

National indoctrination policy in the undercaste ghettos of Nara Prefecture during the 1910s: The role of Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines

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The present article examines the implementation of Japan's mass state ideology indoctrination policy through Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines within the undercaste ghettos (*hisabetsu buraku* 被差別部落) of Nara Prefecture during the 1910s, in relation to changing trends in religious belief systems on the local level.

The majority of residents of the ghettos of Nara Prefecture, which remained as segregated residential communities originally created for scheduled castes under the social stratification system instituted in the premodern age were traditionally adherents of the Jodo Shinshu 浄土真宗 sect of pure land Buddhism and thus were not deeply versed in beliefs regarding Shinto gods or particularly active in related festivals promoted by the Meiji state since the 1870s. In response to this adherence to Buddhist beliefs and ceremony, Nara Prefecture adopted, following the Russo-Japanese War, a Buraku Improvement Program, which attempted to strengthen adherence to state religious ideology through such projects as revising Pure Land millenarian beliefs emphasizing the afterlife, inculcating the concept of “*shinzoku nitai*” 真俗二諦 (there being no contradiction between following the teachings of the Buddha, while submitting to the secular authority of the Emperor), the elimination of special social status for Shinto shrine patrons (*ujiko* 氏子), the installation of Shinto altars in the home, universal allegiance to the national flag and the promotion of pilgrimages to the national Shinto shrines. The author analyzes the program's implementation as a process by which modern Japan's policy regarding the ideological indoctrination of its imperial subjects proactively attempted to mobilize local residents alienated from their traditional beliefs and modes of worship into the state's new system of ritual centered upon the new Shinto

pantheon, stressing the divinity of the Emperor.

At the same time, as the agents of its Buraku Improvement Program the Prefectural authorities attempted to enlist the Buddhist priests of local ghetto temples, which had been for centuries an integral part of the daily lives of local residents. The Program also called for these priests to promote the Prefecture's austerity program of frugality and increased household saving. These activities were hindered by the fact these same clerics were totally dependent on the local community for their livelihood, in accordance with the Buddhist vow of poverty (*dāna* 檀). As an example of this dilemma, the author cites the expectations expressed by ghetto community leaders who had formed the Yamato Dōshikai 大和同志会 prefectural civil rights advancement association in 1912 that their communities' temples and priests would participate in the activities of the improvement program, while on the other hand condemning the temples as religious organizations economically exploiting their parishioners.

It was during the First World War, in 1916, that Nara Prefecture's policy of state ideology indoctrination of ghetto residents began to include the introduction of Shinto shrines directly into ghetto communities; for example, preparing designated sanctuaries on the grounds of existing temples, from which to worship Emperor Meiji from afar. This change in policy was an attempt to place the community leaders of each ghetto as the key enablers for local religious reform, in the search for a new set of beliefs by which to promote state ideology.