

Changing Patterns of Discrimination in Japan: Rise of Hate Speech and Exclusivism on the Internet, and the Challenges to Human Rights Education

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Abstract

Patterns of discrimination against the minorities have been changing in Japan owing to the rise of hate speech groups and online exclusivism. One distinguished feature among the new groups is the active involvement of the “lost generation”, who are in their 30’s and early 40’s. Their racist belief is based on the strong sense of “inverted victimhood”, claiming that minorities are wrongfully enjoying privileges, and therefore, depriving their rights. The internet provides them with the power to disseminate their ideas to millions, which in turn compensates for their sense of being victimized. The younger generation are susceptible to their racist discourse, especially on the internet, unless there is effective intervention in Japanese schools. Educators are tasked to address the new forms of racism through human rights education.

Keywords

anti-discrimination education, human rights education, hate speech, exclusivism on the internet, racism, minorities, inverted victimhood.

Patterns of discrimination towards the minority groups have recently been changing in Japan. Hate speech groups and the groups that incite discrimination on the internet have become prevalent over the past decade. This period coincides with the time after the end of the *Dowa* Special Measures Laws, which acted as strong legal measures to promote anti-discrimination education in schools. The rise of new patterns of discrimination poses new challenges to human rights educators.

The prevalent racist groups that target the following minorities, chiefly *Zainichi* (permanent resident) Koreans and *Buraku* communities (both the communities and the people of Buraku origin), have several commonalities among them. First, even though classical prejudice and stereotypes towards the minorities are still alive in their discourse, these groups also adopt new forms of expression that contain political elements. They insist that minorities had been given too much under preferential policies, therefore, they are the ones who are discriminated against in the society. Second, the founders and leading members of these groups belong to the same generation, in their 30's and early 40's. Although they were brought up with strong anti-discrimination education in schools, they criticize and challenge such education, even saying that their discriminatory expression is their freedom of speech, that they are simply enjoying human rights. Third, the groups maximize the use of the internet to propagate their racist beliefs, as the founders also belong to the "digital native generation", fully acquainted with its functions and impacts on a large audience.

On the other hand, schools and teachers are not yet prepared to face these changes. Many teachers are hesitant to touch upon the issues in the classrooms, especially being afraid of misleading students by informing them about the aforesaid websites. The younger generation is therefore susceptible to abusive expressions and information they encounter outside schools.

Considering the strong need to address changing racism through education, this paper primarily analyzes why such changes took place, chiefly through examining the activities of two dominant racist groups, *Zaitokukai* and *Tottori-Loop*. Generation is a key factor of the analysis, as the changes in educational policies and practices in schools of respective periods impacted on the attitudes of particular generations, including those who founded the groups. In addition, the paper modestly tries to situate the changes in a broader context, comparing the racist claims in Japan with other forms of

discourse of populism and racism.

Background Overview: Changes in Educational Policies in Japan

Human rights education in Japan traces its roots back to the anti-discrimination education in the post-war period, known as *Dowa* education. It was strongly promoted under the *Dowa* Special Measures Laws (1969-2002), which created temporary statutes to implement affirmative action measure for the disadvantaged *Buraku* communities.¹ Under the laws, anti-discrimination education was institutionalized in schools with the support of the Ministry of Education and the local boards of education.

Shortly before the termination of the last special measures law, the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004) became a new vehicle to continue anti-discrimination education. The Government adopted a national plan of action in 1997, and some five hundred local governments adopted plans of action. Such enthusiasm stemmed from the need for a new framework that would continue government support for anti-discrimination education.

On the other hand, a stronger legal basis was needed, as the UN Decade did not have any binding force. In this light, the Law on the Promotion of Human Rights Education and Human Rights Awareness-Raising (LPHREA) was enacted in 2000. However, the new domestic law ironically led both national and local governments to give less attention to the international framework for human rights education. In the meantime, the practice of anti-discrimination education substantially weakened since the end of the special measures law in 2002, which will be later explained more in detail.

Japan's inward-looking political environment was reinforced with the change of the ruling party (Liberal Democratic Party) in 2012. The LDP government decided to bring moral education back as an official subject at primary and secondary schools in 2018 and 2019 respectively. Moral education is strongly supported by the present Cabinet. Part of their agenda is a return to traditional values and building "beautiful Japan". This has already led to giving less attention to human rights education in schools. Weakening of anti-

¹ *Buraku* is defined as a Japanese minority descended from an outcast group of feudal times, and their communities of residence. Although *Buraku* and *Dowa* are the almost equivalent terms, *Dowa* is the official term used by the government.

discrimination and human rights education combined with more emphasis on moral education, may partly account for the strengthening of nationalistic views among many racist groups.

The Two Groups: “*Zaitokukai*” and “*Tottori-Loop*”

(1) *Zaitokukai*

The *Zainichi Tokken o Yurusanai Shimin no Kai* (literally means “citizens’ league to deny the privileges of residential Koreans in Japan”), popularly known as *Zaitokukai*, is a far-right group that opposes granting any special rights to *Zainichi* Koreans, who trace their roots back to Korea under Japanese rule.² Current membership of the group reaches over 16,000 according to their website. However the number could be inflated as anyone can be a member by a single click after entering one’s e-mail address on their website.

The group’s first large attack targeted the K-6 Korean School in Kyoto, three times between 2009 and 2010. The group hurled abusive and intimidating words in front of the school and disturbed school activities. The traumatic experience caused prolonged psychological impact on children. The group not only damaged school facilities, but also ruined its credibility. The school filed a damage suit against *Zaitokukai*, and the legal fight took more than four years before the Supreme Court finally ordered the group to pay 12 million yen in damages in 2014.

The supporters of the Korean school also became the subject of attack. The former secretary general of Tokushima prefectural branch of Japan Teachers’ Union, a Japanese women, became the target of racist attacks, as the Union provided financial aid to the Korean School. Sixteen members of *Zaitokukai* and other racist groups entered the Union’s office in April 2010, insulted and threatened her over the loudspeaker, shouting “fraud”, “traitor”, and “execution”. The group even repeated the assault on the street. The High Court judge said that the act was undoubtedly based on racist ideology, and ordered the group to pay 4.36 million in damages in November, 2016.

The hate speeches targeted both specified individuals and institutions, as well as the ethnic group as a whole. The Japanese civil and penal codes however,

2 Although *Zaitokukai* chiefly attacks Koreans, the target of their xenophobic insults also includes other minorities, such as Chinese and *Buraku* communities.

are only applicable to the former, as Japan still places a reservation on article 4(a) and (b) of International Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD). As the racists attacked specified subjects in both cases above, the victims could file civil law suits. On the other hand, most racist demonstrations targeted the Koreans as a whole, without specifying individuals or institutions, marching on the streets of towns with a large numbers of Korean residents, such as Shin Okubo in Tokyo, Kawasaki in Kanagawa, and Tsuruhashi in Osaka.

Along with the rallies, *Zaitokukai* uses the internet as a medium for spreading their racist ideas. Formerly, the group posted video footage of their demonstrations on video-sharing sites including YouTube. However, many of them were deleted in 2016, upon the request from the Ministry of Justice since the anti-hate speech law has been effective in June 2016. Although the law does not ban hate speech nor set a penalty, at least it condemns discriminatory language as “unforgivable”.

While the group utters xenophobic rants on the streets, their claims also contain social and political elements. The group claims that Koreans are given special privileges such as permanent residency; it is much easier for Koreans to receive public livelihood assistance; Koreans abuse their “pass names” (Japanese style names used in public) to escape from paying taxes, etc. The list of claims continues, yet most can be easily refuted.

(2) *Tottori-Loop*

While *Zaitokukai* promotes their racist beliefs through rallies on the street as well as through information activities on the internet, *Tottori-Loop*,³ the group that incites discrimination against *Buraku* communities, entirely concentrates on information activities. The group opened their website in 2005. They explain that their objective was to break the taboo of discussing the issue of *Buraku* discrimination. The group quarries its information in the books (including human rights education resource books), articles, research reports, and administrative information that may lead to identifying the location of *Buraku* communities, and discloses this information on the internet. In addition, they have brought several actions against local governments, demanding information on the location of *Buraku* communities where the

3 Tottori is the name of the prefecture, where the founder of the group comes from. It is located in the westernmost region (*Chugoku*) of the main island of Japan.

past *Dowa* projects were implemented. They criticize the “privileges” granted to *Buraku* communities under the special measures laws, and insist that it is tax-payers’ right to know the location of them.

At the beginning of 2016, *Tottori-Loop* disclosed a “*Buraku* communities list” on the internet which contained a nationwide list of all the names and locations of *Buraku* communities, and other demographic information. The list could be compared against one’s address or family registry to examine his/her connection to *Buraku* communities, and used for discriminating a person in time of marriage or employment. The group obtained the list in an old government report, which they found in a public library where the librarians mismanaged and released the report. The group also announced the publication and sales of the list on the Amazon website, saying that the old government report was no longer protected under the copyright.

In fact, the group imitated an incident that took place in 1975, when the underground publication and sales of “*Buraku* communities lists” by detective agencies was discovered. More than two hundred major companies and institutions who purchased the list for the purpose of screening the job applicants were denounced by the *Buraku* Liberation League, and forced to promise taking anti-discrimination measures in their institutions. The revised Employment Security Act later prohibited collection of any personal information that might lead to discrimination. Some local ordinances banned detective industry to offer background checks for finding a person’s ancestral link to *Buraku* communities. Thereafter a public consensus was reached that disclosing the names and locations of *Buraku* communities was socially unacceptable, until *Tottori-Loop* broke the rule.

Tottori-Loop claims that secrecy created taboo. However, their disclosure of the list inevitably incurs abuse, when many people still check on their future in-laws before marriages, and make secret inquiry before renting or purchasing a house.

The court issued a provisional disposition order to the group to stop publication and delete the list from the website shortly after the disclosure. However the list is still available, as the mirror sites were created by unidentified third parties. It is absolutely impossible to delete the discriminatory information once uploaded on the internet.

Besides the list of *Buraku* communities, the group disclosed many other

sensitive information, including a name list of local *Buraku* activists, common family names of particular *Buraku* communities, and their maps. The group also published reports of “field visits” to many *Buraku* communities with pictures that identify exact locations.

Meanwhile, the group’s use of the Wiki system in disclosing the list created another problem. As the Wiki system allows multiple participants to edit the website, more information has been added by unknown parties on the group’s website to more accurately identify the locations of *Buraku* communities.

Tottori-Loop said that they do not violate human rights, as they only disclosed names of communities, but not the individual “human” names. They carefully avoid insulting language, and insist that *Buraku* discrimination no longer exists.

Discussion

(1) The role of the “lost generation”

These two racist groups have some similarities. The founders and leading members of both groups are currently in their 30’s and 40’s, and finished compulsory education when the *Dowa* Special Measures Laws were still in effect. Although they were in schools when anti-discrimination education was strongly promoted, they are now challenging such education by using “rights languages” that they learned in schools, such as, their racist expression is their freedom of speech. This shocks many human rights educators.

While the groups rail at the minorities, they have “victim mentality” in common. They share a strong sense of being a minority unrepresented and marginalized in the mainstream Japanese society, saying that the minorities are enjoying too many rights while they are not.

In fact, the founders and the leading members of the groups also coincide with the “Lost Generation” in Japan, graduated from high schools or colleges during 1994–2004, so-called “employment ice age”. This was the hardest period for job seekers after the Japanese economic bubble collapsed, and many of them have suffered from insecure working conditions as non-regular workers. As Ito noted, attacking minorities may help them restore their own dignity. (Ito, 2014)

(2) “Victim mentality” in populism and racism

The strong sense of “inverted victimhood”, on the one hand, implied a zero-sum view of citizenship. *They think if the rights of “us”, the majority, are declining, the reason of this decline must be that “they”, the minorities* (Morris-Suzuki, 2015). Thinking in this way, the groups both abandon their possible social ties with people with different views, and give up on democratic approaches to the solution of their own problems.

The groups’ exclusionary discourse, in its construction of “otherness”, establishes out- and in- groups and overlaps with the ways that identitarian populism affects youth in Europe. (Lazaridis, Konsta, and Lee, n.d.)

On the other hand, their manner of justifying discrimination as a concern for justice has similarities with “modern racism” as in the United States. (McConahay, 1981) This is composed of beliefs, such as that racism is no longer a problem, and that minorities (African Americans) should make an effort to overcome their difficulties without special assistance (affirmative action). Considering that the theory came about after the civil rights movement, the discourse of modern racism especially overlaps with the claims of *Tottori-Loop*, which severely criticize the affirmative action projects for *Buraku* communities.

(3) Impact on the younger generation

While the founders belong to the “lost generation”, participants of the rallies of *Zaitokukai* are from a variety of age groups, including young students. The youngest participant witnessed was a lower secondary school girl, who called for the massacre of *Zainichi* Koreans during an anti-Korean protest in Osaka in 2013. (Daily Mail Reporter, 2013) Since the ordinary activities of *Tottori-Loop* are limited to the dissemination of information on the internet, there is no way of identifying the ages of those involved. However, a case has been reported in which college students used the “*Buraku* communities list” from the group’s website to examine whether their friends were connected to *Buraku* communities or not. (Kaiho Shinbun, 2016: 7)⁴

The few reports available are not enough to prove that the young students are particularly susceptible to discriminatory discourse. However, the following

4 “Hollowing out of Dowa Education.” Kaiho Shinbun (Newspaper published by Buraku Liberation League) September 12, 2016. p.7 (Japanese)

data from a student attitude survey shows the changes in anti-discrimination education in schools have created an environment in which the young students easily come under the influence of such discourse.

The survey was conducted by the Kyoto Human Rights Research Institute in 2014 of 2,867 college students mostly in the *Kinki* region.⁵ Whilst 71.3% students “learned about *Buraku* discrimination in schools”, 87.4% replied that they did not know anyone with *Buraku* origin.⁶ They learned and knew about *Buraku* discrimination, yet they had no encounter in person. (公益財団法人世界人権問題研究センター, 2015: 117) As such, the understanding of *Buraku* among youth has become very abstract. For the young generation, the *Buraku* discrimination is becoming a problem of somebody somewhere.

This result can be explained as an outcome of the end of *Dowa* Special Measures legislation. When these laws were in effect, *Buraku* communities were designated under the laws as recipients of *Dowa* projects, and empowerment and coming-out of the communities and individuals with *Buraku* origin were preconditions for designation. School teachers played a key role in the empowerment of *Buraku* children and in anti-discrimination education, through close collaboration with home, community and school. However, after the end of the special measures legislation, most schools stopped teaching anything that might lead to identifying *Buraku* communities or persons with *Buraku* origin. Based on their bureaucratic judgement, as there were no longer designated communities under the law, it was wrong to identify them without a legal foundation. (Akuzawa, 2016) Obviously, “coming-out” (self-disclosure of one’s identity) is different from “outing” (disclosure of one’s identity from outsiders without one’s consent), and the teachers are afraid of being accused of outing. As a result, many schools stopped programs such as fieldwork, or inviting speakers from local *Buraku* communities, which were previously popular in many schools.

Moreover, identity construction of *Buraku* children has also been weakening, along with the decline of local youth activities which, under *Dowa* legislation,

5 *Kinki* region refers to an area in western Japan. The research was conducted in colleges mostly in *Kinki* region (Osaka, Hyogo, Kyoto, Shiga prefecture), and one exception in Tottori prefecture in Chugoku Region.

6 The respondents were asked to choose from four alternatives; “I have a close friend” (3.0%), “I have a casual acquaintance” (7.0%), “I have my family and relatives” (1.0%), and “I do not know anyone personally” (87.4%). No answer was 1.2%.

was promoted by *Buraku* liberation movement to encourage *Buraku* children to proclaim their identity. *Tottori-Loop* took advantage of those changes in schools and communities.

As a result of the changes in education, students now only learn about *Buraku* discrimination as a piece of abstract knowledge. Without encountering real people and real communities, the “*Buraku* communities list” is nothing more than a list of community names, with no human face on it. It may be psychologically easier to abuse the abstract images of the minorities without suffering the pangs of feeling guilty.

(4) Multiple effects of the Internet

The anonymity of cyberspace may also remove a psychological barrier to abusing minorities, as perpetrators feel that they will not be discovered. (Gagliardon et. al., 2015) In fact, previously there were millions of unidentified online right-wingers who attacked *Zainichi* Koreans, and *Zaitokukai* succeeded in organizing them through the internet. *Tottori-Loop* invited many anonymous contributors of discriminatory information through the Wiki system. The anonymity, enhances the level of fear for the victims, as the perpetrators are unknown. (Anderson and Strum, 2007) Anonymity in cyberspace has a strong impact on the psychology of the minorities hindering them from disclosure of their identity, which makes the minorities even more invisible in the society.

The other distinctive feature of the new groups is their massive use of the internet, taking into consideration its influence on an audiences unlimited in no time at all. The founders of the groups are “digital natives” able to maximize its use.

The internet, in addition, makes it easy for them to reach the younger generation, as the possession of cell-phones is common among youth. According to government statistics (2016), 60.9% of students of lower secondary school owned cell-phones, while it was 96.7% among upper secondary schools do so. (Cabinet Office, 2016) Besides accessing racist websites young people can easily become a part of racist activities by retweeting the racist tweets through a personalized interface.

The reason for the heavy use of the internet among racist groups may lie in its power to compensate for their sense of victimhood and disempowerment.

With the help of the internet, the racists can express their claims and frustration, and advance their initiatives.

It is also argued, by Suriyawongkul (2016) for instance,⁷ that the power of the internet distorts the social contract theory of human rights. He suggests that the internet creates an illusion for its users in that they become power holders through the purchase of “freedom of speech” from service providers. At this point, the right to free speech is no longer understood as a human right, but as a subject of possession by a commercial contract. Making political claims on the internet is not an exercise of democracy but the simple action of a consumer. The idea of human rights and democracy is now being threatened along with the changing pattern of discrimination on the internet.

Conclusion: Challenges to human rights educators

The rise of hate speech and exclusivism on the internet came along with the weakening of anti-discrimination and human rights education. Countering these new forms of discrimination becomes an important task for human rights educators in Japan.

Educators need to prevent racism by teaching what racism is, where it comes from, and why it threatens our society and democracy, and most importantly what true respect for human dignity is, not as a piece of knowledge but through the enjoyment of encounter and interaction with the minorities.

In the meantime, intervention to overcome prejudiced attitudes is equally important. However, repeating the old messages of anti-discrimination education may not work effectively for the younger generation, as those in the new racist groups hold a strong sense of “inverted victimhood”. An ordinary message such as, “don’t discriminate against minorities”, may not appeal to them as the groups are convinced that the minorities are already overprotected.

Educators need to seek the root cause of rising racism, who the people inciting hatred are, and why they act thus, as the resentment of racist groups in Japan is connected to the difficulties they have been through. However, *this type of research, unfortunately, is still marginal.* (Gagliardon et. al., 2015: 12)

7 From the presentation made by Arthit Suriyawongkul from Thai Netizen Network, at Plenary III: Cyberspace and Human Rights, at the 4th International Conference on Human Rights and Peace and Conflict in Southeast Asia, at Bangkok, Oct. 12, 2016.

Expressing resentment by constructing “otherness” divides the society, but it is becoming popular in recent elections in Europe as well as in the recent presidential election in the U.S.A. Japan is no exception either. The former leader of *Zaitokukai* also run the Tokyo gubernatorial election in 2016. Racist discourse that creates political “otherness” is now having an adverse impact on the democracy.

The internet also poses another challenge to the educators. It is now a source of power for the racist groups. However, inciting hatred in cyber space does not necessarily bring the solution to their own problems in the ir daily lives. The most critically needed is the empowerment of the young generation to enables them to deal with, and participate in, the real society through the democratic process. Ending racism starts from education, and it is all the more important to pass on democracy to coming generations.

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日本歧視形態的轉變： 仇恨言論的興起、網路中的排外風 潮、以及人權教育面臨的挑戰

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摘要

在日本，由於仇恨團體以及網路上排外風潮的興起，針對少數族群的歧視在形態上出現轉變。這些新興團體有一個明顯的特徵，即三十多歲、四十歲出頭，所謂「失落的一代」，在其中極為活躍。其種族主義的根源，來自於強烈的「反向性被害意識」（inverted victimhood）。他們認為，自身權利受到剝奪，起因於少數族群獲得了不應該擁有的特權。他們透過網際網路將觀點散佈給廣大民眾，藉以撫平自身的受害意識。如果學校不作有效的介入，年青的一代十分容易受到這些種族言論——尤其透過網路散佈——的影響。教育工作者有必要借助人權教育，來處理這類新形態的種族主義。

關鍵字

反歧視教育、人權教育、仇恨語言、網路上的排外風潮、種族主義、少數族群、反向性被害意識
