

BOOK REVIEWS

Dōwa Policy and Japanese Politics

By Ian Neary. Routledge, 2021. 276 pages. Hardback, £120.00 GBP, ISBN: 9780367651343. Ebook, £36.99, ISBN: 9781003127994

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One would expect that a set of policies whereby the Japanese government spent in excess 4 trillion yen over 30 years would draw the focus of academics across disciplines. However, within both Japanese and English language scholarship, there has been limited attention, and indeed, only one book in Japanese and no full-length book in English on this set of policies – until now. Ian Neary’s book, *Dōwa Policy and Japanese Politics*¹ provides the first in-depth work in English exploring this set of interrelated policy programs designed to improve conditions in specific Buraku communities. Known collectively as Dōwa Policies, these laws were in place from 1969–2002, and saw the improvement in living conditions, employment and education for Buraku districts that received this aid (though as Neary notes, not all Buraku districts did).

Neary takes a novel approach to looking at the policies, tracing the historical trajectory of various programs and approaches, leading to the development of the 1965 cabinet report, which led to the creation of the 1969 original Dōwa law. Following this foundation, he examines the divergent voices in the creation of the laws and the roles of the various ministries involved. Finally, he provides a compelling set of case studies to better understand the effects of these policies by looking at three locations that received support under the Dōwa laws: Osaka, Nara and a small city in Kyushu “Q”. Owing to the concern over outing the community and members within, Neary understandably masks this community.

At the start, Neary outlines five broad themes that guide the work, which also provide a strong framework for how the book reaches beyond Buraku studies. First, exploring Dōwa policies allows us to explore Japan’s commitments to human rights. Second, he illuminates the role of international approaches in shaping domestic policies. Following this, he considers these policies within the broader context of Japanese welfare policies. Fourth, as Dōwa policies did not lead to new national agencies, this work allows an investigation of the relationship between national and local governments. Finally, he elucidates the social construction of what it means to be Burakumin and how identity as Burakumin has shaped government policies (18–19).

The work considers these themes across the eight substantive chapters, beginning with Chapter 2, where Neary explores the role of the state in “taking rights seriously” (24). This chapter allows the reader to consider the role of the state, the relationship between domestic policies and international norms, and national vs. local governments through the lens of Dōwa policies, though the conceptual issues of human rights and public welfare are much broader than these policies alone.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the modern history of Buraku issues, highlighting the position of Burakumin in the broader society, the establishment of social movements, and the way the Japanese government attempted “to exert social control” (41) over what it considered to be “problematic” approaches. One such mechanism in the prewar period was through the Home Ministry providing aid to Buraku communities under a set of policies known as *Yūwa* policies. These policies, along

¹We might think of the work as part of a trilogy that Neary has been working on over the course of his career, following his works on the Burakumin action group Suiheisha (1989) and Burakumin activist leader Matsumoto Jiichirō (2009).

with the creation of the *Suiheisha*, an organization calling for Buraku empowerment, helped lay the foundation for the postwar Dōwa policies.

Chapter 4 moves to the early postwar period, centering on the occupation and domestic politics developed over the 1950s which shaped myriad parts of Japan for generations. Neary explores not only the importance of these national policies, but in this chapter, we are able to better understand the divergent voices within Buraku politics. Neary presents two major Buraku social movement groups here, and explores their sometimes divergent, sometimes overlapping goals and approaches. The groups, the Buraku Liberation League (BLL, historically affiliated with the Socialist party) and the Zen Nihon Dōwakai (affiliated with the LDP), both shaped the creation of a group focused on Buraku issues within the cabinet office. This committee “suggested a programme which would... improve employment, living conditions, economic prospects, and educational performance” (64–65). The grounds for Dōwa policies were now recognized.

Chapter 5 briefly outlines the period between the report from the cabinet office in 1965 and the implementation of the Dōwa laws in 1969. It was here that the “statutory framework” between local and national government took shape. The membership of the committee to create the law was, not surprisingly, dominated by the LDP, but because it was also made up of experts on Buraku issues, it had members who were politically not aligned with the LDP. This clear example of the cliché on politics and strange bedfellows allowed the Dōwa laws to be pulled in various directions, but with the shared ultimate goal of improving living conditions in Buraku districts.

The next three chapters form the bulk of the explanation of how these policies were implemented at the national level and then were experienced at the local level. Chapter 6 focuses on the role of the state in implementing the Dōwa policies recommended by the cabinet office, with considerable attention to the “interaction between the ruling party, the Bureaucracy and the representatives of the Buraku communities” (89). Chapter 7 highlights the roles the various ministries played in creating and administering the requisite policies through a detailed examination of governmental expenditures. This chapter in particular allows us to better understand ministerial decision making on major policy decisions. While national policies are important, one of the tremendous contributions of this work occurs in Chapter 8, where Neary examines how these policies were experienced at the local level. As he notes, “most Dōwa policy projects – well over 90% in terms of expenditure – were implemented at the level of local government and were financed through, if not always completely, by the local administrative authority” (157). To better illustrate this process, Neary considers Osaka, Nara and City Q. Making use of local engagement with Dōwa policies highlights the diversity of experiences at the local level – not all Buraku communities were the same, nor did they reap the same benefits from Dōwa policies.

While this work centers on Buraku issues, its value is not limited to scholars of Buraku studies. The work outlines how policies are developed, managed across ministries and then implemented at the community level (where most people experience the impact of governmental policies). This alone presents a tremendous contribution to our understanding of policy implementation and laws in Japan. Using Dōwa laws as the lens to see this process, the work constitutes a significant addition to policy studies. However, it is when we consider that the laws in question were designed and promulgated to address issues of institutional discrimination against Japan’s largest minority group that we recognize the deeper contribution of the work, specifically through broader national welfare policies coupled with global human rights issues.

As noted above, the Dōwa laws represented a considerable expenditure by the government (national and local). Anytime there is such money flowing, there is a chance for corruption. This fact, coupled with what can only be described as undercurrents of prejudice, have led some to suggest that Dōwa policies, because they were addressing Buraku inequality, were inherently corrupt. Neary addresses this point in Chapter 9, articulately noting that “there is no data enabling comparison between [corruption] incidence in construction projects in Buraku and non-Buraku areas” (222). He continues, noting the works of other scholars, that there has long been “collusion between public works bureaucrats, politicians and contractors” (234), a point that is unrelated to the focus of specific governmental policies. This brief chapter should put to rest the voices suggesting a direct link between organized crime and Burakumin through the Dōwa laws.

Overall, while centered on Burakumin and Dōwa policies, the work provides compelling frameworks through which we can better understand the mechanisms of policy development, making and implementation. The work makes a strong contribution to our understanding of Japanese policy studies and minority studies, and can provide a framework for a comparative examination for other political systems that have considered their own form of affirmative action policies.

References

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Continent in dust: experiments in a Chinese weather system

By Jerry C. Zee. University of California Press, 2022. 332 pages. Hardback, \$85.00 USD, ISBN: 9780520384088. Paperback, \$29.95, ISBN: 9780520384095. Ebook, \$29.95, ISBN: 9780520384101.

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Continent in Dust is an ambitious and illuminating exploration of contemporary environmental and political-economic shifts in China and beyond. In the book, Jerry Zee develops a “political anthropology of strange weather” (p. 8), which challenges both universalizing Anthropocene narratives and methodological nationalism as it traces changes in the seasonality of the monsoon and the atmospheric vagaries wrought via desertification, industrial emissions and wind patterns, from the deserts of Inner Mongolia and Gansu to the streets and buildings of Beijing, and on to Seoul, and to San Francisco. The text examines changing environments and weather not as passive objects of, or backdrops to, political action, but as lively participants in a more-than-human “choreography”, presented here through a material-semiotic lens attentive to the politics and the poetics of dust, storms, and breathing; of living with and through change.

Reflecting on the rise of dust storms and air pollution as an increasing focus of attention for China through 40 years of economic Reform and Opening, the book shows how this “modern weather” (p. 15) confounds conventional environmental management and international relations. The 2008 Beijing Olympics drew international interest to the Chinese state’s ability to manage air quality, which soon expanded to the implications for China’s neighbours in Asia and other “downwind” locations. By following dust flows beyond mapped borders, Zee explains his field as an “aerosol China” (p. 34), conveying the extra-territorial reach of material and political effects. Drawing primarily on 14 months of multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork and interviews, he follows dust across time and space, noting how Chinese officials trying to manage Beijing’s air traced its particulate contents up-wind, to the deserts of the interior, seeking to avert or reverse desertification via policies banning pastoralism in favour of forestry, and infrastructural efforts to hold back encroaching sands. This is the setting for Part One of the book, which focuses on “wind-sand” (*fengsha*), the compound vernacular