

Burakumin, the Criminal and the Yakuza: A Critique of the Discriminatory Thoughts of Mark Ramseyer

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This article is a criticism of Dr. Mark J. Ramseyer. The author has already criticized Ramseyer in an English-language paper now under peer review. That paper also critiques him as an Orientalist, after Edward Said, describes his Westerner's episteme as a power. Ramseyer has defamed and taunted the oppressed Burakumin. Focusing on the discussion of Burakumin and crime rates, this article will be Japanese and English, with necessary additions and corrections. The correct purpose of science is not to hurt minorities, as many Burakumin who will be hurt by Ramseyer's papers.

Are Burakumin crime rates high?

Mark Ramseyer (2019:49–59) introduced the concept 'Burakumin PC,' which is the percentage of Burakumin in a population at a given time. He attempts to link Burakumin crimes rates with population density, income PC, sewerage rates, poverty, etc. (Ramseyer, 2019:44–7). After this odd exercise, Ramseyer leans rather heavily on Toyohiko Kagawa.

Ramseyer approached his first task with a simple enough idea: many Burakumin live in urban districts; urban districts tend to have high crime rates; therefore Burakumin have high crime rates. Q.E.D. This line of thinking is meaningless.

Crime rates are generally calculated as the number of crime perceptions per one hundred thousand population¹. Ramseyer alleges that Burakumin produce more criminals than non-Burakumin. He, however, shows no data. He only refers to Kagawa and his prejudice against poor minorities, for whom poverty basically equated to crime. "Modern cities should wipe out Tokushu-min (Burakumin) because of crime" (Kagawa, 1917:56). As a follower of Kagawa, Ramseyer compares Burakumin to "crackers" (Ramseyer, 2019:2). This appears to be an attempt to make Americans and other Westerners better identify, wrongly, with a false and vulgar characterization. It betrays Ramseyer's contemptuous opinion both of Burakumin and his own fellow citizen "crackers."

¹According to data of 2018, the murder rate in Japan was 0.26 (per hundred thousand population). That occupied the 154th place in the world. In the richer United States of America, where Mark Ramseyer lives, the murder rate is 4.96, and is in 60th place. In Japan, crime peaked in 1949; then, it has decreased constantly since. After WWII, murders and violent robberies consistently decreased. Western criminal sociologists would serve their communities better by studying the causes behind Japan's successes, and looking toward application or imitation.

In Japan, criminal sociology has already revealed that there are no correlative relationships between poverty of minority groups and crime rates (especially bodily injury and theft). Could such correlative relationships be found, they would not be synchronous (Tsushima, 2010:15). Additionally, Robert K. Merton is correct to insist that any discussion of crime should include majority populations and the wealthy.

These crime “data” (organized in terms of a particular operational concept or measure of crime) have led to a series of hypotheses which view poverty, slum conditions, feeble-mindedness and other characteristics held to be highly associated with low-class status as the “cause” of criminal behavior. Once the concept of crime is clarified to refer to the violation of criminal law and is thus extended to include “white-collar criminality” in business and professions—violations which are less often reflected in official crime statistics than are lower-class violations—the presumptive high association between law social status and crime may no longer obtain (Merton, 1968:144).

Furthermore, Ramseyer has used data of Naimu-sho from 1921 (Ramseyer, 2019:59-60). This appears to show a slightly higher criminal rate, but most government data then was strongly biased. Other official data from the period tells a different story. Table 1 is data from Hiroshima Prefecture, 1920, tallied in 1917. It shows Buraku arrest rates. Hiroshima Prefecture then had a total population of 1,695,844, with 17,338 arrests, giving a general arrest rate of 1.02. Going by city and county, the Buraku arrest rate was higher than the prefectural average in seven districts, and lower in eleven. As the real Buraku population in Hiroshima City was over 6,000, the true arrest ratio there should be lower. From this comparison, any Buraku special affinity for crime is inconclusive. Ramseyer’s belief in high urban crime rates appears to be falsified.

Table 1: Rates of arrested persons in Buraku (Hiroshima-kenchō, 1920:57-8)

City and County’s Name	Numbers of arrested persons	Population in Buraku	Rate of arrested persons
Hiroshima City	46	5,065	0.91%
Onomichi City	0	561	0.00%
Fukuyama City	0	228	0.00%
Aki County	16	4,423	0.36%
Saiki County	63	2,876	2.19%
Asa County	38	2,988	1.27%
Yamagata County	18	1,443	1.25%
Takata County	71	3,261	2.18%
Kamo County	31	3,059	1.01%
Toyota County	40	5,172	0.77%
Mitsugi County	38	2,257	1.68%
Sera County	6	1,324	0.45%
Numakuma County	6	2,530	0.24%
Fukayasu County	5	2,178	0.23%
Ashina County	7	2,067	0.34%
Jinseki County	9	483	1.86%
Kōnu County	1	430	0.23%
Futami County	44	3,382	1.30%
Hiba County	79	2,769	2.85%
Total	518	46,496	1.11%

*Population in Buraku’ includes residents who live outside of their communities. This didn’t significantly affect the crime rate.

The next example is from Hyōgo Prefecture data. In 1921, the Buraku population in Hyōgo was 107,608. There were 1,250 arrests (Hyōgo-ken naimu-bu shakai-ka, 1921:34-1), for a rate of 1.16. There is no national data for the same year; the nearest is from 1924, where there were 433,879 arrests in a population of 58,876,000 population, for a rate of 0.74. Going only from this, one might prematurely conclude that Buraku, in Hyōgo Prefecture at least, did have an elevated crime rate. However, in 1949, Buraku in Kōbe City (the prefectural capital) had 18,612 residents and only 83 arrests, for a rate of only 0.462 (B-chō chiiki-kaizen taisaku-iinkai, 1949:402-3). In the same year, crime peaked nationally. There were 585,329 arrests in a total population of 81,773,000, for a rate of 0.716. Even in this confusing post-war time, the arrest rate of urban Buraku was lower than the national average.

Again, any relationships between Burakumin, poverty, and crime is at best inconclusive. It is a complicated subject. Historical events and periodic differences, changes in law, structural changes of regions, cultures, statistical methods, and so on, will all affect crime rates. Concepts of crimes also change. Nonetheless, neither we nor Ramseyer has been able to find any evidence of the fabled Burakumin criminal nature.

Yakuza and Burakumin

A few authors have written stories of yakuza men with Buraku origins. There are stories, for example, of former yakuza men in the Buraku Liberation Movement. They are rare, and they tend to be comeback stories, not stories of hopeless deviance.

The present author has met with a former yakuza Burakumin. He came from a very wealthy family. He went into the yakuza because he adored the *ninkyō-dō* yakuza philosophy. He retired from that world because of receiving Buraku discrimination. According to him, the yakuza world is rife with cruel anti-Buraku discrimination. It is hard to imagine how this could be if, as Mark Ramseyer wants to allege, the yakuza is largely a Burakumin institution. Ramseyer cites Kaplan and Duboro's statement that 70% of yakuza come from Buraku (Ramseyer, 2018:209), but neither man gives evidence in support of this figure. Bosses of yakuza organizations have sometimes claimed to receive deviants from Buraku and the Japanese Korean society. These appear to be attempts at rationalizing their illegal acts exploiting companies, and citizens' heartstrings. Whatever they say, it is probably unwise to receive the word of a crime lord too uncritically.

When we discuss criminal syndicates and Japanese society, several essential assumptions exist, i.e. relationships between criminal syndicates and Japanese politics and economics. The white-collar business world and crime is another important subject, as per Merton. Iwai Hiroaki (1969:668-84) wrote about yakuza and politics. Capitalists in the Chikuhō coal mine region tied strongly with central and local politics and yakuza organizations, and monopolized interests of the coal industry through the oppression of labor unions (Iwai, 1969:668-84). In this large book, Iwai never mentioned Buraku.

The connection of politics and yakuza predates the Meiji Restoration. In the Boshin-war and other battles between pro-Meiji and pro-Tokugawa forces, both sides employed yakuza. The new Meiji government sided with gambling boss Shimizu-no-Jirochō, and the Bakufu employed Kurokoma-no-Katsuzō (Takahashi, 2010:133-67). The connection between yakuza and politics continues. Ramseyer wants to connect Burakumin and yakuza without any evidence, where there are many demonstrable connections between government and yakuza. It looks like another servant of the Occidental episteme is just trying to invent another criminal caste.

Slums and Buraku

Mark Ramseyer confused the Airin-district with a Buraku (Ramseyer, 2019: 21). He would not have made this mistake if he understood either correctly. Airin-district is Kamagasaki. Most sociologists categorize it as *yoseba*. *Yoseba* generally consisted of working-age single men in *kichin-yado* (cheap lodging houses) (Aoki,1989:51–2). On the border between *yoseba* and Buraku, sometimes small disputes occurred from cultural misunderstanding. Burakumin lived in family dwellings. Both districts have been home to honest day laborers proud of their work. These workers struggled against capitalist exploitation and yakuza violence. Residents in Buraku and *yoseba* are not yakuza.

Referring to documents of Umeshirō Suzuki², Ramseyer called Nago town a Burkau (Ramseyer, 2019:48). It was definitely non-Buraku. In the mid Meiji period, the local government dismantled Nago because of a cholera epidemic (Katō, 2004:2-5). This is another fatal defect in Ramseyer’s credibility as an expert on the Buraku issue.

Buraku and Family Discipline

Most Burakumin, even in severe poverty, worked hard. Many were able to purchase houses for their families. In Maizuru City, Kyoto, a small settlement of Burakumin was attacked by yakuza during the men’s absence. Although angry, the men wished to avoid conflict. They moved their families and established a new community again. Working hard as coal landers, they educated their children in their own houses. Family deterred deviance (Kobayakawa, 2019: 64-8).

Discourse and Observation

The Buraku/crime discourse and policy rest on the concept that poverty itself is criminal. Buraku have always been the target of police prejudice. In 1942, in Kure City, Hiroshima, a mutilation murder case occurred. Police based their “investigation” on the mere presumptions that the perpetrator had to be Burakumin. The general populace agreed. The murderer was eventually found despite his *not* being Burakumin, no doubt a disappointment to many. The heavy hands of police prejudice and false

² Source documents Umeshiro Suzuki wrote in 1886 (<http://www.kamamat.org/yomimono/sisatu-nagamachi.html>) explained that crime rate at Nago town was about 1.27% (8,532 population and about 108 crime a year) Ramseyer, however, simply showed total 603 crimes in five years and seven months. Agreeing his way, soon crimes will exceed total populations in Nago town. At that time, statistics of police was inexactitude, and it is impossible to make deserving comparison.

accusation³ still hover over Burakumin heads. Kōbe City has dedicated four police boxes to its tiny urban Buraku. Hiroshima City has three. The Reconciliation Movement, the *Hōmen* Committee, and so on functioned as policing apparatuses against Burakumin (Kobayakawa, 2017:84-7). Nonetheless, Buraku enjoy normal crime rates. If Mark Ramseyer ever cared to visit, he might find them to be eminently peaceful, welcoming, and yes—forgiving communities.

Incidentally, police prior to WWII had authority over hygiene, construction, labor, and finance. Pre-war crime must be analyzed accordingly. Dr. Mark J. Ramseyer, if he knew this, might wish to adjust his claims.

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³ There is a record of false accusations in Kure City. In 1922, e.g., one poor man was found innocent after he had served his full jail term (Hironaka, 1953:405-13). Such miscarriages of justice were not uncommon.

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