1. In recent years American journalism has, on more than a few occasions, taken up the issue of the Buraku. Unfortunately, their coverage consistently betrays a certain slant in that they fail to look at the people engaged in the struggle against discrimination.

In the spring of 1988, a Bay Area TV station, KTSF, aired a program called “Japan.” A five minute segment was devoted to the “Buraku issue.” The manner in which this issue was presented was a good example of the general approach taken by the American media.

In an attempt to clarify the features of Japanese society that have contributed to Japan’s economic success, they focused on the traditional emphasis on academic achievement, the competitive drive for admission to the most prestigious universities, and the regime of after school tutoring and coaching initiated at an early age.

As evidence of the accumulation of stress in such a high pressure environment, the report noted the phenomenon of harassment and bullying, increasingly evident among Japanese schoolchildren. This led into the introduction of the Buraku issue as an example of bullying on a larger social scale. In this way the Buraku issue was treated as a symbol of the contradictions inherent in Japanese society; this report, like many others in the American media, represented no actual concern with the Buraku issue itself. It is
not surprising, therefore, that no attempt was made to examine the ways in which the Burakumin are fighting discrimination.

Certainly one can take no exception to outside observers showing overall interest in Japanese society, its economic structure and cultural characteristics. However, there is a very sharp difference between taking an interest in the Buraku and other minority issues in order to understand the society as a whole, and studying Japanese social structure and cultural traits in order to understand the Buraku issue.

I have chosen to take the latter approach. I believe that we should concern ourselves with the following points:

1. What forms of discrimination exist in Japanese society?
2. In what ways are people struggling to eradicate these forms of discrimination?
3. What kind of struggles have proved to be effective?
4. From the viewpoint of those subjected to discrimination, what are the most crucial issues confronting Japanese society, and what forms of social change are needed?

The above questions will provide the focus as we examine the movement for Buraku liberation.

2. Special Features of the Buraku issue

An important feature of most minority issues in Japan is that of invisibility. One cannot watch passersby on the street and identify any particular individual as being a Burakumin. One cannot spot members of the Korean minority by outward appearances. The same is true for Okinawans. In the United States one can easily identify Blacks, Asians, Hispanics, and Caucasians.
lack of ready identification of minorities in Japan means that
discrimination appears in some different forms than in the United
States. One of the most characteristic forms of discrimination in
Japan involves the exposure of an individual’s Buraku status. In
the course of daily conversation, someone might raise four fingers
on one hand and ask, “Do you think he might be one of them?” The
four fingers are a traditional euphemism for Burakumin. The use
of this euphemism implies three things:

1. To even speak aloud of someone’s Buraku status is
to risk defilement.
2. Such a person is to be despised.
3. The use and understanding of the euphemism itself
is an affirmation of solidarity and belonging in the
social majority.

Therefore, raising four fingers on one hand means much more
than just the identification of Burakumin. Many Burakumin have
experienced the shock of hearing of friends and colleagues using
this expression and realizing the persons they trusted actually
harbor prejudiced attitudes toward the Buraku.


Due to the invisibility of the Buraku, the liberation movement
has pushed forward its struggle in two directions that, at first
glance, might seem contradictory. One, which we call Strategy A,
is to openly declare one’s identity and pride as a Burakumin. The
other, Strategy B, is to thoroughly denounce any efforts by outside
parties to investigate and expose anyone’s Buraku status. These
two courses of action, though seemingly contradictory, actually
interact to create a more effective movement.
4. Strategy A - Burakumin Pride

This can best be illustrated with concrete examples:

(1) In schools that have adopted educational programs for Buraku liberation, “Burakumin Declarations” are included in the curriculum. Starting in intermediate school classes, individuals openly proclaim their Burakumin origins, talk about the discrimination experienced by Burakumin and make an appeal for understanding. Because of the negative image of Burakumin held in today’s Japanese society, this is not an easy thing to do. Due to the outward invisibility of the Buraku minority, many Burakumin believe that so long as their origins go undiscovered, they will not be subject to discrimination. However, hiding one’s identity from others can present an enormous psychological burden. In order to free themselves from this psychological stress and eliminate discrimination from society, it is imperative that they openly declare that they are Burakumin. Even so, it cannot be denied that clear identification of their Buraku status can leave them open to outright discrimination. Therefore, when encouraging Buraku declarations in the classroom, liberation education must encourage pride and self-respect in Buraku students and create a classroom environment in which no forms of discrimination are tolerated. Burakumin declarations are a big step in building in Buraku youth the kind of self esteem and self reliance that will not give in to discrimination. At the same time, the non-Buraku students learn to reject discrimination against their Buraku classmates, and gain a sense of their own personal responsibility to help create a society free of discrimination.

(2) Buraku school children are also encouraged to take part in
the movement protesting the notorious "Sayama Incident." Buraku students in Elementary, Middle, and High Schools across the nation have boycotted classes in coordinated demonstrations, proclaiming the innocence of Kazuo Ishikawa. By leafletting and holding rallies outside their school gates, these students are openly acknowledging their Buraku status. To declare their faith in Ishikawa's innocence and take part in these protests requires no small amount of resolve on the part of these young Buraku students. It's not an easy step for any of them. Even so, in May of 1976, as many as one hundred thousand schoolchildren nationwide joined in boycotting classes.

(3) The Burakumin in the city of Osaka developed a comprehensive program for Buraku liberation. This program included plans

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1 In May of 1963, a high school-age girl was abducted and murdered in Sayama City in Saitama prefecture. The local police, after failing to apprehend the suspect that showed up to collect the ransom money, was widely criticized by the press and public. In a bid to restore their reputation, the police targeted the local Buraku community and arrested Kazuo Ishikawa. Ishikawa protested his innocence and staged a thirty-day hunger strike in prison. A detective of Ishikawa's acquaintance told the young man that his lawyer was deceiving him, and that if he didn't confess, he would never get out of prison. If he confessed, the detective said, he would be out in ten years. Ishikawa, who hadn't finished elementary school and was ignorant of the law, succumbed to these blandishments. The court found Ishikawa guilty, and sentenced him to death. Protests erupted nationwide, condemning the investigation and trial as deeply biased and prejudiced, a miscarriage of justice stemming from anti-Buraku discrimination. A higher court commuted the sentence to life imprisonment, but upheld the guilty verdict. The legal battle to secure a retrial is now in progress. As many as 6,920,000 persons have signed petitions proclaiming Ishikawa's innocence.
for the upgrading of living conditions in Buraku districts and the inclusion of liberation curriculum in local schools. Implementation of this program was the responsibility of the civic administration. The success of the program depended on gaining the understanding and cooperation of citizens living around and nearby the Buraku neighborhoods. Banners saying, "Let's all work for the success of the Buraku Liberation Plan" were posted over the main thoroughfares in Buraku neighborhoods. Hanging banners with similar slogans were displayed on the walls of Buraku community centers (Liberation Halls). The sight of such a banner was a clear sign that the surrounding area was a Buraku community. There was opposition expressed by more than a few Buraku community members, who felt that since many outsiders were unaware that some districts were Buraku, there was no reason to advertise the fact. In response, the leaders of the liberation movement sought to allay their misgivings and win their cooperation, saying that, "There's nothing to be ashamed of in being Burakumin. It is those who discriminate that should be ashamed." Even today, however, there are Buraku neighborhoods who have yet to take this first, crucial step.

As the above three examples illustrate, the Buraku liberation movement believes that instead of letting sleeping dogs lie, the correct strategy for eliminating discrimination is to actively raise the Buraku issue and stop concealing their Buraku status as individuals and communities. This approach is much the same as the Black liberation movement's assertion that "Black is beautiful."

5. Strategy B — Opposition to Background Investigations

The routine investigation of persons' family, residential or occu-
pational backgrounds is one of the most common manifestations of discrimination against the Buraku. The liberation movement has fought against this form of discrimination on all fronts. It should be emphasized that Burakumin are neither a distinct race nor an ethnic group. They represent a status group. Burakumin are not identifiable by any physical characteristics. Culturally they display no traits fundamentally different from Japanese society as a whole. They are not set apart by religious convictions, either. Nine out of ten Buddhist temples in Buraku communities belong to the Jodo Shin sect, but Burakumin comprise no more than about ten percent of total Jodo Shin sect membership. Some Burakumin belong to other Buddhist denominations, while others have adopted the Christian faith.

There are certain occupations that were traditionally the preserve of the Buraku. These include slaughtering and butchering, leather products, shoes and other footwear. These trades, however, have been engaged in by only a small minority of the total Buraku population, so Burakumin cannot be said to be identifiable by occupation. The one major factor that sets the Burakumin apart from their fellow Japanese is the fact that their ancestors were relegated to pariah status under Japan's feudal hierarchy. Therefore, those persons who practice discrimination against the Buraku first trace the family line of the individual in question in order to ascertain whether he is a member of the Buraku caste. This can prove to be difficult since, obviously, no household is likely to advertise such information. The easiest way is to find out where he lives.

During the last century of modernization in Japan, some new Buraku communities have been founded and some Burakumin have relocated outside their traditional quarters. Large numbers continue
to dwell in the areas allotted to them during the feudal period. However, due to increased mobility in modern urban society, one can no longer be certain whether or not a person is of Buraku origin simply by checking where he lives. It is estimated that there are six thousand Buraku communities in Japan; the total Burakumin population is about three million. Government surveys have established that of this total, only 1,170,000 still reside within the traditional Buraku districts. Data on the number of Burakumin who have resettled in the outside community is not available, but it is nearly certain that their numbers are about equal to those living in the designated Buraku communities. Government surveys also show that as many as 840,000 non-Buraku citizens have taken up residence in the Buraku districts. Buraku districts in large urban centers such as Osaka and Kobe have populations as high as one million, but the majority are now non-Buraku.

Therefore, employers who are loath to hire Burakumin, and families wishing to avoid intermarriage have found several ways to investigate whether an individual is from a Buraku background. The Buraku liberation movement opposes these practices and has pushed for measures that would curtail such investigations. At the same time, the movement has worked to educate the public about the discriminatory nature of family background investigations. One common practice in hiring and marriage was to request a copy of the koseki or family register.

The *koseki* system is an apparatus of citizen control unique to Japan. Whereas a person's current residence is registered as an "address", the "*honseki,*" or the place where the household was originally registered, remains unchanged despite changes of address. All changes of address are recorded in the administrative office of the town where a family was originally registered. The marriages,
divorces, births and deaths of all family members are recorded there as well. This is known as the koseki system. Alien residents of Japan are excluded from this apparatus, being placed under the authority of the Alien Registration System. In addition to perpetuating discrimination against Burakumin, the koseki system is an adjunct to discrimination against foreign residents and individuals born out of wedlock. The National Government compiled in 1872 lists the previous status of all households under the feudal hierarchy. It clearly shows the status of Buraku households and their descendants. Until recently, anyone could gain access to this information. The Buraku liberation movement has strongly opposed public access to koseki records on the grounds that it encourages discrimination. In 1874, the community of Shirahama in Wakayama prefecture adopted a policy of restricting access to family registers to family members. This was the first case of a local administration taking measures to discourage discrimination. This landmark precedent lead to a nationwide ban on public access to the 1872 koseki records and restrictions on access and copying of recent koseki information.

Resumes provide another way to check up on an individual's background. Until recently, the general-use resume forms sold in Japan were highly detailed, asking information about a family's registered place of residence, the registered head of the family, the applicant's current address and length of residence, all previous achievements, and police record, if any. Application forms provided by employers were also very detailed, asking applicants to disclose their parents' occupations, their parents' position in their work places, whether they rented or owned their homes and if they owned any farm land.

Educators concerned with the Buraku issue as well as the
Buraku liberation movement protested these practices as encouraging discrimination against not only Burakumin but economically disadvantaged persons as well. These protests proved effective. Since 1973, application forms have been standardized, and entries having discriminatory potential have been deleted. Since 1974, resume forms also have been simplified, asking only city and prefecture to be given as place of birth.

A third way to look into an individual’s background is to engage the services of a private detective agency or a koshinjo, a type of agency devoted to discreet investigation of job applicants and marriage prospects. As stated before, it is never easy to distinguish Buraku from non-Buraku. When other methods fail, such specialists can be called in. The majority of investigations commissioned by employers involve checking for Buraku origins among job applicants.

It is possible for Burakumin to transfer their koseki to districts outside the traditional Buraku communities. Persons fearing discovery of their Buraku origins may transfer their koseki several times. However, the koshinjo, or detective agencies can trace households back to their point of origin. The common procedure is to trace back over three generations. There have been many cases of families rejecting marriage proposals after investigators turned up evidence of one partner's Buraku origins.

A woman of Kumamoto prefecture was engaged to an Osaka man in December of 1968. The man’s family hired the services of a koshinjo, and when the woman’s Buraku background was discovered, the man broke off the engagement. The woman brought suit against the koshinjo. The koshinjo argued that its work was protected under the law as free enterprise. The court ruled against the koshinjo, saying that, “while the court recognizes freedom of enterprise and choice of occupation, no enterprise can be allowed to violate the
equality of persons guaranteed by law.”

The exploitation of existing prejudices for personal profit by these investigation agencies has aroused the wrath of Burakumin, who have waged a tenacious struggle for legal measures against such discriminatory investigations. Finally in 1985, the local government of Osaka imposed a ban on all detective agencies and koshinjo investigations initiated with discriminatory intent. Agencies engaging in such work would be closed down and subject to penalties. Unfortunately, these businesses still operate openly and without regulation in other communities throughout Japan. Furthermore, although public access to koseki records is now proscribed by law, many investigators are willing to use illegal means to obtain information. One result of making such investigations illegal is that agencies can command exorbitant rates for illicit work. Despite the risks involved, the potential profits are often irresistible for unscrupulous investigators. To more effectively counter discriminatory investigation, a higher consciousness of human rights needs to be nurtured in the general public, thus ending the demand for such services.

5. Who is a Burakumin? Identity and Self-determination.

As outlined above, the strategy of opposing the practice of probing family backgrounds has been applied to a number of issues and struggles. One important feature shared by Strategy A and Strategy B is that they are both necessitated by the invisibility of the Burakumin. Due to this invisibility, discrimination manifests itself in very different ways than in the United States, where physical, cultural and linguistic features make minorities highly visible. The struggle against discrimination in Japan consequently takes different forms as well.
Strategies A and B seem to aim at making public one's Buraku identity on the one hand, and, on the other, keeping it concealed. However, it is a mistake to characterize these strategies as contradictory. Strategy A is intended to strengthen the Burakumin's self-determination in the struggle against discrimination. Strategy B seeks to confront those who practice discrimination. The Buraku Liberation League, as a mass movement supported by the largest number of Burakumin, conducts its struggle along these dual lines of strategy.

Closely related to these two strategies is the question of just who is a Burakumin. The definition of who is a Burakumin is not something we can approach objectively. We must first make clear who is to make the definition and to what objective. There is no fixed category of persons subject to social discrimination. Because discrimination against Burakumin is declared illegal, national and local governments have no official definition of the Burakumin. From the perspective of Strategy A, it is the Burakumin themselves that shall define who is a Burakumin. In other words, a Burakumin is one who has been subjected to Buraku discrimination, or can anticipate Buraku discrimination. It is from this experience that they become conscious of being Burakumin. Identity as a Burakumin can be a matter of the way of life. For example, if a child is born to a Burakumin mother and a non-Burakumin father, is the child Burakumin or not? If the child chooses to identity himself as a Burakumin, as in strategy A, and makes some kind of effort in the struggle to end Buraku discrimination, then he is a Burakumin. If he should identity with his non-Burakumin father and does not consider himself a Burakumin, then he is a member of the majority and not a Burakumin.

Looking at this question from the perspective of Strategy B,
we get a different answer. The question of who is a Burakumin is determined by those who discriminate. In other words, the person who is the target of those who discriminate is a Burakumin. Those persons that tend to discriminate also tend to expand the definition of Burakumin. For example, it is often the case that non-Buraku who take up residence in traditional Buraku districts find themselves identified as Burakumineven though they have no Buraku ancestry. There are also persons from families of Buraku ancestry who have had no ties with the Buraku for two or three generations. Such persons have no consciousness of being Burakumin. However, an investigation into their family tree may result in their being discriminated against by other persons. Among the young people known to have been driven to suicide by discrimination in marriage arrangements are many who were shocked by the sudden revelation of their own unsuspected Buraku roots.

When Burakumin openly declare their Burakumin identity, as in Strategy A, they make a statement of their determination to fight against discrimination. They are also making a call for a broader unity in the cause of creating a society free of discrimination.

On the other hand, when others expose a person's Buraku background, their intentions can usually be interpreted in one of the two following ways:

(1) Although they may harbor no malicious intent toward the Burakumin, many persons may deliberately reveal someone's Buraku identity for sheer conversational value, taking idle pleasure in sharing an exclusive bit of gossip. For example, when discussing movie stars or sports figures, one might say, "Oh, by the way, did you know that he/she is really a Burakumin?"

(2) In most cases, unfortunately, exposure of an individual's
Buraku background is a deliberate, malicious attempt to destroy that person's human relationships and damage their well-being and future prospects. For example, those opposing a candidate for political office might spread rumors that "candidate XX is really from a Buraku community in XX prefecture."

The Buraku liberation movement fundamentally rejects both the attitude of "letting sleeping dogs lie" and the desire to "pass" in the majority. At the same time, we regard the exposure by others of anyone's Buraku background as an act of discrimination, and strongly oppose it.

7. A Third Strategy — The Upgrading of Inferior Living Conditions

The Buraku liberation movement has a third strategy. The movement holds that the inferior social and economic conditions prevailing in the Buraku communities are unquestionably a form of discrimination, and is working to alleviate those conditions. An important analysis that has grown out of the Buraku liberation movement is that the main basis of discrimination is the exclusion of Burakumin from the principle relations of production. This analysis applies equally well to minority issues in the United States. An important concept articulated by American economists is that of the "secondary labor market." Denied entry into the primary labor market, Burakumin are limited to the secondary labor market. The economic impoverishment, poor social environment and inferior housing conditions apparent today in many Buraku communities all stem from the unsteady employment, low wages, hazardous occupations, and inferior working conditions imposed on Buraku workers. These conditions deprive Burakumin of the educational
opportunities necessary for the acquisition of skills that could lift them out of the secondary labor market. A vicious circle has been established:

Having arrived at the above analysis, the Buraku liberation movement places high priority on achieving work security for Burakumin workers and expanded educational opportunities for their offspring.

(Due to limitations of space, the very important issues of education cannot be adequately covered in this paper. Instead, the author wishes to focus on the struggle for Burakumin job security.)

8. The Struggle for Job Security

Since the 1950's, Burakumin have waged a struggle for steady employment aimed at national and local administrations. Underlying that struggle was the acute awareness of the long history of institutionalized discrimination against Burakumin. The failure of government administrators to insure educational opportunities had resulted in the inability of Burakumin to secure steady work. Administrations were also called to account for allowing job discrimination to run unchecked for so long.

As a result, Burakumin have found employment since 1970 in janitorial capacities in local government facilities and as security personnel and maintenance workers in public schools. The percentages of Burakumin employed vary from one local government to another,
but in the city of Kyoto, where Burakumin organized for many years to demand jobs, as many as 30% of working Burakumin are employed by the city’s administration.

While local governments were taking steps to advance Burakumin job security, the National Government made almost no positive efforts. In fact, the national bureaucracy remained oblivious to its own discriminatory practices. The job application forms for civil service positions, drafted by the National Personnel Authority, came under criticism as discriminatory. This form required applicants to give the following information:

1. Applicant’s original koseki location.
2. School attendance (day school or night classes).
3. Place of birth.
4. Occupations of family members.
5. Household income.
6. Health history.
7. Map of the family’s neighborhood.
8. Current housing conditions.

The National Personnel Authority openly stated that, “Since civil servants are to be entrusted with public funds, it is imperative that we check applicants’ backgrounds and choose persons of good character and upbringing.”

The initial challenge to the National Personnel Authority’s discriminatory stance was made by high school teachers in Hyogo prefecture together with the Buraku Liberation League. Their protest movement succeeded in getting several potentially discriminatory criteria eliminated from application forms. Application forms would be standardized and would no longer ask for koseki records. Despite this small victory, the National Bureaucracy of Japan today has yet to take any really positive steps towards hiring minorities.
The National Personnel Authority has stubbornly stuck to its policy of not hiring alien residents of Japan. In response to repeated protests against discrimination on the basis of nationality raised by the Buraku Liberation League and Korean residents' organizations, the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications decided to hire two Koreans who resided in Buraku districts. This was in May of 1985.

8. Transforming the Discriminatory Character of Japanese Corporations

Burakumin currently enjoying steady employment are mostly working as civil servants, school teachers, and nursery school attendants. All of these are employees of local civil administrations. This is a grim illustration of the extent to which the private sector discriminates against Burakumin. During the 1960's there were numerous cases of companies openly declaring that they would not hire Burakumin. Overt discrimination of this type is now rare due to the effective protests of the Buraku Liberation League. However, it is still common practice for companies to secretly engage investigators to probe the backgrounds of job applicants. Until recently, it was hard to tell how many companies practiced this form of discrimination. In the mid-1970's however, the infamous "Buraku lists" came to light, and examination of subscription lists revealed the shocking fact that nearly all of Japan's top corporations practice discrimination.

The Buraku lists are compilations of place names known to be Buraku settlements throughout Japan. The first list was the conception of a man who had experience working on koshinjo investigations. Seeing the large volume of investigations commissioned to check for Buraku backgrounds, this man realized that publication
of such materials could be highly profitable. He sent letters to personnel officers in major corporations, soliciting subscriptions. By checking applicants' addresses against the Buraku lists, the letters said, companies could easily detect Buraku backgrounds.

After the existence of these secret Buraku lists was exposed, it was found that as many as nine versions were in circulation, and more than two hundred major corporations were revealed to be subscribers. Among them were corporations synonymous with Japanese industry worldwide, firms such as Toyota, Nissan, Mitsubishi, Suzuki, Daihatsu and Mazda. These corporations represent only the automobile industry, but the fact that virtually all the major auto makers subscribed to the Buraku lists is a good indication of the pervasiveness of Buraku discrimination in Japan's corporate establishment.

The controversy surrounding the Buraku lists led to the establishment of the Buraku Issue Corporate Liaison Committees. These committees were founded to encourage study and awareness of the issue of discrimination within corporations, and to foster dialogue and understanding between business and the Buraku liberation movement and other citizens' organizations. These committees meet every year, and the current number of participating corporations is 6900 in Osaka, 368 in Fukuoka, 115 in Kitakyushu, 92 in Hiroshima, 55 in Kyoto, and 115 in Tokyo.

In 1977, the Director of the Job Security Bureau of the National Ministry of Labor issued an important directive aimed at ending job discrimination. Companies employing one hundred or more persons were required to appoint an employee to be in charge of promoting education on Buraku issues within the work place. The directive also applied to some companies hiring fewer than a hundred persons if those companies were expected to be hiring Burakumin,
or if allegations of discrimination had been made in the past. The local administrations of Osaka and Fukuoka prefectures extended this requirement to companies employing 30 or more workers. As of 1984, there were 33,212 persons working in that capacity in 33,874 work places. This represents 98% compliance by companies with the government's directive. This is an indication that private sector corporations are finally taking a hard look at the Buraku issue.

Securement of job security is a crucial agenda for the Buraku liberation movement, which, in concert with opening the doors to higher education, will prove effective in upgrading the opportunities and living conditions of Burakumin. At present, however, nothing equivalent to the American model of affirmative action has been implemented for Burakumin in the areas of employment and higher education in either the public or private sectors.

10. Why Do Corporations Practice Discrimination?

Why do corporations discriminate against Burakumin? A common explanation is that discrimination is the result of historical prejudice against Burakumin. I don't believe this to be the true answer. If we were to accept this theory, then it necessarily follows that firms that have been in business for several generations should be much more inclined to discriminate than newly established enterprises. These older firms are highly conscious of status and tradition, and are accustomed to being held in higher regard socially than new businesses. New enterprises, on the other hand, are free from the often irrational strictures of tradition and can more easily adopt new technology and marketing strategies. The older firms would seem the most likely to discriminate. This assumption is supported by the introduction to the 8th edition of the Directory of Buraku Placenames, one of the infamous Buraku lists. It
states that, “...most households still hold allegiance to their own particular standards and practices which have been nurtured and valued over the years. Such time-honored traditions cannot be swept away overnight.”

Well then, are new corporations less likely to discriminate? One would hope so, but looking at the names of *Buraku list* subscribers, it is apparent that this is not the case. Among the subscribers are such new and highly successful businesses as Jasco, a supermarket chain, and Sekisui House, a manufacturer of prefab dwellings. Those corporations identified as *Buraku list* subscribers are not necessarily the only corporations using the lists and secretly practicing discrimination. There may be many more, but hard evidence and statistics are largely unobtainable. Judging by the findings of research into the dynamics of class mobility, new enterprises seeking to gain high standing and favor in the corporate establishment are prone to excessive identification with the dominant standards and values of that establishment.

In all nations where capitalism has developed, the pursuit of profit has enjoyed precedence over human rights and the welfare of the workers. Capitalism always seeks cheaper labor in order to raise profits. Widespread unemployment is a necessary condition for keeping wages low. The development of modern Japanese capitalism depended on a steady supply of cheap labor from the surplus population of farm villages. The wretched poverty of the villages was the result of the high percentage of the crops that had to be paid by tenant farmers to the landowners. An important adjunct to this systematic exploitation was the static, chronic unemployment of Buraku communities.

The land reforms enacted after the Second World War broke the stranglehold of the landowners. Since the high rate of industrial
growth in the 1960’s, only about 10% of the population is still employed in agriculture. This represents a major shift in the economic order. Still, cheap labor has been an indispensable factor in Japan’s “economic miracle.” Most major corporations today rely on the services of numerous small- or medium-sized subsidiary companies. There are even subsidiaries of subsidiaries, and the farther down the chain you go, the lower the workers’ wages; working conditions also get progressively worse and employment is increasingly unsteady. At the bottom of the economic hierarchy are the Korean and Buraku minorities and part-time workers, mostly women. This industrial structure and labor market exists because the corporate establishment requires a surplus labor pool that is either transient or stagnant, a surplus labor pool characterized by latent unemployment. The persons who are caught in the web of latent, chronic unemployment are those who were denied educational opportunities, persons who are socially handicapped, and persons from disadvantaged or economically distressed family backgrounds. This is not a manifestation of deliberate bias, but of institutionalized discrimination.

During the 1950’s and 1960’s, Japan’s labor unions were highly militant, and its most active members were dedicated to the cause of socialist revolution. The corporations placed great priority on co-opting the worker concerns on which the labor movement had thrived. Numerous institutions were established within the corporate hierarchy; workers were offered company housing and cars, pension plans, and low interest loans for the purchase of consumer durables. Lifelong employment was instituted to insure job security for corporate workers. The establishment of these “paternalistic” institutions created the illusion that the interests and fate of the workers were inseparable from the success or failure of the
corporation. The corporations have succeeded in molding a work force that places company loyalty above the common interests and rights of labor in the broader social context. This loyal, motivated work force is to be found only in the major corporations with lifelong employment guarantees. Today in Japanese society we are seeing the reassertion of feudal consciousness of social ranking, as social distinctions are becoming more pronounced between worker in major corporations, medium and small company workers, tiny "cottage" industry labor, seasonal labor, and day labor.

This modern corporate organizational structure, together with the increased stratification of the working class, is creating a hotbed of prejudice and discrimination against the Burakumin.

The practice of lifelong employment makes Japanese corporations exceedingly cautious when it comes to hiring. Once hired, an individual will be in the company for thirty to forty years; great emphasis is placed on harmony in the work place, so corporations want to hire persons who can fit in easily. They take care to screen out beforehand any person that might threaten that harmony or fail to fit in. Corporate discrimination against the Burakumin is an outgrowth of these concerns. In some instances, Burakumin may be excluded because irrational prejudice dictates that "Burakumin are different somehow, so it's hard to get along with them." In other instances, companies may be reluctant to hire Burakumin on the grounds that "everyone hates Burakumin." Companies discriminating on such grounds do not necessarily believe that Burakumin have traits that make others hate them. They simply conclude that, "It won't do to hire persons that will be hated by their fellow workers," regardless of why they are hated.

Similarly, some companies refuse to hire Burakumin on the grounds that doing so would damage their own reputation. This form
of discrimination is an act of conformity with the prevailing prejudices of society. This attitude is commonly found in customer services trades, such as banks, department stores, and restaurants.

Furthermore, the criteria used by corporations in screening applicants applies not only to the individual, but to his family as well. An applicant’s family background, his parents’ occupations, income, assets, type of housing, neighborhood, and even their state of health are often subjected to close scrutiny. These criteria are applied because corporations will hold families jointly responsible in the event of embezzlement or other irregularities on the part of an employee. It is calculated that families and relatives of good repute will therefore keep an employee in line and act as a deterrent to temptation. The corporate practice of selecting only those applicants whose parents satisfy strict criteria places Burakumin applicants at a severe disadvantage, since conditions of unsteady employment have plagued Buraku families for generations. The Buraku liberation movement believes that setting hiring criteria in areas beyond the responsibility of the individual constitutes discrimination, and has fought to eradicate these practices. Our movement works to protect the interests and rights of not only Burakumin, but all persons subjected to social, economic or cultural disadvantage.

In Conclusion

This paper has focused on corporate discrimination in its presentation of the Buraku issue. It is no exaggeration to say that Japanese corporations are inherently discriminatory in nature. As these corporations have sought to raise profits, expand markets and elevate their corporate standing, they have imposed hardships and sacrifices on those who labor at the bottom of the economic hierarchy.
Corporations remain indifferent to the realities of discrimination, arguing that the issue of human rights is irrelevant to their own enterprise. Until confronted with concrete proof of hiring bias, they will stubbornly insist that they don't discriminate.

The Buraku liberation movement confronts these corporations by asking, “What specifically have the corporations done to eliminate anti-Buraku discrimination?” It is only in the last ten years or so that the social responsibilities of the corporations has been brought into question.

As Japan’s corporations expand their economic penetration of the United States, there is strong possibility that their inherent discrimination will apply to American minorities as well. In order to prevent Japanese companies from practicing discrimination in America, we who live in Japan must work to overcome the discriminatory nature of Japan’s corporate establishment. It is also essential that Japanese companies learn from human rights issues and struggles in the United States and apply those lessons in their American activities.

The protection of minority rights in both Japan and the United States calls for cooperation, communication and solidarity between citizens and communities of both nations. The influence of multinationals is on the rise worldwide, and minority groups must respond by building global solidarity.

[注]
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