

#### Topic and Research Question

Zainichi-Koreans are a South and North Korean minority living in Japan for more than hundred years. Some of them were forced to work in Japan during the Japanese occupation of Korea, some of them fled to Japan to seek for a better life, where they live already in the third or fourth generation. Although Zainichi-Koreans adapted to the life in Japan and have a living standard similar to the Japanese, many of them claim to be victims of discrimination in various areas of life.

This thesis tries to identify experienced discrimination and changes in its nature, which leads to the research question:

“Are accusations of discrimination of Zainichi Koreans justifiable and if so, have there been any changes in the nature of the discrimination in recent years?”

To answer this question, I tried to answer the following subquestions:

“Is there actually discrimination in area xy?”

“Have there been any changes of quantitative or qualitative nature in area xy?”

“Can we still find discrimination in area xy today?”

“Which measures could avoid or reduce discrimination in area xy?”

#### State of the Art

Most English books on the topic consist mainly of qualitative analysis provided through interviews with victims of discrimination. Through telling the stories of victims of discrimination, the authors try to provide proof that there is discrimination in areas like employment, housing, school, daily life, suffrage and marriage. Besides the lack of validity of such selective interview-data, most interviews used in these books are out of date. Even recent books like Zainichi Korean Identity and Ethnicity (2008) or John Lies Zainichi – Koreans in Japan (2008) feature data from between 1960 and 2000.

Due to the outdated information, findings on changes or new areas of discrimination, such as discrimination in the internet can be hardly found in such books.

#### Methodology and Approach

Due to the above described problems of other books on the topic this thesis uses not only existing data but also data provided through new field research by me.

For that purpose I interviewed 52 people who fit the group Zainichi-Korean via Internet. The results of the interviews were used in qualitative and quantitative ways for a comparison with old and recent findings.

All interviews were made via SNS platforms mixi.jp and facebook.com. To be able to compare discrimination of people with Japanese citizenship to people with Korean citizenship, people who carry Japanese names to people who carry Korean names and younger generations to older generations I also separated the results into two citizenship-groups, two name-groups and three age-groups. Therefore I was able to see positive effects of having a Japanese citizenship or name and if discrimination is likely to vanish or rise in some areas. Since gender did not influence my research, I did not group results into gender-groups.

All People I interviewed were born in Japan. The youngest participants were 16 the oldest were 50 years old. I focused my research on areas which were analyzed in previous books on the topic:

Employment, housing, school, public life, marriage and suffrage. But I also asked people about “other areas of discrimination”, since there might be also new forms of discrimination nowadays.

#### Main Facts

**Employment market:** According to previous research results a lot of Zainichi Koreans experienced discrimination when trying to find a job at Japanese companies. The so called Hitachi-case reduced discrimination, but still discrimination has not vanished.

My findings showed that 25% of the interview participants did also experience discrimination, while 76% did not experience discrimination. Furthermore, people with a Japanese citizenship and/or a Japanese name did suffer much less discrimination than people with a Korean citizenship and/or name. In addition younger people experienced less discrimination.

**Housing:** Early results showed that Zainichi Koreans faced also big problems when looking for a place to live. Many of them were declined because some private apartment owners didn't accept foreigners including

Zainichi Koreans. Although the situation for Zainichi Koreans got better when Japan started to rent public apartments to foreigners as well, some people still had hard times when trying to get a private apartment.

The interview results show that only 13% of the interviewed people had problems to find an apartment, while 87% did not. Interestingly nobody who owned a Japanese citizenship and only a few people who carried a Japanese Name faced such problems. Furthermore, younger generations experienced almost no discrimination when looking for a place to live.

**Discrimination at School:** Zainichi Koreans who didn't go to Korean schools, but to Japanese schools did experience discrimination in various ways, like insults from classmates or teachers or even violence.

About 33% of the interview participants also had such problems at school, while 67% did not. Although the citizenship or the name of a person didn't matter that much, discrimination seemed to disappear (still didn't vanish) since younger people experienced much less discrimination than older people.

**Discrimination in public life:** Discrimination of Zainichi Koreans in public life came mainly from policemen and officials but also from members of the *uyoku* group who insulted or even attacked people for being Zainichi Koreans.

My findings showed that 27% of the interviewed Zainichi Koreans experienced discrimination in public life, while 73% did not. Furthermore, citizenship or names did not seem to matter in this area and younger age groups seem to suffer not less discrimination than older ones.

**Problems with marriage or finding a spouse:** Zainichi Koreans who wanted to marry a Japanese man or woman often faced a lot of problems. Not only was it sometimes difficult to find a person who was willing to marry a Zainichi Korean, but the parents of the Japanese partner also had to accept the Zainichi Korean.

Since only a few people who participated in my interview were married, the sample was too small for a quantitative analysis, but statements showed that people still face these kind of problems, which makes some people look for a Zainichi Korean partner.

**Problems with the status of residence permit:** Like any other foreigners, Zainichi Koreans who do not have a Japanese citizenship but a so called “special residence permit” also have to carry a Foreigner-ID everywhere they go, which makes some of them feel discriminated.

Another problem about not being a Japanese citizen is to not have the right of suffrage. Even if it got possible to participate in some local elections, Zainichi Koreans without the Japanese citizenship are still not able to participate in national elections.

**Discrimination in other areas:** 29% of the interviewed Zainichi Koreans have faced discrimination in “other areas”, while 71% did not. Not a few of the victims of discrimination are people from younger age groups, who experienced discrimination via internet. This seems to be a rather new phenomenon, where people can use their anonymity to insult Zainichi Koreans on message boards etc. Also the *uyoku* group seems to be still a threat to the Zainichi community.

#### Results

Although the so called Korea-Boom has influenced the image of (Zainichi) Koreans in a positive way, this minority still faces various kinds of discrimination (institutional, structural, etc.) in various areas of life, even though discrimination overall seems to get less in recent years.

Since a change in the attitude of the Japanese people is something that can't be forced and takes time and people with the Japanese citizenship face less or even no discrimination at all in some areas, taking the Japanese citizenship might be the easiest and most effective way for Zainichi Koreans to avoid discrimination in most areas.

#### References

All references can be found in the full version of the MA thesis available at <http://othes.univie.ac.at/21836/>

#### About the Author

Salomon Zilberberg holds a B.A. degree in Japanese Studies from the University of Vienna. Besides studying at the university Salomon Zilberberg spent a lot of time in Tokyo (Japan) for business reasons and for improving his language skills and cultural knowledge..

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