

Declaration

Tokushu Burakumin^[1] throughout the country: Unite!

Long-suffering brothers!^[2] Over the past half century, the movements^[3] on our behalf by so many people and in such varied ways have yielded no appreciable results. This failure is the punishment we have incurred for permitting ourselves as well as others to debase our own human dignity. Previous movements, though seemingly motivated by compassion, actually corrupted many of our brothers. Thus, it is imperative that we now organize a new collective movement to emancipate ourselves by promoting respect for human dignity.

Brothers! Our ancestors pursued and practiced freedom and equality. They were the victims of base, contemptible class policies and they were the manly^[4] martyrs of industry. As a reward for skinning animals, they were stripped of their own living flesh; in return for tearing out the hearts of animals, their own warm human hearts were ripped apart. They were even spat upon with ridicule. Yet, all through these cursed nightmares, their human pride ran deep in their blood. Now, the time has come when we human beings, pulsing with this blood, are soon to regain our divine dignity.^[5] The time has come for the victims to throw off their stigma. The time has come for the blessing of the martyrs' crown of thorns.

The time has come when we can be proud of being Eta.^[6]

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

Thus is the Suiheisha^[7] born.

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

March 3, 1922^[8]

The Suiheisha

General Principles

1. Tokushu Burakumin shall achieve complete liberation through our own actions.

1. We, Tokushu Burakumin, are determined to achieve our demands for complete freedom in undertaking economic activities and in choosing our occupations.

1. We shall awaken to the fundamentals of human nature and march toward highest human perfection.

Notes

[1] Tokushu Burakumin

In Japanese 'buraku' means a village/community and 'min' means people. 'Tokushu' means special. "Tokushu Burakumin" therefore means "people of a special community." From around 1900, the term came to be used deliberately by the government in a discriminatory fashion to emphasize the perception held by non-Buraku people that Buraku people are peculiar and lowly in comparison to the general populous. The founders of the National Levelers' Association, themselves Buraku people, intentionally used "Tokushu Burakumin" with pride rather than with self-deprecation.

[2] brothers

Those suffering from Buraku discrimination were both men and women so the term should be "brothers and sisters." Yet the awareness of rights for women was very low in Japanese society at this time, and likewise for the founders of the National Levelers' Association in addressing themselves primarily to Buraku men.

[3] movements

"Movements" refers to 'kaizen undo' (improvement movements) and 'yuwa undo' (reconciliation movements) undertaken before the founding of the National Levelers' Association. The former were organized to improve community sanitation conditions and social habits, such as behavior and language usage of Buraku people, and the latter were organized in order to try to achieve societal integration for, and reconciliation with, Buraku people. The founders of the National Levelers' Association severely criticized the nature of both such movements, because they sensed these movements were motivated by benevolent charity instead of an actual desire to promote the attainment of equality.

[4] manly

Although "manly" is used to emphasize the industrial role played by the Buraku, behind its usage lies the understanding in Japanese society at the time which believed men were superior to women.

[5] "We human beings ... are soon to regain our divine dignity:"

Until this time, some god-like transcendent power was thought to be absolute and the object of worship for humans, but from this time forth, the time has come for humans themselves to replace such divine power, to be respected as beings who have unlimited potential.

[6] Eta

This highly discriminatory term, meaning full of filth, came to be commonly used in the caste-like class system of Japan's Edo period (AD1603-1867), and was continued to be used into modern times with regard to Buraku people. The founders of the National Levelers' Association protested strongly against its use in society; however, to fellow Buraku people, they emphasized that being Eta was something to be proud of.

[7] Suiheisha

The word 'suihei,' meaning horizontal or level, is employed as a call to realize a society that is uniformly even and without discrimination. As an association for such aims, the name Suiheisha ('sha' means association) was used. At the time, the term was synonymous with autonomous Buraku liberation organizations. "National," prefectural or district proper names, were placed at the front of the term as appropriate.

[8] March 3, 1922

The original text indicates the founding date only as "March, Taisho 11." Taisho (AD1912-1926) was the era named after the then-Emperor Taisho following the Japanese tradition of naming eras based on the emperor system. In alignment with the international custom of using Christian dating, we have chosen in this translation "1922" and included the date when the Declaration was made, March 3, in order to emphasize the importance of the actual founding of the National Levelers' Association.