are numerous variables involved.

Some say that Dōwa education has played a vital role in improving the quantity and quality of educational opportunities for Buraku youth.[94] Since the 1969 Special Measures for Dōwa Projects were passed, the government has made efforts to aid Burakumin and their communities, including providing funding for Dōwa education.[95] Through these actions, the government has assigned additional teachers to be responsible for the Dōwa education, who have prepared programs and workshops, guided Buraku children, taught Buraku identity courses, and helped Buraku students by providing career guidance.[96] As a result, the number of Buraku students attending high schools in Japan has increased.[97] While equal access to education has

[91] Hirasawa, *Dōwa Education*, 9.
[92] Bondy, *Violence,* 58.
[93] "Burakumin (Buraku People), Minority Rights Group International, accessed December 25, 2023, https://minorityrights.org/minorities/burakumin-buraku-people/.
[94] Hirasawa et al., *Dōwa Education,* 44.
[95] Bondy, *Violence,* 59.
[96] Hirasawa et al., *Dōwa Education,* 20-38
[97] Masato Okamoto, "Hisabetsuburaku shusshin seinen ni totte no dōwa kyōiku no kyō-tekina igi — hi daisotsu no hisabesuburaku shusshin-sha kara no kikitorichosa zentai —" [Significance of today's Dōwa education for young people from discriminated against Buraku communities: Complete interviews with non-university

been established, educational attainment and outcomes have not been as equitable. Facing a long history of discrimination, Buraku youth experience low self-esteem and a lack of motivation to attain a better future, leading them to underperform academically.[98]

It is important to acknowledge that Dōwa education has been successful in increasing human rights awareness among non-burakumin students and teachers. For example, a book called *Ningen* found wide use among schools in the Osaka area.[99] This textbook comprises various stories on different equity-related topics, such as people with disabilities, Indigenous people in Japan, and Burakumin. Having a resource such as this available has allowed students to learn about people being discriminated against, thereby helping to develop students' empathy towards these people.[100] Furthermore, the Dōwa education has nurtured students' ability to think critically and communicate with others about their feelings.[101] Traditionally, the common way of teaching the Dōwa issue involved teachers reading handouts and explaining aspects of the topic. However, such a method limited the opportunities for students to engage in meaningful discussions or share their perspectives. Moreover, when students were given the chance to express their thoughts, teachers' lack of acknowledgment or response created an atmosphere where honest interactions were discouraged. Consequently, students came to understand that discrimination was unacceptable but they felt hopeless to combat it.[102] In recent years, many schools have moved away from these instructional methods and begun employing participatory approaches to teaching. In some schools, students are now encouraged to translate their learning into creative genres such as stories and theatrical skits. These participatory teaching methods have motivated students to express their opinions and feelings more openly.[103] Unfortunately, this effective teaching method has not been employed across all of Japan due to the autonomy granted to individual schools when determining how to engage with these issues. In areas without Buraku communities, the development and implementation of effective Dōwa education

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graudates from Buraku communities," *Jinken Mondai Kenkyuu* 19 (2022), 34, https://dlisv03.media.osaka-cu.ac.jp/contents/osakacu/kiyo/24351016-19-31.pdf.

[98] Kitaguchi and McLauchlan, *An Introduction to the Buraku Issue,* 12 & 13.

[99] Hirasawa et al., *Dōwa Education,* 34.

[100] Daisuke Nojima, "Anti-Discrimination Education in Japan: Buraku Sabetsu Simulation," *Human Rights Education in Asia-Pacific* 5 (2014): 97, https://www.hurights.or.jp/archives/asia-pacific/section1/pdf_1/Anti-discrimination.pdf.

[101] Hirasawa, "Evolution of Dōwa Education."

[102] Hideaki Toyama, "Gakusei no dōwa kyōiku no taiken kōryū ni manabu" [Learn from students' experience and exchange with Dōwa Education], *Nihon Kyōiku Gakkai Nenpō* 3 (1994): 129-131, J-Stage.

[103] Hirasawa et al., *Dōwa Education,* 38.

have been slow.[104] In one school in Kuromatsu, for example, despite the teachers' dedication, conducting discussions about Buraku issues was prohibited by the local community as it was seen as extending studies beyond what was covered in the required textbook.[105]

2.2.3 Challenges

The 1969 Special Measures Law for Dōwa Projects was the first national law that aided Burakumin and their community. This law officially supported human rights education, especially Dōwa education. The SML was originally valid for 10 years, but the BLL organized a campaign to extend the law as they believed 10 years was not enough to end Buraku discrimination. As a result, the law was extended for an additional three years in October 1978.[106] Furthermore, with the support from other laws and the recognition of the ongoing importance of addressing the Buraku issue, the SML was extended until 2002,[107] with no intentions to renew it afterward.[108]

With the SML ending, schools found it difficult to sustain and advance Dōwa education due to the government's lack of support and guidance.[109] *Ningen* was no longer printed, forcing practitioners to distribute photocopies in its place. The Osaka governor implemented a policy of cutting back on prefectural government spending in the late 2000s, resulting in less funds being made available for educational initiatives.[110] Furthermore, with the expiration of the SML, teachers no longer had to take any university classes on Buraku issues to obtain a teacher's license, negatively impacting their understanding of and ability to address these issue with students. [111] As a result, teachers in many schools avoided discussing the Buraku issue entirely, fearing that they might say or do something inappropriate.[112]

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[104] Ibid, 45.
[105] Bondy, *Violence,* 60-85.
[106] Kenzo Tomonaga, "The Buraku Liberation Movement and Legislative Measures Towards Elimination of Discrimination – The Japanese Experience," *Buraku Liberation and Human Rights Research Institute*, n.d., https://blhrri.org/old/blhrri_e/article/20110303/article1.htm.
[107] Jefferson R. Plantilla and Kazuhiro Kawamoto, "Remembering the Past: Henomatsu Community," *FOCUS* 97 (September 2019), https://www.hurights.or.jp/archives/focus/section3/2019/09/remembering-the-past-henomatsu-community.html.
[108] Bondy, *Violence*, 59.
[109] Bondy, *Violence*, 59.
[110] Nojima, "Anti-Discrimination," 97.
[111] Ibid, 97 & 98.
[112] Bondy, *Violence,* 57.

The end of the SML also presented challenges to cultivating a comprehensive and inclusive approach toward addressing historical discrimination against the Buraku community. Following its expiration, there was a noticeable shift in societal perceptions and attitudes. To replace it, the national government enacted the Law on the Promotion of Human Rights Education and Human Rights Awareness-Raising (LPHREA) in 2000. Subsequently, in 2002, the government adopted the National Basics Plan,[113] solidifying the nation's commitment to promote human rights education. Through this legislation, schools shifted their focus to teaching about all minority groups, including Burakumin,[114] thereby expanding the coverage of human rights education in a way thought to offer numerous advantages to society. However, this new curriculum should be understood as a double-edged sword: while helping to spread general awareness of other marginalized groups in Japan, it simultaneously decreases emphasis on specifically Buraku issues within educational programs.[115] In many cases such educational generalization falsely conveys the idea that discrimination against the Burakumin has vanished and is no longer a pressing issue.[116] Even upon learning about these issues, some individuals tend to perceive them as irrelevant to their personal lives or wider set of societal responsibilities.[117]

2.4 Moving Forward

Moving forward and in order to make Japanese human rights education more effective, we need to foster an environment where individuals feel empowered to assert their rights without fear or constraints.[118] Unfortunately, Japan is a country that prioritizes maintaining group harmony,[119] with many Japanese believing that staying silent will make problems disappear.

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[113] Jefferson R. Plantilla, "BLHRRI and Anti-Discrimination Education," *Human Rights Education in Asia-Pacific* 12 (2022): 19, https://www.hurights.or.jp/archives/asia-pacific/hreap_v12_experiences1.pdf.

[114] Bondy, *Violence,* 59.

[115] Ibid, 57.

[116] Plantilla, "BLHRRI," 16.

[117] Ichiro Akashi, " 'Dōwamondai o kangaeru': Jinkenmondai-ron no kōgi kara" ["Thinking About the Dōwa Issue": From a Lecture on Human Rights Issues], *Jinken o Kangaeru* 20 (March 2017): 74, CORE.

[118] Sachiko Takeda, "Human Rights Education in Japan: An Historical Account, Characteristics and Suggestions for a Better-Balanced Approach," *Cambridge Journal of Education* 42, no.1 (March 2012): 92, https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2011.651203.

[119] Ibid.

Since Buraku issues are seen as sensitive[120] or taboo topics,[121] the expectation of societal silence has tended to force Burakumin to conceal their identity.[122]

In response, a fundamental shift in societal attitudes is essential. Encouraging open dialogue amongst Japanese and acknowledging historical injustices are crucial to fostering understanding and inclusivity. Creating safe spaces for discussions within educational settings as well as in the broader society is necessary if individuals are to feel comfortable expressing their opinions without fear of judgment. To achieve this comfort, several prerequisites need to be met.

First, the Japanese government needs to reassess the allocation of its resources and consider the most effective way(s) of advancing human rights educational programs. With the elimination of the Dōwa law, local communities had to reconsider their priorities, leading them to end Dōwa education in schools due to budgetary constraints.[123] These constraints can and should be overcome. By reassessing resource allocations and reinstating support for Dōwa education, it would become possible to convey the message that Buraku issues are still important, allowing Burakumin youth to know that they are important as well.

Second, teachers need to become educated about Buraku issues so that they are equipped with the necessary tools to teach about these topics within the broader human rights curriculum. Teachers need to make lesson plans incorporating knowledge about the Buraku that are accessible for all ages. It is sometimes claimed that teaching Buraku issues to children is too difficult,[124] but experience shows that human rights education can encourage critical thinking and empathy from an early age, laying the groundwork for a more compassionate and equitable society.[125]

Lastly, implementing Dōwa education uniformly across schools in Japan is crucial and requires collaboration between schools, Buraku communities, and the government. As stated earlier, teaching about Dōwa issues varies across schools. This inconsistency has resulted in different levels of educational effectiveness across Japanese schools. Furthermore, the current

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[120] Bondy, *Violence,* 124.

[121] Emika Terashima, " 'Sabetsu no genjitsu shitte hoshī' Yamaguchi-ken jinken keihatsu sentā Kawaguchi Yasushi-san" ["I want people to know the reality of discrimination" Yasushi Kawaguchi, Yamaguchi Prefecture Human Rights Awareness Center], *Asashi Shimbun*, March 3, 2022, https://www.asahi.com/articles/ASQ335WNZQ2XTZNB010.html.

[122] Bondy, *Violence,* 124 & 125.

[123] Ibid, 130 & 131.

[124] Ibid, 124.

[125] "Human Rights Education for, with and by Youth," United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, October 6, 2022, https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2022/10/human-rights-education-and-youth.

challenges lie in the fact that, even when students learn about the problem, they may dismiss it as they believe it is not a concern relevant to their lives.[126] Therefore, there is a need to reevaluate Dōwa education by examining the accuracy of content, the impact on students' attitudes, and the methodologies being used to teach the issue. To enhance the effectiveness in instilling a sense of responsibility among students to combat discrimination in society, schools also need to actively engage in exchanging ideas, methodologies, and successful teaching approaches with other schools and Buraku communities. One potential method for this collaboration could be by establishing workshops where teachers from various regions and schools come together. In these workshops, teachers could share their best practices in teaching about Buraku issues. Furthermore, to foster the discussions and provide authentic perspectives, these workshops could be led by members of the Buraku communities, such as the BLL or the Buraku Liberation and Human Rights Research Institute. The government shall make all the necessary efforts to make this a reality by providing support, resources, and a conducive framework to ensure the success of the workshops. This collective exchange of ideas will contribute to enabling the government to develop a unified curriculum that is appropriate, accurate, and fosters a shared understanding. However, when weighing these options, the government also needs to consider how it will implement Dōwa education in areas lacking Buraku communities, or where discrimination against other minority groups is more common.

Conclusion

The examination of Dōwa education's impact on addressing and reducing discrimination against Japan's Buraku community reveals a complex narrative complete with achievements and failures. On one hand, such education has played a vital role in decreasing the knowledge gap between Buraku children and non-Buraku children. Additionally, it has raised awareness and fostered empathy among the younger generation. The educational initiatives have undoubtedly contributed to a more informed student population and allowed them to discuss these issues. On the other hand, ongoing discrimination underscores the intractability of deeply ingrained societal

[126] Kumamoto Prefecture Human Rights and Dowa Issue Division, *Jinken kenshū tekisuto dōwamondai (Buraku sabetsu) hen: Jibun ni kakawari no aru koto to shite dōwamondai (Buraku sabetsu) o kangaeru [Think about the Dōwa issue (Human rights training text on Dōwa issue (Buraku discrimination) ediction :Buraku discrimination) as something that concerns you],* 2018, 14, http://www.kenshu-kumamoto.jp/news/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/人権テキスト同和問題編）.pdf.

biases that persist even after decades of implementing the Dōwa system. Furthermore, there remain questions about the extent that Dōwa education was effective following the expiration of the 1969 Special Measures Law for Dōwa Projects. Terminating this law disrupted the continuity of efforts made by some schools, leading to financial constraints, reduced resources, and a decline in teachers who were educated enough to teach properly about Buraku issues.

With Dōwa education contributing to increasing awareness for various marginalized groups in Japan, it is crucial not to overlook the need for further actions to enhance the system's effectiveness. There continues to be a need for governments to reassess their funding allocations in order to advance educational programs. Teachers need to be educated on the problems they are teaching about, and there should be more standardized teaching of the Buraku problem across schools to guarantee consistency in addressing discrimination. As we move forward, we must understand that the continued evolution and effectiveness of Dōwa education requires collective dedication, further research, and a commitment to address and overcome any limitations. Through such efforts, Dōwa education can genuinely nurture a well-informed, empathetic society devoted to eradicating discrimination.

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