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**The Resurrected Jesus and the marginalized people:
From a Buraku Liberation perspective**

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ABSTRACT

Discrimination is one of the most challenging issues that we are faced with in the world today. It impairs human dignity and dehumanizes individuals and particular group of people, violating the order of God's creation. It has and continues to be a critical issue and a serious challenge for Christian churches today. This thesis aims to link the theme of the liberation for the *Burakumin* who are the discriminated and marginalized people in Japanese society over a period of years, with the liberating message of the Gospel, and the ecumenical commitment towards the issue of discrimination. The Burakumin are not really known in the world outside Japan. An attempt is made to highlight their discriminatory situation and their struggle for liberation. An attempt has also been made to study the Buraku liberation theology as one of the contextualized liberation theology and highlights its relevance and contribution towards the struggle against the discrimination in Japanese society and also the world at large.

Then, as an example of the ecumenical biblical interpretation for the liberation of the marginalized people, it attempts has been made to interpret and re-read the biblical text about the story of the resurrection in John 20:11-18 from the perspective of the Burakumin. Through a Buraku liberation reading, it is hoped that the possibility of interpreting the resurrection of Jesus as the liberating experience for the discriminated and marginalized people can be highlighted with the re-reading and presentation of the resurrected Jesus in the similitude of the discriminated and the marginalized, appearing before the discriminated and marginalized in the society.

ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BLC	Buraku Liberation Center
BLL	Buraku Liberation League
DEM	<i>Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement</i>
DTWT	<i>Dictionary of Third World Theologies</i>
ERES	<i>Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Society</i>
CCA	Christian Conference of Asia
NCCJ	National Christian Council in Japan
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
UCCJ	United Church of Christ in Japan
WBC	World Biblical Commentary
WCRP	World Conference of Religions for Peace
WCC	World Council of Churches

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INTRODUCTION

Discrimination is one of the most challenging issues in the world today. It denies the diversity of race, ethnicity, gender, and culture and devalues the others. Throughout the history of the ecumenical movement, discrimination against certain groups of people has been recognized as a big challenge against the understanding of the whole of humanity created in the image of God. Today it still remains as the power of segregation and oppression among people in the society and even in the churches. To struggle against any form of discrimination is becoming more and more important for the ecumenical movement.¹ Thus, we need to promote and uphold the ecumenical commitment to liberation from discrimination.

This thesis aims to link the theme of the liberation for the *Burakumin*, who are discriminated and marginalized people in the Japanese society over a period of years, with the liberating message of the Gospel. It also aims to elucidate that the biblical message proclaims the liberation for the discriminated and the marginalized people.

In Chapter 1, an attempt is made to analyze the issue of the Burakumin (Buraku issue), to explain the historical background and the reality of their discrimination, and their liberation movement. The relationship between the Japanese churches and the Burakumin and also the theological contribution to the Buraku issue is also highlighted.

In Chapter 2, a more theological approach to the Buraku issue is attempted. An attempt is made to review the history of the Buraku liberation theology that focuses on the theme of the liberation from the Buraku discrimination, and to elucidate its theological characteristic. The significance of the understanding of “the crown of thorns” in the perspective of the Buraku liberation theology, with its scopes and prospects for future development is also presented in this chapter.

In Chapter 3, as an example of the ecumenical biblical interpretation for the liberation, an attempt is made to interpret the biblical text on the story of the resurrection in John 20:11-18. Through a Buraku liberation reading, it is hoped that the possibility of interpreting the resurrection and the appearance of the resurrected

¹ World Council of Churches, *Resource book: World Council of Churches 10th Assembly Busan, 2013*, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), 109, says, “the context of the Twenty-First century presents numerous initiatives and struggles of people for freedom, justice, dignity and life in many parts of the world.”

Jesus as the “liberation experience” for the discriminated and marginalized people is highlighted. In other words, the resurrected Jesus is re-read and imaged in the similitude of the discriminated and the marginalized who appears to those who have been discriminated and marginalized in society.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1. The Buraku issue

1.1.1. Who are the “Burakumin”?

The *Burakumin* are those discriminated minority group in the Japanese society. They have been discriminated and marginalized socially and structurally for over a time. The Burakumin are the largest minority group in Japan, but their situation is not really known in the world outside Japan. They have been referred to a few times in discussions in the ecumenical movement.²

It is difficult for many people to understand correctly who the Burakumin are and the discrimination against them. The reason comes from the fact that it is impossible to identify them in terms of race or ethnicity. They are not different from the other Japanese in terms of race, ethnic, culture, language and religions,³ but they have not been accorded any identity in the Japanese society. Their existences have not been recognized. Therefore, some researchers, especially the non-Japanese researchers, sometimes refer to them as an “invisible minority” in Japan.⁴

Burakumin and other minority groups in Japan

Sometimes Japan is considered a homogeneous country though there are several minority groups in Japan. For examples the *Ainu* are an indigenous people from the northern part of Japan and the *Okinawan* are descendant from the *Ryukyu* Dynasty, who were independent and had traded with East and Southeast Asian countries until the 19 century. Korean residents are the descendant of Korean who came from the Korean Peninsula as a result of the colonialization of Korea by Japan. They are also strongly discriminated and marginalized in Japanese society. In contrast to them, however, the Burakumin are not a racial and ethnic minority, yet they are excluded and discriminated within Japanese society.

² “Perhaps the least-known case of group oppression is that against the Buraku in Japan, which shows only too vividly that once an identifiable group has been marked out for oppression at some point in history, it is extremely hard to eliminate the stigma.” See Barbara Rogers, *Race: No Peace without Justice*, (Geneva: World Council Churches, 1980), 29.

³ Teruo Kuribayashi, “The Story Of The Buraku People Of Japan”, in Dhyanchand Carr (ed.), *God, Christ and God’s people in Asia: as see by the participants of the Consultation on the theme “Through a new vision of God towards the new humanity in Christ”*, Kyoto, 1994, (Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia, 1995), 90.

⁴ Richard T. Schaefer (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Society* (London: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2008), 214.

The term “Buraku” and “Burakumin”

Literally, “*Buraku*” means “hamlet,” and “*min*” means “people,”⁵ namely, “*Burakumin*” means “the people of the hamlet.”⁶ Thus, the term “Buraku” by itself has no negative implication, but the way it has been used by the majority people to imply those living in such hamlet has negative implications. The way “Burakumin” has been used to describe the people who lived in such hamlet by the majority people, carries with its negative implications. Today, the term “Buraku” is widely used in Japanese society and also in the Buraku liberation movement.

Historical origin: before the 17th century

The Burakumin are historically considered as the descendants of marginalized people in the medieval era, though “it is not easy to establish the historical origin of the *Burakumin*.”⁷ According to some historians, there were several marginalized groups who were clearly differentiated from the ordinary people. The Burakumin were the people who were “dealing with animals, working with leather, or caring for the dead.”⁸ Since their occupation involved touching dead animals and corpses the Burakumin were considered as impure and polluted in Japanese society where blood and dead bodies were considered as impure. Along with the Burakumin, other groups (such as nomadic people, traveling entertainers, Hansen’s disease sufferers) were also severely discriminated and marginalized as outsiders by the majority group of people in the society.

Foundation of Class system: after 17th century

In the 17th century, the federal government organized a class system based on the occupations of the people. The emperor was located at the top of the hierarchy, and four classes (warriors, farmers, artisans, and merchants) were located inside the social structure under the emperor. Then, some marginalized groups found themselves without any identity and outside the social structure because their occupations were not included in four classes. They were re-named “*eta*” (impure/polluted) and “*hinin*” (non-human/people) with derogatory implications.

⁵ Timothy D. Amos, *Embodying Difference: The Making of Burakumin in Modern Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2011), 3.

⁶ *ERES*, 213.

⁷ Virginia Fabella and R. S. Sugirtharajah (eds.), *Dictionary of Third World Theologies* (New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 33.

⁸ *ERES*, 214.

Being outside the class system they were discriminated and marginalized for over 200 years.

Social stigmatization: from 19th century

In the 19th century, with the modernization of the Japanese society the class system was abolished and those belonging to the four classes were clubbed together as one group of “common people.” The marginalized groups (“*eta*,” “*hinin*,” and other groups) were also integrated into “common people” by the Emancipation Edict in 1871. Class discrimination was abolished legally, though the discriminations against them remained deeply embedded in the society. The majority group rejected the Burakumin very vehemently and referred them as the “new common people” and “former *eta/hinin*.” Some riots took place against the Emancipation Edict, in some cases some Burakumin were killed.⁹ Many of the Burakumin fell into abject poverty and were forced to live in ghettos under horrible conditions deprive of any benefit of developments brought about by the modernization of the society. The districts where they lived were called “*tokushu-buraku*” (special hamlet) and were isolated and alienated from other communities, and they were considered by the majority people as those responsible for plague (such as cholera) and their districts as hotbed of crime.¹⁰ The Burakumin suffered oppression, social stigmatization and were alienated and excluded from the local Japanese community and social life.

1.1.2. Discrimination against the Burakumin

The Burakumin suffered from manifold discrimination such as social, economic, political as well as cultural. Today the Burakumin continues to suffer psychological exclusion and social stigmatization based on the geographical location that is considered as the place that the “*eta*” or “*hinin*” lived. In the past they were forced to live in ghettos under horrible condition and abject poverty. They did not have access to the same quality and standards of gas connection (for cooking, heating etc.) and water like the other neighborhoods around them and their children dropped

⁹ Toshiyuki Hatanaka, “Centering on ‘a bad name’: A review of the naming for the status and historical perception”, in: *Ritsumeikan Keizaigaku*, 54:5 (2006), 1041-1044. (The Original text is in Japanese: 畑中敏之『『二字之醜名』をめぐって:身分呼称と歴史認識の再検討』, 『立命館経済学』54:5, 2006.)

¹⁰ Michihiko Noguchi, “The change of definitions of ‘Buraku’ from 1871 to 1922: status category, class category and geographical category”, in: *Dowa Mondai Kenkyu*, 19 (1997), 44-60. (The Original text is in Japanese: 野口道彦『『部落』の呼称と問題認識の変化:身分的呼称、階層的呼称そして地域的呼称』, 『同和問題研究』19, 1997.)

out of schools because of poverty.¹¹ Since 1969 up to 2002, the “Dowa Special Measures” was implemented with the objective of improving the living, working and educational condition in the Buraku community.¹² Despite some achievements, the measures that were taken did not really put an end or even lessen the discrimination suffered by the Burakumin. Though the discrimination suffered by the Burakumin has become less prominent and visible than earlier times it continues in an artful and insidious way in the Japanese society.

The Buraku discrimination as social exclusion

One typical case of the Buraku discrimination is social exclusion. Most of the majority people do not want to have any contact with the Burakumin and this is very evident and obvious at the time of seeking alliance for marriage and recruitment for jobs. Some companies and university secretly purchase what is known as the “Buraku List” issued by private investigation agencies, to check whether the applicant is a Burakumin or not. Parents also check whether the prospective groom or bridegroom is a Burakumin. In some cases, the village of the Burakumin would be excluded from religious rituals during the village festival.¹³

Buraku discrimination as social stigmatization

The Burakumin are considered as the object of dread based on misunderstandings and prejudices of the majority. People often refer to them as “dangerous” and “violent” and “strange” without any personal/direct experience or encounter with them. One of the most famous case of Buraku discrimination is the “Sayama case” that occurred in 1963, in Sayama city.¹⁴ A young Buraku man, Kazuo Ishikawa was suddenly arrested on an allegation of a murder case, and was sentenced to death at

¹¹ Terumi Igarashi, “Persons from Discriminated-Against Buraku”, in: Carolyn Bowen Francis and John Masaaki Nakajima (eds.), *Christians in Japan* (New York: Friendship Press, 1991), 69.

¹² Ian Neary, “‘Human Rights’ in the Discourse of Buraku Liberation: From the 1920s to the 1990s, an Initial Survey”, in: *Development And Society*, 39:2 (2010), 295; NGO Committee for the Reporting on the ICESCR, “The Implementation of the ICESCR in Japan and the Problems of the Japan’s 3rd Periodic Report: For the 50th session of the CESCR”, Final version, (2013), 56.

¹³ Makoto Higashitani, “My hometown”, in: United Church of Christ in Japan Buraku Liberation Center (ed.), *Let there be light in all human beings: the message to Buraku liberation* (Osaka: United Church of Christ in Japan Buraku Liberation Center, 2014), 129-134. (The original work is in Japanese: 東谷誠「私のふるさと」、『人間に光りあれ：部落解放へのメッセージ』, 大阪:日本基督教団部落解放センター, 2014.)

¹⁴ Igarashi, 74; Tsutomu Tomotsune, *A History of Buraku Liberation Movement in the postwar period: whereabouts of permanent revolution* (Tokyo: Kawade Shobo Shinsha, 2012), 65-114. (The Original work is in Japanese: 友常勉『戦後部落解放運動史: 永続革命の行方』, 東京:河出書房新社, 2012.)

the first trial because the police claimed that Ishikawa confessed to the murder during the interrogation. Even though this young Buraku man insisted on his innocence the policemen had coerced a false confession out of him during the interrogation. He filed a plea for retrial, but it was denied. Today the police investigation against Ishikawa is considered to be very controversial and at the same time deplorable because of the suspicion that they were hunting for a criminal in a prejudicial manner against the Burakumin. Many Buraku liberation organizations has petitioned the Prosecutor Office to disclose all the evidences pertaining to the case as there is a strong belief that the evidence they supposedly have are not enough to prove that Ishikawa is guilty of the murder and perhaps even disprove their claim. Even some exculpatory evident that was provided by the Buraku liberation organizations through lawyers were not admitted. The Sayama case clearly shows that public authority such as the police and the Prosecutor Office also discriminate the Burakumin and strongly prejudice against them.

Denial or disclaiming the discrimination of the Burakumin

Though the Burakumin suffered severe discrimination in society, the majority often claims that there has never been any discrimination of the Burakumin and deny that such discrimination exists in society. This clearly is an attempt on the part of the majority to silence the Burakumin's protests against the oppression and discrimination they suffer at the hands of the majority. The very fact that their existence in the society is denied is a form of discrimination. Due to severe discrimination that the Burakumin suffer, many try to escape by hiding their place of birth and origin. Having no other alternative to overcome the discriminations but having to deny their own identity and roots as something that is negative and as something to be freed from has great adverse psychological implications for the Burakumin. Buraku parents in order to protect their children from the stigma of being born a Burakumin keep their real roots and identity secret from their children, which leave them without any real sense of identity and belonging. This in turn has now led to a situation where even the Burakumin themselves live in denial of their own existence.

1.1.3. “Assimilation” or “liberation” of the Burakumin

“Liberation” is the translation of Japanese term “*kaihō*” and the term *kaihō* has been chosen by the Burakumin themselves in their struggle against the Buraku

discrimination.¹⁵ In the Buraku liberation movement, people use the term “kaihō” as opposed to “yūwa” (assimilation). It has criticized and has challenged the term assimilation for a long time.¹⁶

The “assimilation” approach

Since the 19th century, the Japanese government has considered the Burakumin consistently as the objects of welfare policy. According to the government, the discrimination against the Burakumin will cease if the social welfare policies are being carried out successfully. The majority too seems to believe that if there are no talks about the discrimination against the Burakumin it does not exist. Therefore, the majority has tried to include and to assimilate the Burakumin into the majority without recognition of their identity and experiences as the Burakumin. As mentioned above, in 19th century, the integration of “*eta/hinin*” into the common people group is one of the assimilation policies. However even after the integration discrimination still exists.

Between the late 19th century to the early 20th century, government and private organizations, and also Christian churches tried the social welfare program for the improvement of the Burakumin. For instance, according to Toraichiro Takeba (1868-1945), a Christian worker of the movement to improve the Buraku area, under the social welfare program evening schools for Buraku youth were organized, women’s association was formed, public bath were built, and attempts were made to improve the language and manners of the Burakumin.¹⁷ This program focused on control of the moral order among the Burakumin, which were assumed to be lacking among the Burakumin accentuated by their poverty and their unhealthy environment. Education was also promoted in an attempt to solve the health problems faced by the Burakumin and also with the hope of reducing the crimes in the society.

Eiichi Kudo, a historian of Japanese Christianity acknowledged that such welfare policy being the only approach or step that has been taken to deal with the problems

¹⁵ Scott W. Sunquist (ed.), *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity*, (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 105.

¹⁶ Teruo Kuribayashi, “Recovering Jesus for Outcasts in Japan: From a Theology of the Crown of Thorns,” in: *Japan Christian Review*, 58 (1992), 19-20.

¹⁷ Eiichi Kudo, *Christianity and Buraku issue* (Tokyo: Shinkyō shuppansha, 1983), 154-158. (The Original work is in Japanese: 工藤英一『キリスト教と部落問題：歴史への問いかけ』, 東京: 新教出版社, 1983.)

faced by the Burakumin has certain historical significance.¹⁸ However, it was the top-to-bottom approach with the perspective that the Burakumin themselves are responsible for their plights because of their unsanitary and dissolute lifestyle. In this view, the correctional education of moral order or the improvement of living condition was considered as the only way to eliminate the Buraku discrimination, and the majority considered the Burakumin as the passive object of charity to be treated with kindness and pity. This view overshadows the important fact that the main cause of the Buraku discrimination is societal and structural. The Buraku liberation movement has named the “assimilation” approach as one of the most glaring reason for the Buraku discrimination and has strongly condemned it.

The “liberation” approach

In contrast and in opposition to *yūwa* (assimilation) approach, *kaihō* (liberation) is what the Burakumin are fighting for. *Kaihō* signifies their aspiration and longing for social transformation and implies their struggles and fight for it and, therefore, denotes the active role played by the Burakumin, as active agents for their own emancipation. They do not believe in passively waiting for support and welfare policy by government and others out of pity and charity. In other words, the term *kaihō* signifies the struggle for freedom, equality and self-empowerment that the Burakumin are actively striving for.

The term *kaihō* was introduced into the Buraku liberation movement by the *Suiheisha* (the Levelers Association, founded in 1922), which is the earliest organization formed by the Burakumin for their liberation. The foundation of *Suiheisha* and its declaration is crucial and the turning point in the history of the Buraku liberation.¹⁹ In the *Suiheisha* Declaration that was issued in the first Assembly on March 3, 1922, strongly condemned the previous assimilation policy and declared that the Burakumin are the subject of “liberation”, not the object of “assimilation.”²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid., 163.

¹⁹ The *Suiheisha* Declaration is the first declaration of humanity by Burakumin in Japan. Also Kazuichi Imai, a first general secretary of BLC, says, “The *Suiheisha* Declaration is our Bible for the un-liberated Burakumin” for the Burakumin Christian. See Teruo Kuribayashi, “Recovering Jesus for Outcasts in Japan”, 19.

²⁰ The declaration says, “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.” English version is from the website of the BLL: http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~mg5s-hsgw/siryou/kiso/suiheisya_sengen3.html

Buraku liberation is not only for liberation from an individual or collective discrimination that the Burakumin face, but also includes the transformation of the unjust social structure that resulted in their discrimination. Therefore, the Buraku liberation movement aspires and strives for a liberation resulting out of the transformation of both sides—the Burakumin and the majority.

1.2. The Buraku issue and Christianity

Christianity was introduced to the Burakumin during the middle of 19th century when the Protestant missionary started working in Japan,²¹ though most Christian churches in Japan have not been dedicated about the mission to the Burakumin. One very pertinent question that needs to be addressed is why are the churches not motivated and actively involved in dealing with the issues and struggles of the Burakumin? According to Kudo, churches have the strong tendency to focus on the middle-class people and not on the Burakumin. With the rapid industrialization and urbanization of Japanese society, the churches became more and more focused on the evangelization of those who are situated in such developing areas and social strata. As a result Japanese churches in the 20th century were heavily tinged with the character of the middle class. Since the focus of the churches activities were geared towards the developing areas, the Burakumin were totally ignored and forgotten by the churches.²² Even when the Suiheisha's movement began, Toyohiko Kagawa, a famous church leader in Japan, sharply condemned them. He called their movement that opposes the assimilation approach, “the Gospel of Hate,” and he demanded Christian churches to proclaim “the Gospel of Love.” Most of the Christian churches at that time did not participate in the Buraku liberation movement.²³

1.2.1. The Burakumin - doubly discriminated in the society and the church

Unfortunately the majority churches do not consider the Buraku issue as their issue. Disregard and lack of understanding of the whole issue have resulted in the Buraku

²¹ Kudo provides the names of the missionaries who were working in the Buraku area at that time: Toshimichi Imai, Takeo Yasueda, Kumajiro Kaiho, Toraichiro Takeba. See Kudo, 37; Kuribayashi also provides the names of some lay people and pastors who addressed the Buraku issue during the postwar period: M. Jones, Sekikadu Nishimura, Ikunoshin Nakamura, Sanji Higashioka, Ryozo Saji, Ryoichi Ogasawara, Ichiro Ono, Eiichi Kudo, Kazuichi Imai, Mitsuhiro Inukai, Luis Grier. See Teruo Kuribayashi, *A Theology of the Crown of Thorns: Buraku liberation and Christianity*, (Tokyo: Shinkyō Shuppansha, 1991), 54. (The Original work is in Japanese: 栗林輝夫『荊冠の神学：部落解放とキリスト教』, 東京:新教出版社, 1991.)

²² Kudo, 10-11.

²³ *Ibid.*, 251-274; See also Kuribayashi, *A Theology of the Crown of Thorns*, 461-466.

discrimination within the church. The non-Buraku church members refused to share communion vessels (cups) with the Burakumin;²⁴ pastor and church members advise the Buraku members that they refrain and keep secret their identity and roots and the place or locality they are living in. There are even instances when the pastor refuses the Buraku membership in the church. There is also the ignorance about the existence of the Burakumin in the church. Many of the majority Christians think that they are free of this problem because they think that there are no Burakumin in their churches and that the issue of the Buraku discrimination is not their concern and that they are far away from it. At the surface everything seems to be normal and fine because the Burakumin hide their identity out of fear of discrimination and are therefore forced into a state of invisibility.²⁵

The churches being part of the wider societies are also guilty of the social stigmatization against the Burakumin, and therefore needs to be liberated from the discriminatory social structure through participation in the Buraku liberation movement. The Buraku liberation movement paves the way for the majority churches to liberate themselves from the dominant social structure on one hand and on the other help them to become shelters and home for the marginalized people in the society.

1.2.2. Ecumenical and inter-religious commitment to the Buraku liberation

Christian churches in Japan started addressing the Buraku issue systematically in an ecumenical and inter-religious way since 1970s. The UCCJ (United Church of Christ in Japan) established the Special Committee on Buraku Liberation Issues in 1975, which resulted in the establishment of the BLC in 1981. NCCJ (National Christian Council in Japan) also established a Committee on Buraku Discrimination Issues in 1976. Then in 1981, the *Dōshūren*, a national council of religious organizations including Christian, Shinto, and Buddhist groups was founded in order to address together the Buraku discrimination.

In 1979, the Third Assembly of WCRP (World Conference of Religions for Peace) was held in Princeton. In this assembly some cases of discrimination in Asia were introduced, and it was proposed that these issues be addressed as a common agenda by religious organizations in the world. But Soyu Machida, a delegate from Japan,

²⁴ Kudo, 105.

²⁵ Kuribayashi, *A Theology of the Crown of Thorns*, 34.

the president of the Japan Buddhist Federation, opposed this proposal and claimed that the Buraku issue does not exist in Japan, and he requested that the words referring to the Buraku discrimination should be deleted.²⁶ As a response to Machida's discriminatory speech, religious groups in Japan founded Dōshūren in order to review their own backyard and to reflect on their institutional discrimination against the Burakumin.

1.2.3. Further development toward the Buraku liberation theology

In comparison to historical and practical study on the Buraku issue, there are very few theological contributions that contextualized the theme of the Buraku liberation. In 1991, Teruo Kuribayashi published his notable work, *A Theology of the Crown of Thorns*, a landmark and a great contribution in the area of a Buraku liberation theology. Kuribayashi while dealing with Christology, the doctrine of God and ecclesiology from the perspective of the Buraku liberation strongly condemned and criticized the traditional structure of faith and church that sustained the Buraku discrimination in Japan. There was a mixed reaction to Kuribayashi's work. Whereas some Christian churches welcomed and received it well and initiated serious discussions about the Buraku discrimination, there were some who were critical of the work in a constructive way. Regrettably, however, the discussions that the work had stirred up did not develop into wider discussions that involve all the churches. The majority did not pay much attention to the book and simply ignored it. Even today after 20 years after Kuribayashi's book, there are very few writings and works that deal with the Buraku liberation theology. In 2011 Kuribayashi while commenting on the need to develop a Buraku liberation theology states that it is high time that a Japanese theology with a holistic hermeneutics of liberation with socio-political dimension from Japan is developed.²⁷ It can be said that there are some Christian commitments towards the Buraku liberation movement, and there are several practical efforts to deal with the challenges faced by the Burakumin, though there is still so much to be done. There is also some development in

²⁶ Mitsuhiro Inukai, "Religion and Buraku discrimination", in: United Church of Christ in Japan Buraku Liberation Center (ed.), *Let there be light in all human beings: the message to Buraku liberation* (Osaka: United Church of Christ in Japan Buraku Liberation Center, 2014), 182-183. (The original work is in Japanese: 犬飼光博「宗教と部落差別」, 『人間に光りあれ: 部落解放へのメッセージ』)

²⁷ Teruo Kuribayashi, "Jesus and Paul in 'Empire'", in: *Journal of studies on Christianity and culture*, 12 (2011), 115. (The original work is in Japanese: 栗林輝夫『『帝国論』におけるイエスとパウロ』、『キリスト教と文化研究』12, 2011.)

historical research in the subject, though research in the theological biblical field is still very few. In this thesis, an attempt will be made to develop and contribute towards the Buraku liberation theology, especially through a biblical interpretation from the perspective of the Buraku liberation. It is hoped that this attempt will promote and motivate others to join and participate in the Buraku liberation movement.

CHAPTER 2

2.1. The Buraku liberation theology

In the previous chapter which dealt with the Buraku issue it has been made clear that most of churches in Japan considered the Burakumin as object of charity and welfare policy and ignored their active participation for their own emancipation through their liberation movement.

In this chapter, an attempt is made to move beyond a historical approach to a more theological approach, and to study the Buraku liberation theology. The Buraku liberation theology is one of the contextualized liberation theology in Japan, focusing on the understanding of “sin,” with an interpretation of the biblical symbol “the crown of thorns” from the perspective of the Burakumin.

2.1.1. History of the Buraku liberation theology

The Buraku liberation theology was first presented in a comprehensive way by Kuribayashi’s book, *A Theology of the Crown of Thorns*. This is an excellent landmark work that grapples squarely with the Buraku issue. Before Kuribayashi’s work there had already been some works that have been done towards developing a Buraku liberation theology such as Grier’s liberation theology.

Grier’s Buraku liberation theology

Luis Grier, a missionary of the Presbyterian Church of the United State of America, who worked as a Pastor in a Buraku area over 30 years, attempts to develop a Buraku liberation theology. According to Grier, the majority Japanese churches were characterized by the former warrior class which was the establishment of a society at the beginning of the Protestant mission in Japan in the 19th century.²⁸ As a typical example, Grier highlighted the case of Inazo Nitobe who was a member of the Quaker in Japan and a famous Japanese philosopher, who believed that Christianity in Japan had the soul of a warrior. Grier points out such understanding and belief were the reason why most church leaders and Christian mission often

²⁸ *Bridge for Liberation: A Journey of Luis Grier* (Tokyo: United Church of Christ in Japan Buraku Liberation Center, 1984), 19. (The Original text is in Japanese: 日本キリスト教団部落解放センター編『解放へのかけ橋』, 東京: 日本基督教団部落解放センター, 1984.)

forgot and ignored the Burakumin,²⁹ because the social status of the Burakumin was at the opposite end of the former warrior class in the Japanese social structure.

Furthermore, Grier asserts the Burakumin require their own theology which is liberated from a warrior character for their self-affirmation through Jesus Christ.³⁰ For Grier, the Buraku liberation theology must deal with the reality of Burakumin—their suffering and humiliation—in all seriousness if a theology that is meaningful for the Burakumin is to be developed.³¹ Grier defines the Buraku liberation theology as the harbinger of the liberation of the discriminated Burakumin as well as liberation of the church that is believed to be the embodiment of the soul of warriors that dominated the church and theology in Japan.³²

Kuribayashi's "A Theology of the Crown of Thorns"

Teruo Kuribayashi's book, *A Theology of the Crown of Thorns: Buraku Liberation and Christianity* (published in 1991) based on his doctoral thesis in 1986 further developing Grier's ideas attempted to mainstream the Buraku liberation theology "in close dialogue with liberation theology, Black theology, and Minjung theology."³³ Kuribayashi's book is one of the first book that exclusively deals with the Buraku liberation theology.

Agreeing with Grier, Kuribayashi opines that the most of the churches has traditionally the ideology of the middle class people in Japanese society. Therefore, Kuribayashi insists that the Buraku liberation theology must begin with a "theological dislocation" – moving away from the concern of the majority's churches and theologies that have received benefits from the development of Japan and have been strongly affirming its economic development.³⁴ For Kuribayashi, because the Buraku liberation theology focuses on the exploited human being and the communities that have been discriminated in society reinforced through the process of industrialization and urbanization.³⁵ Kuribayashi defines the task of Buraku liberation theology as a search for God who offers love and salvation to the

²⁹ Ibid., 19.

³⁰ Ibid., 105.

³¹ Ibid., 113.

³² Ibid., 108; 113.

³³ John C. England...[et al.] (eds.), *Asian Christian Theologies: A Research Guide to Authors, Movement, Sources, Volume 3, Northeast Asia* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2004), 429.

³⁴ Kuribayashi, *A Theology of the Crown of Thorns*, 45-46.

³⁵ Ibid., 47.

people—“the poor,” “the lowly,” “those who are mentally and physically challenged,” “the lost children of Israel,” and “the sinner”—all those who suffers any kind of oppression and discrimination.³⁶

2.1.2. Understanding “sin” as social structural injustice

In the 19th century, there were some theological discussions about sin in relation to the Buraku discrimination. In 1893, Toshimichi Imai, an Anglican clergy, wrote about the Buraku discrimination in a journal where he clearly states that the discriminations suffered by the Burakumin are not a consequent of the sin of the Burakumin, but because of the sin of the whole society.³⁷ Indeed, Imai refers to a story from the Bible, and stresses that the reason why Jesus ate a meal with a tax collector was because Jesus did not simply deal with the tax collector as “the sinner” mercifully but because the tax collector carried in himself the burden of “sin” that society created, and not based on his own individual sin. Imai while vehemently criticizing the way by which the Burakumin are being blamed for their discriminations compares the plight of the tax collector with that of the Burakumin because they were being blamed for the sin of the society.³⁸

Kuribayashi in his book focuses on the people who were considered as “sinners” in Jesus’ time because they were not able to keep the Torah, especially the law of clean/uncleanness in a Jewish society, as a result of which they were considered religiously unclean and polluted and were excluded from the rest of the community of Israel.³⁹ Kuribayashi drew a parallel between those who were considered as “sinners” in Jesus’ time because of the law of purity and pollution and the Burakumin because of their ancestors too were considered as filthy and polluted because of their occupation during the medieval period in Japanese society. Kuribayashi throws light on how the sinners were those who were labeled as unclean and polluted because of their occupation. They were being forced to the status of being unclean or polluted without any respite because there was no ritual for purification in the temple that they could perform. Kuribayashi challenges the notion that the sinners are those who are ignorant and those who neglect the Laws of purity and pollution and that states “everyone is a sinner.” In his understanding, the

³⁶ Ibid., 47.

³⁷ Kudo, 38.

³⁸ Ibid., 68-70.

³⁹ Kuribayashi, *A Theology of the Crown of Thorns*, 251.

sinner is considered as a historical particular group due to their occupations.⁴⁰ Kuribayashi expresses a sharp disagreement with typical understanding of sin that is considered only as an inner event which disregards and ignores the social structural dimension of the sin of the period.⁴¹ On the other hand the Buraku liberation theology emphasizes the social structural dimension of sin and strives for further development towards the understanding of sin that moves beyond the individual and internal sense into the communal, structural and historical sense.⁴²

In the 38th National Assembly of The Anglican-Episcopal Church of Japan in 1983, Hideyasu Nakagawa, a Japanese theologian, made some discriminatory comments about the Buraku issue voicing his own negative attitudes towards them.⁴³ While his speech itself was very problematic, his letter of apology for his discriminatory speech against the Burakumin that was published in the newspaper, *The Christ Weekly* at few months after the Assembly became more controversial. In his letter of apology, Nakagawa states that the problem lies in the foundation of his own “sinful existence”; and he therefore confesses his own sin, going down on his own knee before the people and God.⁴⁴ Although his apology implies that Buraku discrimination is a sin, his understanding of sin itself differs from the understanding in the Buraku liberation theology.

Nakagawa considers that the sin of discrimination is located within his own foundation and can be overcome by addressing the internal mind. But, the Buraku discrimination is the sin of the social structure. Any forms of discrimination are created historically and socially. It is impossible to overcome discrimination without addressing the social and political aspect, and not only individual and internal aspect and dimension.⁴⁵ To struggle against discrimination means the transformation of not only the individual, but also the social structure itself which includes individuals.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 253.

⁴¹ Ibid., 252.

⁴² Ibid., 34-35.

⁴³ Inukai, 193. The report states that Nakagawa is sure to hesitate to give his daughter in marriage to the Buraku man, even if the man is a church member, Nakagawa would always be wary and conduct research on the prospective groom carefully to find out whether he is a Burakumin.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 193-194.

⁴⁵ Such understanding of sin is also found in the liberation theology. See Gerald West, “The Bible and the poor”, in: Christopher Rowland (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 168; Valpy Fitzgerald, “The economics of liberation theology”, in: Christopher Rowland (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 254.

Therefore, the term liberation is used to talk about liberated both—the discriminated and the ones who discriminate—from the sin of discrimination together. The Buraku liberation theology strongly emphasizes that the Buraku discrimination is a consequent of the unjust and oppressive social structure.

2.2. Re-interpretation of the crown of thorns from a Buraku liberation perspective

One of the most significant points of Kuribayashi's work is the subject of the crown of thorns and the re-interpretation of it from the perspective of the Buraku liberation movement.⁴⁶ Kuribayashi begins with the interpretation of the biblical symbol - "the crown of thorns" that Jesus was crowned with the Roman soldier in the Passion Narratives as the symbol of people's suffering. Kuribayashi's work, a great contribution towards a liberation theology for the oppressed and the marginalized people was introduced to the ecumenical movement and was received as one of the liberation theologies, which deals specifically with the context in Japan.

The point of departure in his theology is the fact that the Suiheisha, which is the earliest liberation movement of the Burakumin themselves, chose "the crown of thorns" as their symbol for their liberation.⁴⁷ They had rightly interpreted their suffering of discrimination and the message of liberation into Jesus' crown of thorns.⁴⁸ For the Buraku liberation theology it is significant that Burakumin were the first to interpret the crown of thorns in Japan, and also more significantly not only as the symbol of the victim's suffering and stigmatization, but also of the definitive victory that is their liberation.⁴⁹ Although there were no Christians in the early Suiheisha, the crown of thorns was interpreted as the symbol of liberation in the perspective of Burakumin.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ *DTWT*, 33; R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Bible and Asia: From the Pre-Christian Era to Postcolonial Age*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 201.

⁴⁷ Kuribayashi says, "The official flag of the Suiheisha was unfurled for the first time. It was black, emblazoned only with a round crown of thorns dyed blood-red, intentionally symbolizing the passion of Jesus." See Kuribayashi, "Recovering Jesus for Outcasts in Japan", 21.

⁴⁸ The crown of thorns is also referred to in the declaration of the Suiheisha: "The time has come for the blessing of the martyrs' crown of thorns." See the website of the BLL.

http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~mg5s-hsgw/siryoku/kiso/suiheisya_sengen3.html

⁴⁹ Kuribayashi, *A Theology of the Crown of Thorns*, 87-88.

⁵⁰ Kuribayashi opines that the founding members of the Suiheisha were not unconnected with Christianity because they were interested in issue of the inculturation and the influence of the Christian tradition of liberation on secular organization. See Kuribayashi, *A Theology of the Crown of Thorns*, 85.

2.2.1. The crown of thorns as a symbol of the suffering people

The term “the crown of thorns” appears only in three Gospels (Mk. 15:17, Mt. 27:24. Jn. 19:2, 5), but the term “crown” itself often appears in the Bible. The crown or the crowning was a well-known tradition that was given to the king or priest as a reward of the conqueror and a glory of coronation in Greco-Roman world and also Jewish society as is to be found in the Old Testament.⁵¹

In the New Testament, especially in the epistle of Paul and Revelation, the crown appears as the eschatological gift from God that is given to the winner. These depiction focuses on the motif of “winning” and “gift” that is reflected by the meaning of crown in the ancient world, surely does not have anything to do with the concept of “suffering.”⁵²

The crown of thorns appears in the Passion Narratives, especially in the scene of the mocking of Jesus. There has been several discussions and debates about the meaning of the mocking of Jesus. As has often been pointed out, the depiction of Jesus’ mockery where he is forced to imitate the king has some similarities to the writings of Josephus and Philo. Ulrich Luz highlighting two examples that are similar to the mocking of Jesus says, “Historically the closest parallel is the vicarious mocking of a man representing the dead king Agrippa I and of his daughter in Caesarea in 44 CE” and “the mocking of the same King Agrippa I that took place in Alexandria in 38 CE.”⁵³ In the latter case, a man whose named Carabas “was outfitted with a crown of papyrus blossoms instead of a diadem,” and both cases “make clear what inspired people to such mocking—namely, mimes.”⁵⁴

In the Passion Narratives, the crown of thorns was a parody and an imitation of the crown that the King and prince wore at that time. In that context, the crown of thorns

⁵¹ Gerhard Friedrich (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. VII, Σ, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapid: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 617; Horst Balz and Gerhald Scheider (eds.), *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol.3, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), 273-274; Geoffrey W. Bromiley (general ed.), *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Fully rev., Vol. 1, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 381.

⁵² Katharine Doob Sakenfeld (ed.), *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible A-C Volume 1* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 806; Frederick William Danker (ed.), Frederick William Danker (ed.) *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 944; *TDNT*, 629-631.

⁵³ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 513.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 513.

was an instrument of mockery, to mock Jesus—royalty against Jesus.⁵⁵ Thus it can be said that the crown of thorns was meant as an instrument to mock Jesus as the pretender of the King of Jews, rather than a torture device.⁵⁶

The two lines of interpretation

Thus, the way that the crown of thorns is interpreted as the symbol of suffering has not been stressed in the Passion Narratives, in comparison to the suffering Jesus bore on the cross. According to Kuribayashi, the interpretation of the crown of thorns as a symbol of suffering was found in the mysticism among peasants and monks in a medieval Europe, but the aspects or dimension of “suffering” under the crown of thorns was pushed aside during the enlightenment period.⁵⁷ Likewise, Luz also points out that the concept and symbol of the crown of thorns had been much stressed in the European history of piety during the medieval period and is also very much prevalent in today’s time.⁵⁸

According to Luz, there are two main lines in the history of the interpretation. The first is to read it as the manifestation of God’s hidden glory in the perspective of Easter’s faith.⁵⁹ In this view, the reader understands that it is the authentic crown given from God because the reader already knows Jesus’s resurrection. In fact, early Christianity including Paul and Revelation tends to emphasize the crown of thorns as the hidden winning and glory and the eschatological hope.

The Second line of interpretation is more important for our interpretation. It interprets the crown of thorns as to the symbol of human suffering. This understanding emerged during the medieval period which was a time of great peril for human life caused by war, poverty, and the plague.⁶⁰ As Luz mentioned, the crown of thorns allows both readings for us, as the symbol of the hidden winning

⁵⁵ Ibid., 515. Luz says, “The crowning with thorns is an actual coronation. Here Christ’s suffering is understood not as humiliation and disgrace but as part of his journey to his Easter victory.”

⁵⁶ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, WBC, 2nd ed. (Nashville: T. Nelson Publ., 1999), 336; M. Eugene Boring, *Mark: a Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 425; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 1062; Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans publishing Co., 1993), 940; J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William. B. Eerdmans, Publishing Co., 2010), 929.

⁵⁷ Kuribayashi, *A Theology of the Crown of Thorns*, 95-97.

⁵⁸ Luz, 515.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 522.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 519.

and the human suffering.⁶¹

The crown of thorns in the Buraku liberation theology

The Buraku liberation theology attempts to connect consciously these two lines of interpretation and shows that the crown of thorns does not only mean the suffering, but also “a double significance—humiliation and triumph.”⁶² In the Buraku liberation theology, the crown of thorns is the symbol of the suffering of the oppressed and the marginalized people due to the discrimination in society. Moreover, it becomes the symbol of “compassion” through Jesus who wearing his crown of thorns suffered the violence and mockery in conjunction with the experience of people’s suffering. Thus, it is “a symbol of God’s solidarity with the rejected and despised of the world.”⁶³ This reading and interpretation of the crown of thorns, that emerged in the interpretation by the oppressed people since the medieval era is still relevant and continues today. The Buraku liberation theology attempts to contribute towards reviving the meaning of the crown of thorns for the oppressed people and focus on it as the symbol of the oppressed, marginalized and discriminated people in the world of the whole human history.

2.2.2. The crown of thorns as a symbol of the postwar period in Asia

The crown of thorns that was chosen by the Suiheisha was in contraposition to two major Japanese symbols that represented the colonial power of war during the time of World War in Asia, namely, the crest of imperial family “the Chrysanthemum” and the national flag of the Empire of Japan “the Rising Sun.”

The Crown of Thorns and the Chrysanthemum

Once the emperor in Japan was called “the divine authority” who controlled all military aggression during the wartime, and the Empire of Japan had executed the war of aggression on other Asian countries under the direction of the emperor. Although the war ended and the Empire of Japan abolished, the emperor system still continues and is deeply rooted in Japanese society. The Constitution of Japan states,

⁶¹ Idid., 522, comments, “In terms of the text, both of them probably can be seen as possible and essentially legitimate developments, expansions, expansions, and deepening of its line of thought.”

⁶² Sugirtharajah, *Bible and Asia*, 201; See also *DTWT*, 33, refers, “Jesus’ crown, now seen in passive, devotional, and contemplative terms, becomes a symbol that points to the pain of the outcastes and also reveals the hope of their final victory.”

⁶³ Sugirtharajah, *Bible and Asia*, 201.

“The Emperor shall be the symbol of the State and of the unity of the People.”⁶⁴

As Kuribayashi points out, some of the Japanese Christians have recognized that the crown of thorns as the symbol against these two typical Japanese symbols.⁶⁵ Tsutomu Shoji, the former General Secretary of the NCCJ (National Christian Council in Japan), points out that the imperial crest of Chrysanthemum is the symbol of the glory and triumph resulting out of military and economic oppression and colonialization against and of other Asian countries. According to Shoji, “symbolizes an idea of history of self-aggrandizement and expansion at the expense of other peoples” and is “completely opposite from the symbol of crown of thorns.”⁶⁶ Shoji clearly contrasts the crown of thorns with the Chrysanthemum.

Burakumin and the emperor

The relationship between the Burakumin and the emperor in the history of Buraku liberation movement has often been discussed and debated upon. Kuribayashi points out that the emperor who symbolized an idea of “preciousness” has been located at the top of Japanese society, and in contrast, the Burakumin who symbolized “filth” has definitely been at the opposite end at the bottom of the society.⁶⁷ The Buraku liberation movement considers the emperor’s system as generating and reinforcing the Buraku discrimination, therefore only if the emperor’s system is abolished the Buraku liberation can be achieved.⁶⁸ During the period of the Japanese Empire the emperor was called “the living God,” and all Japanese, even Christians and other Asian people colonized by the Empire of Japan were forced to worship the emperor. Kuribayashi emphasizes that the emperor is nothing more than a “God of oppression,” a “God of discrimination” for the Burakumin.⁶⁹

In the Buraku liberation theology, the crown of thorns does not mean the glory, triumph and prosperity of earthly authority. In contrary, it means the symbol of people’s suffering, mockery, and non-violent struggles for liberation following in the example of Jesus. It radically opposed the symbols of the Japanese imperialism

⁶⁴ English version is from the website of the Prime minister of Japan and High Cabinet: http://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government/frame_01.html

⁶⁵ Kuribayashi, *A Theology of the Crown of Thorns*, 91.

⁶⁶ Tsutomu Shoji, “Not the Chrysanthemum But the crown of thorns: A New Vision of Mission in Japan”, in: *International Review of Mission*, 75:300 (October 1986), 390.

⁶⁷ Kuribayashi, *A Theology of the Crown of Thorns*, 398-399.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 399.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 400.

in Asia. In this regard the crown of thorns also has possibilities to become the symbol of compassion and reconciliation in the context of the suffering Asians during the postwar period.

The Suiheisha and cooperation with the war of aggression to Asian countries

It is important to note that the Suiheisha did not oppose the war of aggression in Asia but actively participated in it. Although this issue has not really been dealt with by the Buraku liberation movement, some historians such as Jung-Mi Kim addressed the issue.⁷⁰ Kim empirically analyzes how the members of the earliest Suiheisha bowed down to the emperor and cooperated with the war of aggression against Asian countries and mobilized the Burakumin into the war. Kim points out that most of the leaders of the Suiheisha by mobilizing them to fight in the Japanese war against other Asian countries positioned the Burakumin as the oppressor and suppressor of other ethnic minorities and other Asians. The Suiheisha did not question Japanese colonization in Japan and overseas; and their main aim was to unite all Japanese people including the Burakumin, for the purpose of war—the Japanese war of aggression against other Asian countries. It was a programme of assimilation without addressing the discrimination and oppression faced by the minority groups in Japan.⁷¹ Kim further points out that the leaders of the Suiheisha considered the emperor as “God” and mobilized the Burakumin to fight in the war under the slogan “National assimilation,”⁷² and claimed to the Burakumin that the suppression and oppression and every sacrifices of other colonized Asian people were means for the improvement of the lives of the Burakumin.⁷³

The crown of thorns: a symbol of struggle against any forms of discrimination

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Buraku liberation movement aspires and strives for liberation resulting out of the transformation of both sides—the Burakumin and the majority people. It is supposedly impermissible thing that the Buraku liberation movement creates and perpetuates the discrimination and

⁷⁰ Cf. Jung-Mi Kim, “What it is ‘to accept the war of aggression as it is’?” in: *Buraku Kaiho Kenkyu*, 79, (April 1991), 97-130. (The original text is in Japanese: 金静美 『侵略戦争そのものをあるがままに受容する』とはどういうことなのか、『部落解放研究』79, 1991.)

⁷¹ Ibid, 100-101.

⁷² Ibid, 103-104.

⁷³ Ibid, 109-110. This problem that is pointed out by Kim applies equally to most of churches in Japan with a few exceptions. The cases where churches cooperated with the war are too numerous to mention.

oppression of other minorities. The challenge and the objective of the liberation movement is to bring about reconciliation and solidarity between the oppressed and the oppressor and to transform the oppressive relationship and structure in society. The crown of the thorns has a potential to become the symbol of reconciliation and solidarity among people suffering violence, poverty, discrimination, oppression and mockery. The Buraku liberation theology is against any form of discrimination suffered by individuals and all marginalized and oppressed groups, and it also aspire for every human being to be liberated historically and in the immediate present time from the sinful and oppressive structure of society through social transformation.

CHAPTER 3

3.1. Re-reading the story of the Resurrection in the Gospels

In Chapter 2, the history and characteristic of the Buraku liberation theology, and especially the concept and interpretation of the crown of thorns chosen by Suiheisha as the symbol of suffering and liberation had been dealt with. It has already been mentioned that although the crown of thorns had the potential to become the symbol of anti-war and anti-violence, and also as a symbol signifying solidarity with those who are discriminated and oppressed in Japanese society and Asia as a whole, it had failed in that aspects because the Suiheisha had supported the aggressive war against other Asian countries by the Japanese imperialism. The Buraku liberation theology challenges all systems and ideologies such as that of the Suiheisha and any other forms of system and structure that lead to the discrimination of certain group of people and individuals in society. It strives for solidarity among all oppressed and discriminated people and reconciliation between the oppressed and the oppressor.

In this chapter, an attempt is made to show the possibility to reading the Bible for the liberation of the marginalized people through the interpretation of the biblical text John 20, specifically at “Jesus’s appearance to Mary Magdalene,” in the “eyes of the discriminated and the oppressed.”⁷⁴ From the Buraku liberation perspective, it can be read as the story of the liberation for marginalized people.

3.1.1. Resurrection as liberating experience

Needless to say, the resurrection has been a very important theme in the ecumenical movement. It is “a living consensus” for Christian churches and, therefore, there has been much discussion about it. For the Buraku liberation theology, the most important point of ecumenical dialogue about resurrection is tradition of the paschal celebration of the early church that was found by the 20th-century liturgical movement.⁷⁵ In the paschal celebration, “the old covenant,” namely the “saving” event of Exodus is connected with the Easter event through the resurrection of Jesus

⁷⁴ Kuribayashi, *A Theology of the Crown of Thorns*, 85; 186-196.

⁷⁵ It is explained in the dictionary: “The Jewish passover (Hebrew *pesach*, from which is derived the Greek *pascha*) remembered the central saving event of the old covenant, God’s deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage. The Christian pasch celebrated a new exodus, God’s redemption of humanity from sin and death through Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 5:7-8).” See Nicholas Lossky...[et al.] (eds.), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 2nd ed. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002), 982.

Christ. The resurrection means “a new exodus” and the “saving” event signifies liberation for the oppressed people.⁷⁶ For a Buraku liberation reading, it is a very important and significant point to understand and to emphasize the liberating dimension and meaning in the resurrection event.

Resurrection as the liberating experience

C. S. Song, a Taiwanese contextual theologian, connects the resurrection to the liberating event. Song understands that “Resurrection is the anchor, so to speak, of the New Testament. A New Testament without the resurrection would be like a ship cut loose from its anchor, drifting away aimlessly in the vast ocean.”⁷⁷ Song also points out that for Jesus’ disciples who encountered the resurrected Jesus, “The experience of the risen Christ was their enlightenment.”⁷⁸ For Song, the resurrection offers “a liberating experience” and “transformation.” Before the resurrection, the cross or crucifixion was nothing more than the instrument of execution of “dissident” by the Roman Empire. It was considered as the way accursed by God among Jews, and as the symbol of hopelessness, failure, and destruction for the disciples. Through the resurrection, however, the cross was transformed into a new and different symbol with “saving” means.⁷⁹

Song believed that the resurrected Jesus appears to the disciples as the suffering Messiah “with the scars of the nails and spear still on his body.” The disciples were astonished at Jesus’ appearance in this manner, because of those who were against Jesus and even his followers considered him a political leader of Jews fighting against the Roman Empire. In the stories of the resurrection, however, God raised him up from death and revealed him as the suffering Messiah, very different from political leaders and earthly authorities.⁸⁰

Resurrection in the Buraku liberation theology

As with Song, the Buraku liberation theology also focuses on the liberating experience of the resurrection. Kuribayashi attempts to identify the experiences of Burakumin who attempt to escape from the discrimination by hiding their identity

⁷⁶ DEM, 982.

⁷⁷ C. S. Song, *The Compassionate God* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1982), 97.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 99.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 99-100.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 113.

by keeping their place of birth a secret, with the disciples who escaped from the place of Jesus' crucifixion for fear of persecution.⁸¹ Kuribayashi finds such experiences of the Burakumin in the description of Peter who hides his place of birth and denies his hometown and relationship with Jesus.⁸²

For the Buraku liberation theology, the resurrection event is the proclamation of God's power for liberation to liberate all those who live in fear, suffering oppression and discrimination. It also means liberation and transformation for the whole society itself as well as the transformation of society itself. Kuribayashi concludes that the resurrection event can have no meaning for the Burakumin if the Buraku liberation theology only refers to it as a one-time event when Jesus was resurrected from death.⁸³ The depiction in Mt. 25:31-46, where the resurrected Jesus appears in the concrete reality of the oppressed people who are "hungry," "thirsty," "stranger," "naked," "sick," "in prison" and "the least" in society is more meaningful and relevant for the Buraku liberation theology.⁸⁴

3.1.2. Burial rites in ancient Israeli society and the medieval Japan

Tetsuro Honda,⁸⁵ a Franciscan working in a poor urban area in Japan, believes that the resurrected Jesus appearing as the smallest and the least through his reading of John 20:11-18 to be the most memorable example.⁸⁶ Honda interprets this story by asking a question about why Mary Magdalene thought that the resurrected Jesus was a gardener despite having been quite close to Jesus. According to Honda, a gardener whom Mary Magdalene assumes the resurrected Jesus to be is also the grave keeper who deals with the dead body in the garden where Jesus was buried. Honda therefore points out that a gardener would probably be discriminated as "the smallest" in the society according to the Jewish Law of purity and pollution.⁸⁷

Honda focuses on the gardener, who has not really been a figure of interest earlier and he insists that the resurrected Jesus appears as the gardener who was one of the

⁸¹ Kuribayashi, *A Theology of the Crown of Thorns*, 280-281.

⁸² Cf. Mt. 26:69-75; Mk. 14:66-72; Lk. 22:62; Jn. 18:15-18, 25-27. See Kuribayashi, *A Theology of the Crown of Thorns*, 282.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 285-286.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 286.

⁸⁵ See *Asian Christian Theologies*, 427-428.

⁸⁶ Tetsuro Honda, *Finding the Bible* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2010), 96. (The original text is in Japanese: 本田哲郎『聖書を発見する』, 東京:岩波書店, 2010)

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 96.

smallest in the society.⁸⁸ For a Buraku liberation reading, Honda's interpretation is very significant because just as a gardener in Jewish society would have been discriminated and marginalized because of his dealing with the dead, the Burakumin suffers the same fate since their occupation during the medieval and early modern period to take care of the tomb and burial of the dead.

A bearer of burial work in the medieval and early modern Japan

As already mentioned in Chapter 1, the idea that blood and the dead body and those dealing with them as impure and polluted was prevalent during the medieval and early modern period in Japan. As a result of this belief those whose occupation makes it necessary for them to deal with the touching of dead bodies as they were responsible for burial of the dead were severely discriminated and marginalized. They were referred to by different derogatory names at different places, but in were as a group generalized as "hinin" (non-human/people).⁸⁹ Originally their work was considered as sacred, indispensable and important but and dead bodies as impure. While the Burakumin were considered as a sacred people who engaged in burial rites as religious pilgrims, but since the early modern period most of them had settled down at the margin and periphery of society which later came to be known as the Buraku area. The other people looked upon them in awe and at the same time were not accepted by them, and gradually the religious function they played in the burial rites were soon ignored and were only treated and looked upon as those who deals with blood and dead bodies.⁹⁰

It was responsibility of the relatives and family of the dead to take care of the burial and those who had performed the task of burying the dead body were considered impure for a certain prescribed period and had to temporarily suspend all communication with others in their community. The economically well off could hire other people to do the burial, but common people whose family members were not able to do the necessary physical work to be involved in burying a dead body

⁸⁸ Ibid., 96-97.

⁸⁹ Yosuke Takada, "Funerals and Undertakers in the Medieval Japanese Towns", in: *Historica (Shiron)*, No. 56, (2003), 1. (The original text is in Japanese: 高田陽介「葬送のにないて—中世非人の職掌との関わりから」, 『史論』56, 2003). They were called "hijiri" (literally meaning, "holy" or "sacred") or "sanmai-hijiri" (sanmai means a grave or tomb).

⁹⁰ Norio Akasaka, "A intellectual history of Hijiri", in: *Beyond time and space of exclusion* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2003), 3; 7; 38. (Original is Japanese: 赤坂憲雄「ヒジリの精神史」, 『排除の時空を超えて』, 東京:岩波書店, 2003)

and who do not have the means to hire others would resort to laying down the dead bodies at the riverside or in some vacant plot of land. There were several cases of dead bodies being left inside the house or just outside the house where the dead person had resided, if the person was not living in his/her own house.⁹¹ In such situations, “hinin” were forced to take care of the dead body that was abandoned inside or outside a house. Their work was indispensable on one hand but on the other hand they were severely discriminated as the impure for the very indispensable work that they were doing.

Impurity and burial in ancient Israeli society

It is well known that there was also the concept and understanding about blood and the dead body as something to be avoided in ancient Israeli society. Impurity was brought about by touching the dead, menstruation, intercourse and childbirth.⁹² As E.P. Sanders states, “Childbirth and intercourse are good, and menstruation is natural.”⁹³ They are not negative in themselves just as death in a family is also natural and an inevitable event for people. While association and involvement in such activities or events even if it leads to impurity it can be remedied because it was possible to privy oneself in accordance with prescribed rituals and rites for purification. These events or acts were considered as “natural, unavoidable, and not sinful. Indeed, various obligatory acts, such as burial, sexual relations, and certain sacrificial procedures (“purifying water”) are ritually defiling.”⁹⁴ But as already mentioned there was a way to deal with such defilement.

Dealing with the dead body was also “a religious duty” for a family member.⁹⁵ In fact digging up dead bodies and abandoning the dead body were considered as religious transgressions.⁹⁶ But one cannot ignore that just like in early modern Japan, there obviously cases of abandoned dead bodies if the dead persons do not have any family. Additionally, in ancient Israeli society the crucified criminals were often denied burial, and most of them were buried in a mass grave or cremation

⁹¹ Takada, 2-3.

⁹² Cf. Lev. 12:1-8, 15:16-24; Num. 19. See E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1985), 182.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁹⁴ Jonathan Klawans, “Moral and Ritual Purity”, in: Amy-Jill Levine, Dale C. Allison Jr. and John Dominic Crossan (eds.), *The historical Jesus in context* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 272.

⁹⁵ See Sanders, 182.

⁹⁶ Kathleen Corley, *Maranatha: Women’s funerary rituals and Christian origins* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 45.

without burial rites and mourning.⁹⁷ According to Corley, "The denial of burial and funeral rites was part of the punishment meted out to the condemned."⁹⁸

How was the crucified Jesus' body treated? According to the Gospel accounts, Joseph of Arimathea, "a rich man," and "a member of the council" and also "a disciple of Jesus," went to Pilate and requested permission to take the body of Jesus.⁹⁹ The body of Jesus was then buried in a tomb "that has been hewn out of the rock" (Mk. 15:46).¹⁰⁰ Unlike the accounts of the synoptic Gospels, John refers to "the garden" where the tomb of Jesus (Jn. 19:41) was located. In common with all four Gospels John says that Jesus was buried in a tomb with the help and support of Joseph of Arimathea, and not in a mass grave or cremation meant for criminals who were crucified. There were also other rare cases where the crucified dead bodies were buried in tombs.

Garden as the place of burial

John's detail of burial scene differs from the synoptic Gospels. What is significant for a Buraku liberation reading is that John describes the place of Jesus' tomb as "garden" (Greek κήπος) that does not appear in the synoptic Gospels.¹⁰¹ Raymond E. Brown opines that the place of Jesus' crucifixion and burial is located in the area north of Jerusalem according to practice that Jewish burial was usually done out of the city, the place was called "Gennath (...), a name connected with the Garden Gate (...), one of the four gates in the north wall."¹⁰² Moreover, Brown states that the body of Jesus was moved taken out from the city to the Garden Gate, and it is probable that the Garden that John describes is located in the area north of Jerusalem because of there is the well-known burial place of "the royal high priests John

⁹⁷ Corley, 31; Ruth Habermann, "Gospel of John: Spaces for Women", in: Luise Schttruff and Marie-Theres Wacker (eds.), *Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature* (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), 674.

⁹⁸ Corley, 31.

⁹⁹ Cf. Mk. 15:43; Mt. 27:57-58; Lk. 23:50-52; Jn. 19:38.

¹⁰⁰ Matthew emphasizes this tomb as "his [Joseph] own new tomb" (Mt. 27:60), and Luke also stresses the tomb "where no one had ever been laid" (Lk. 23:53).

¹⁰¹ The Gospel according to Peter (GPet.) refers to the place of Jesus' tomb as the garden, and it describes the ownership of the garden, "the Garden of Joseph" (GPet. 6:24). But John does not refer to the ownership of the garden. Brown comments, "the reason he offers for the burial of Jesus in this particular tomb is because it was near the place where he was crucified." See Raymond E. Brown, *The death of the Messiah: from Gethsemane to the grave: a commentary on the Passion narratives in the four Gospels*, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 1269.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 1269.

Hyrceanus and Alexander Jannaeus.”¹⁰³ Brown suggests that “the garden” in John’s account may be located the area north of Jerusalem, outside the city, which was a place of burial, and that Jesus was buried in a tomb in that garden.¹⁰⁴ In other words, the garden (κῆπος) is used for the indication as the place of burial in John 19-20, and this is very significant and important for a Buraku liberation reading. This usage of the garden supports and makes relevant the interpretation, namely, “the gardener” as a grave worker in the garden.

3.2. Re-interpretation of the Resurrected Jesus as a “gardener” (John 20:11-18)

In this section, an attempt is made to interpret the story of “the appearance of the resurrected Jesus to Mary Magdalene” in John 20:11-18 focusing on two characters—Mary Magdalene and the gardener from the perspective of the Buraku liberation.

3.2.1. Mary Magdalene as a marginalized woman

One interesting point in some epiphany stories is the fact that those who encountered the resurrected Jesus do not immediately recognize him. In John 20:14-15, Mary Magdalene does not recognize the resurrected Jesus and mistook him as a gardener. Likewise, in John 21:4-5 the resurrected Jesus appears to Peter and the disciples, but they did not recognize him and even shared a meal with him without recognizing him. Then, in Luke 24:15-16 two disciples encountered the resurrected Jesus on the road to Emmaus and did not recognize him as they journeyed and talked with him. Most commentators say, “Failure to recognize is a common feature in such epiphany stories,”¹⁰⁵ and point out the commonalities among these three accounts of the “misrecognition” in the epiphany stories.¹⁰⁶ In the account of John 20, one may wonder why Mary did not recognize the resurrected Jesus.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 1269.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 1270.

¹⁰⁵ J. Martin C. Scott, “John”, in: James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (eds.), *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 1208.

¹⁰⁶ Beasley-Murray, 374-375; Michaels, 998; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St John*, Vol.3 (London: Burns and Oates, 1982), 316; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: a commentary*, vol. 2 (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2003), 1189; Dorothy A. Lee, “Turning from Death to Life: A biblical Reflection on Mary Magdalene (John 20:1-18)”, in: *The Ecumenical Review*, 50:2 (April 1998), 115; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2004), 567; Ernst Haenchen, *John 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 7-21* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 209; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John 13-21*, AB (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1970), 1009; Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, NICNT, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapid, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 740.

The negative attitude towards Mary Magdalene's witness of the Resurrected Jesus

In the history of interpretation, a strongly rooted interpretation is that the problem of Mary is ascribed as the cause of her “misrecognition.” This interpretation tends to state as the reason for the “misrecognition” her psychological state brought about by her weeping and grief.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, some commentators emphasize her “unbelief,” stating that “Mary Magdalene sees Jesus but she does not ‘see’ him, that is, with the eyes of faith, until he discloses himself to her.”¹⁰⁸ Also, Rudolf Bultmann explains her “misrecognition” as her “foolishness.”¹⁰⁹

In contrast, feminist theologians have paid much attention to Mary Magdalene and have been pointed out that such kind of interpretation has a tendency to reflect a patriarchal and male-oriented perspective of the figure of Mary.¹¹⁰ Jane Schberg points out that there has been a strongly rooted interpretation of Mary considered as “whore.” In this image, Mary has been considered as a “Repentant whore. (...) the saved prostitute, a figure that is relatively rare in literature, as the more negative archetypes prevail.”¹¹¹ Dorothy A. Lee also comments that Mary has been described as a “helpless” and a “dependent woman.”¹¹² Because of these negative attitudes towards Mary Jesus’ appearance to her, “has been consistently trivialized as a ‘private,’ that is, unofficial event without ecclesial significance” in the history of interpretation.¹¹³

Mary Magdalene's “unreliable” witness

¹⁰⁷ For instance, her “weeping” is frequently mentioned as the reason for her misrecognition. Mary is weeping to find that the body of Jesus disappeared (20:11), two angels and even the resurrected Jesus ask her “Woman, why are you weeping?” (20:13, 15); See F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Wm, Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), 388, says that Mary “may simply have been so blinded by her tears that she could only make out the form of a man standing behind her.” Then others focus on the fact that Mary is beside herself with grief. See Schnackenburg, 317, says, “she wants to bring the body back again although that is hardly practicable for a woman by herself. Pain and ardour make her blind to the one who stands before her.” See also Sandra M. Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Forth Gospel* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1999), 195, says, “her grief has spiritually blinded her, rendered her incapable of revelation even when Jesus himself stands before her and speaks to her.”

¹⁰⁸ Gerard Sloyan, *John, Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 220.

¹⁰⁹ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 686. He says, “in her foolishness she thinks he is the gardener.”

¹¹⁰ Lisa Isherwood and Dorothea McEwan (eds.), *An A to Z of Feminist Theology*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 129; See Jane Schberg, “Thinking back through Mary Magdalene”, in: Amy-Jill Levine (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to John Volume II* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003).

¹¹¹ Schberg, 178.

¹¹² Dorothy A. Lee, “Partnership in Easter Faith: The role of Mary Magdalene and Thomas in John 20”, in: *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 58 (1995), 37-38.

¹¹³ Schneiders, 111.

Mary's witness of the resurrected Jesus has also been trivialized and considered "unreliable" not only in most history of interpretation, but also during the New Testament time. According to the Gospels, the women who accompanied Jesus and who were present during his crucifixion and burial became the first messengers to announce the resurrection of Jesus to the other disciples and Mary was the first witness of the resurrected Jesus.¹¹⁴ In the description other than the Gospels, there however is no reference to the women's testimony. Paul's account of Jesus' resurrection in 1 Cor. 15:5-8 seems to refute the Gospels' reference of the resurrected Jesus appearance before the women.¹¹⁵ This tendency to ignore or dismiss the women's testimony is not only evident in Paul's writings but also in the Gospels. Luke describes that the resurrected Jesus firstly appeared to Peter (Lk. 24:34), and even John alludes that "the other disciple" were the first to believe in the resurrection (Jn. 20:8). Schberg thinks that women's active presence in the crucifixion, the empty tomb, and the epiphany already got submerged into the process of trivialization and miniaturization during the New Testament period.¹¹⁶ There are also others who voiced the possibility that the Gospels themselves have the intention of reducing and playing down women's active role in the Easter tradition.¹¹⁷

People doubted the credibility of women's testimony in the Israeli society during the first century and it was often dismissed. In the light of this attitude Richard Bauckham points out, "since women's testimony in the ancient world, including especially Jewish Palestine, was widely regarded as unreliable and untrustworthy, this role of the women in the Easter events is unlikely to have been invented."¹¹⁸ Thus, although Mary's testimony had no credibility in the society of the day and even "in an emerging male-dominated church, the appearance to Mary became more

¹¹⁴ Cf. Mt. 28:9-10; Jn. 20:14-18; Mk. 16:9.

¹¹⁵ "and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, the to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me." (1 Cor. 15:5-8, RSV)

¹¹⁶ Schberg, 176.

¹¹⁷ Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 258-259. Thorwald Lorenzen, *Resurrection and Discipleship: Interpretive Models, Biblical Reflections, Theological Consequences* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995), 140.

¹¹⁸ Bauckham, 257-258. See also Lorenzen, 140-141, says, "But knowing the juridical stipulations that the testimony of women was, like that of children and imbeciles, not valid, and recognizing the hesitancy of early Christian authors to have women serve as the main witnesses to important events..."

and more marginalized,”¹¹⁹ it is all the more remarkable that Mary’s story certainly remains in the Gospels and she plays a key role as the first witness in the resurrection of Jesus.

A Buraku liberation reading rejects the interpretation that her “foolishness” or “unfaithfulness” is responsible for her “misrecognition.” Rather than focusing on her “misrecognition” it focuses on her “marginalization,” as a person viewed as “unimportant,” “sinful,” “unreliable” woman by the male-dominated society. It also understands her as “the marginalized woman” in the society. By doing so, it attempts to look at the resurrection that she experienced in a different light and perspective, namely, the appearance of the resurrected Jesus as a liberation experience for the marginalized people.

3.2.2. Gardener as a marginalized people

In John 20, the main reason of a negative judgment on Mary is that she did not recognize the resurrected Jesus and mistook him as a “gardener.” This biblical imagery of a gardener, which suddenly appears in the text, awakens a reader’s interest, but there is no explanation about the gardener and the reason why Mary mistook the resurrected Jesus as a gardener?

Greek word κηπουρός, translated “gardener,” is hapax legomenon, it appears only in Jn. 20:15 throughout LXX and NT.¹²⁰ Therefore, it is not easy to understand the meaning of the term, and “Why Mary took him for the gardener is not clear.”¹²¹

Rhetorical interpretation of “garden” and “gardener”

Some commentators opines that a gardener has rhetorically been adapted in John’s account, because the garden where Mary stands is mentioned in the previous chapter (Jn. 18:1, 26, 19:41), and therefore John attempted to match the description of the tomb of Jesus in the “garden” with the “gardener” who Mary Magdalene recognized.¹²² There are others who focus on the context of the event and suggest

¹¹⁹ Lorenzen, 142.

¹²⁰ Some commentator point out, while κηπουρός is hapax legomenon in the Bible, it is not an uncommon word in the Hellenistic world. See C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St John: An introduction with commentary and notes on the Greek text*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1978), 564; Brown, *John*, 990. “Garden” (Greek κήπος) is found in several texts of the Gospels (Lk. 13:19; Jn. 18:1, 26, 19:41, also GPet. 6:24).

¹²¹ Morris, 740.

¹²² Schnackenburg, 317; Brown, *John*, 990; Haenchen, 209.

that since “it was still dark” (20:1), the only probable person to be there and to ask her who she was looking for was a gardener who took care of the tombs, and so it was understandable that Mary mistook the resurrected Jesus as a gardener.¹²³

All these interpretations of the event do not pay much attention to the figure of the gardener himself. The image of the gardener in Jn. 20:15 seems to be inserted simply to complete the setting of John’s narrative without any particular significance or message.

Apologetic intent against Jewish polemic about the lost body of Jesus

Other commentators offer another interpretation of the gardener as a “grave robber.” The appearance of the gardener also seems to point towards an “apologetic” intent against Jewish polemic that the gardener stole the body of Jesus. According to this, John used the word “κηπουρός” for an apologetic answer to such Jewish claim.¹²⁴ It has been suggested that the reason why Mary wept was not because of Jesus’ death, but because she thought that the body of Jesus had been stolen and such act was considered as “abuse of the dead” and an “abhorrent offence.”¹²⁵ Stealing of dead bodies was not uncommon during those days though it was considered as a scandalous event, and has been referred to as “a sufficiently common crime to provoke an imperial edict.”¹²⁶ John’s account which highlights the presence of a gardener brings a reader’s attention to the resurrection of Jesus by God and away from the suspicion of grave robbery.¹²⁷ The supposition about John’s intention can be supported by the account in which Mary addressed who she believed to be the gardener as “Sir” and probably “supposes that he has taken the body, without bad

¹²³ Morris, 740; Köstenberger, 568.

¹²⁴ Brown, *John*, 990; Bultmann, 686, note 3. According to them, an apologetic interpretation is found in Tertullian’s text. See also Morris, 740; Schnackenburg, 317.

¹²⁵ Köstenberger, 567; Habermann, 674. Habermann pays attention to the description that “it was still dark” (20:1), and points out the possibility that Mary’s action to take and bury the body of Jesus was a risky mission at that time.

¹²⁶ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Light Has Come: An Exposition of the Forth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 263. See also Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-science commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 282. They introduce the ordinance for grave published by the Roman emperor in the first century: “For beyond all else it shall be obligatory to honor those who have been buried. Let no one remove them for any reason. If anyone does so, however, it is my will that he shall suffer capital punishment on the charge of tomb robbery. (SEG 8.13 Nazareth [?] first century C.E., Metzger 1980, 77)” They also consider, “If this ordinance was in fact published in Galilee some time prior to the death of Jesus, then at the time of Jesus’ resurrection there was in force a severe law against tampering with buried bodies.”

¹²⁷ Köstenberger, 567.

intent, to another place.”¹²⁸

Gardener with particular occupation and social status

It is not easy to really understand actual meaning and implication of the term “gardener” (κηπουρός) as used John 20:15, though in all probability John used it to convey some meaning and therefore would have some significances. It can also be assumed that the gardener’s occupation and role in ancient Israeli society do have some important and significant meaning and implications in the resurrection story. The question about who is the gardener has been discussed in a several way. For instance, one can say that he is similar to “watchman” or “keeper,”¹²⁹ and is employed to watch over the garden during harvest time, and does not entail manual work.¹³⁰ Brown opines that the gardener’s work is “to care for the trees and fruit or crops,” but not as a custodian.¹³¹

Interestingly, Keener, referring to Greek literature, *Heroikos* written by Flavius Philostratus in the third century raises the possibility that the gardener belonged to the poorest group of people of that time.¹³² *Heroikos* is written as a fictional conversation between a Phoenician and a Vinedresser. In this, the vinedresser’s response to the Phoenician’s admiration for the vinedresser is remarkable. In the course of conversation (Hrk. 4:11-12), the Phoenician told the Vinedresser, “I equally do an injustice to your wisdom by calling you a ‘vinedresser’.” The Vinedresser responded by saying, “Do call me so, and indeed you would please Protesilaos by addressing me as ‘farmer’ and ‘gardener’ and things like these.” “Gardener” (κηπουρός) appears here in another term—“farmer” (γεωργός). Moreover, it seems to be used for a self-humiliation word by the Vinedresser who does not think himself an admirable person.

The use of ἀμπελουργός and γεωργός in LXX

In Hrk. 4.11-12, three similar and different Greek words are used, ἀμπελουργός translated as “vinedresser,” γεωργός and κηπουρός. In NT ἀμπελουργός only appears in Lk. 13:7, which is translated as “vinedresser” (RSV) or “gardener”

¹²⁸ Schnackenburg, 317.

¹²⁹ Cf. 2kgs. 17:9, 18:8; Job 27:18.

¹³⁰ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Fully rev., vol. 2: E-J (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 400.

¹³¹ Brown, *John*, 990.

¹³² Keener, 1190.

(NRSV). It is certain that ἀμπελουργός refers to those who work in a vineyard in the context of Lk. 13:6-9. In contrast to κηπουρός, ἀμπελουργός is found in several texts of LXX.¹³³ The word γεωργός is usually translated as “farmer” and “vinedresser,” and it appears in the parables of Jesus,¹³⁴ and also in LXX.¹³⁵

Similar to Hrk. 4:11-12, ἀμπελουργός and γεωργός appear simultaneously in Jer. 52:16 that describe the scene about the Babylonian captivity by Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard.¹³⁶ J. A. Thompson opines that vinedressers and tillers were “the insignificant members of the populace (the weak ones)” for Babylonia, and were considered “a low estimate of the significance,” and as the poorest people.¹³⁷ J. N. Graham opines that this text “reveals that the lower classes of Judean society became ‘vinedresser and plowmen’ after the departure of the landed, aristocratic, and skilled classes.”¹³⁸

Thus, there is the possibility to understand that ἀμπελουργός and γεωργός who occupation was to care for vines and crops, are used almost with the same meaning in LXX, and as Jeremiah mentioned, they belonged to and came from among the poorest people in the society.

Those who work in the garden where tombs are located

In the introduction of *Heroikos*, Jenifer K. Berenson Maclean and Ellen Bradshaw Aitken explain the word ἀμπελουργός as “one who tends, prunes, cultivates, and otherwise cares for the grapevines in a vineyard.”¹³⁹ According to them, the work of ἀμπελουργός “tends the vineyard and gardens around the tomb of the hero Protesilaos.” At that time, there was “abundant vegetation” in a tomb or sanctuary of a hero, because it “signals the immortality of the hero, as well as the justice and

¹³³ Cf. 2kgs. 25:12; 2Chr. 26:10; Is. 61:5, Jer. 52:16.

¹³⁴ Cf. Mt. 21:33ff; Mk. 12:1f; Lk. 20:9f.

¹³⁵ Cf. 2Chr. 26:10; Jer. 52:16; Joel 1:11. In Jer. 53:16, it is translated as “plowman” (RSV) or “tillers” (NRSV). According to William L. Holladay, plowmen “were evidently workmen engaged on highly organized state-managed terraced estates producing export-quality produce, such as wine and oil.” William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 26-52*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 441.

¹³⁶ “But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left some of the poorest people of the land to be vinedressers [ἀμπελουργοὺς] and tillers [γεωργοὺς] of the soil.” (Jer. 52:16, NRSV)

¹³⁷ J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, NICOT, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 776.

¹³⁸ J. N. Graham, “‘Vinedresser and Plowmen’: 2 Kings 25:12 and Jeremiah 52:16”, in: *Biblical Archaeologist*, (March 1984), 55.

¹³⁹ Flavius Philostratus, *Heroikos: Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Jennifer K. Berenson Maclean and Ellen Bradshaw Aitken* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), xxxvii.

prosperity that derive from the hero.”¹⁴⁰

The word ἀμπελουργός connotes a person who works in the tomb in accordance with the context and location, for example, a sanctuary or tomb of a hero in *Heroikos*. This is similar to the usage of “garden” (κῆπος) that also connotes the tomb through the context. As Keener points out that “The dead were often buried in fields and gardens, so a tomb in a garden area (19:41; Cf. 20:15) is not unlikely,”¹⁴¹ and it is possible to consider the gardener (κηπουρός) in Jn. 20:15 as a person who cultivates crops and keeps a tomb in the garden as well as ἀμπελουργός.

3.2.3. The Resurrected Jesus in the image of the marginalized people

Through the discussion so far, the possibility to interpret that the resurrected Jesus appears in the image of a gardener that Mary recognized as a person who takes care for the tomb in the garden, and that gardeners of that period are among the poorest people in society have been indicated. Probably the scene where Mary asks the gardener to return the body of Jesus indicates the possibility that the gardeners are also involved in the transport and caring of the dead body as a part of their work. It is possible that Mary thought the gardener carried away the body of Jesus (Jn. 20:15) to some other place.

As mentioned above, to be involved in the dead body was avoided because of the concept of impurity that was connected with blood and the dead in ancient Israeli society, therefore it was unlikely for people who are not families to be involved in the process of the burial of the dead. However, for gardeners who work in gardens where tomb are located, to deal and the burial of the dead, or to be in contact with someone’s blood and a dead body, was not an extraordinary thing as it was their occupation. As a result of the nature of their work they were severely marginalized and discriminated and ostracized in society. A Buraku liberation reading pays great attention to the gardener as a representative figure of marginalized people as well as the role and part played by Mary and focuses on the text about Mary’s “misrecognition” of Jesus as gardener, and also attempts to interpret and reread it from the perspective of the Burakumin. It is important a significant that the resurrected Jesus appears to Mary in the image of a gardener, who belongs to the marginalized group of people in society. The appearance of the resurrected Jesus as

¹⁴⁰ *Heroikos*, xxxvii.

¹⁴¹ Keener, 1164.

a gardener in the eyes of Mary reminds us what Jesus had said during his life—“just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family” (Mt. 25:40), “He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free” (Lk. 4:18); and what he was—“a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Lk. 7:34).

Resurrection “in another form”

Ernst Haenchen states that Mary’s misrecognition “is designated to show that the risen Jesus is not accessible like he once was.”¹⁴² Honda interprets the gardener in Jn. 20:14-15 as a representative figure of the discriminated people in society, and Honda states that the resurrected Jesus appears in that particular image—the image of the marginalized people in the same way as “the stranger” in Lk. 24:16 and Jn. 21:4.¹⁴³ In these three epiphany stories, the resurrected Jesus appears the unrecognized. Furthermore, Markan Appendix clearly describes that the resurrected Jesus appears to two disciples “in another form” (Greek ἐν ἑτέρῃ μορφῇ, Mk. 16:12).¹⁴⁴ The figure of the resurrected Jesus is not in a form that is familiar to the disciples; rather Jesus is resurrected “in another way” and is perceived as the stranger and a gardener who are the marginalized in the society. In this context, it can be said, that the appearance in the image of the marginalized and “the recognition scenes emphasize transformation.”¹⁴⁵

Resurrection is not the exclusively an event when a dead person is resurrected, but also entails and leads to the transformation in all spheres of lives. It can be of relationship, perspectives, and social structures. This transformative aspect and dimension is clearly expressed in the story of the Easter event, in the encounter between Mary Magdalene and the resurrected Jesus in the image of a gardener who is also represents the marginalized people in society. Through a re-reading of the Easter event from the perspective of the Buraku liberation theology that focuses on two marginalized people in the society the story of the resurrection becomes a transformative message of liberation from any form of discrimination.

¹⁴² Haenchen, 209. See also Schnackenburg, 317, says, “the risen one assumes a form and a dress appropriate for those to whom he wants to reveal himself.”

¹⁴³ Honda, 97-99.

¹⁴⁴ Mk 16:12-13 is considered as the summary of Lk. 24:13-35. Brown, *John*, 1009; Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, WBC (Nashville: T. Nelson, 2001), 548; Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis/ Fortress Press, 2007), 808.

¹⁴⁵ Brown, *John*, 1009.

CONCLUSION

The Buraku liberation theology attempts to emphasize the Gospel of liberation for the marginalized people and to affirm that the Gospel message should lead to the transformation of not only individuals but the whole society itself. Through the process of this transformation the wicked, the oppressors as well as those who had been oppressed, discriminated and dehumanized are reconciled and all are resurrected and transformed into a community where all have their own dignity and identity as human created in the image of God. In the ecumenical movement in Asia, the theme of struggling against dehumanization is consistently one of the most crucial topics from the beginning. Harvey L. Perkins, an Australian contextual theologian, mentions the “de-peopled” in the history of CCA, as he states, “We can describe the ‘de-peopled’ with varying emphases. The Penang Assembly of the CCA, in 1977 described the people as wasted: by hunger, exploitation, sexual oppression and racial and ethnic discrimination; by hunger, torture and deprivation of rights; by loneliness, non-relation and non-community.”¹⁴⁶

In this sense, we can say that the Burakumin called “*eta*” (impure/polluted) and “*hinin*” (non-human/people) in Japan are also the “de-peopled” with experiences of dehumanization and discrimination. “De-peopling” occurs through “the result of the political, economic, social and cultural structures of community.” Therefore, “re-peopling” if we may use the term “is not merely ameliorating conditions of poor people, but restoring them to a place in society from which they can claim their rights, and not become marginalized or oppressed by the structures of society again.”¹⁴⁷ Thus, “re-peopling” involves the “action to release and restore people by changing political, economic, social and cultural structures of communities.”¹⁴⁸ It is also the process of rediscovering one’s own identity because the Burakumin, the “de-peopled” has been subjected to live with false identity by the dominant and oppressive structure and system in society.¹⁴⁹

The Suiheisha Declaration clarifies the experiences of the “de-peopled” and the process of “re-peopling.” The declaration clearly states that it is time to get rid of and the negative connotation of being labeled as the Burakumin and to overcome it

¹⁴⁶ Harvey L. Perkins, *Roots for Vision*, (Singapore: Christian Conference of Asia, 1985), 6.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

by rediscovering their own identities in the history of their ancestors' struggle against the discrimination and marginalization that they had suffers.¹⁵⁰ The declaration also clearly states: "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."¹⁵¹

For the Burakumin and other marginalized people, it is very important to rediscover their own identity and roots in their struggle for liberation. They have to overcome the process of being "de-peopled" because they are forced into a system and structure where they have to hide their own identity and history or else suffer unprovoked violence and discrimination. It must be also noted that the Buraku liberation theology also recognizes the responsibility to strive towards the "re-peopling" of all other marginalized people in society and the world at large.

"Let there be light in all human beings!"

Masao Takenaka, a Japanese ecumenical theologian, introduces an understanding of "human" from the writings of Rinzo Shina, a Japanese famous writer. Takenaka explains that the Japanese word "*ningen*" (human) rooted in a Chinese character is made up of two words, "*hito*" (a person) and "*aida*" (between).

人 person
 + = 人間 (*ningen*) human
 間 between

* This figure is reconstructed based on Takenaka's book.¹⁵²

In the culture of East Asia, a person can become human by the presence of another person and co-existing with one another without any marginalization and isolation. Takenaka theologically interprets this understanding by referring to Genesis 2,

¹⁵⁰ "Our ancestors pursued and practiced freedom and equality. They were the victims of base, contemptible class policies and they were the manly 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." BLL comments on the word "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." See the BLL website.

http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~mg5s-hsgw/siryoku/kiso/suiheisya_sengen3.html

¹⁵¹ See the BLL website.

http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~mg5s-hsgw/siryoku/kiso/suiheisya_sengen3.html

¹⁵² Masao Takenaka, *Cross and Circle*, (Hong Kong, Christian Conference of Asia, Urban Rural Mission, 1990), 70.

where says, “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18), and he says, “In Christ, we concretely find co-humanity. In Christ we have the assurance of hope and resurrection of humanity” because of that Living Christ is already among people in the world.¹⁵³

The Suiheisha Declaration ends with a final sentence that “Let there be warmth in human society, let there be light in all human beings.” When we understand the word “human beings” as the meaning of “To be human is to be a person between people,” we can recognize that the light is given to all the people in order to unite together and to create a new relationship where there is no discrimination and marginalization.

Although there is no “visible” distinction of race, ethnicity, language, culture and religion, the Burakumin have been severely discriminated and ostracized by the majority in the Japanese society. Such unprovoked discrimination against the Burakumin paradoxically enables us to understand that any form of discrimination is a selective and artificial oppression by the majority upon the vulnerable as the social minority. Kuribayashi concludes his book by saying:

We, the church with the discriminated should continue a long process of the liberation and the voice against the discrimination might be consistently marginalized in the established church; but we hope one day the big movement will appear there; even if it is small like a mustard seed, God will make it grow up the greatest one; the important thing is the courage to take a step beyond.¹⁵⁴

Liberation from and the struggle against the discrimination must lead to the transformation the society where there is no longer any violence and oppression and to the restoration human relationships. There is an urgent need to commit us towards the struggle for liberation of the marginalized and the discriminated and the society at large with our eyes fixed on the resurrected Jesus.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 70-71.

¹⁵⁴ Kuribayashi, *A Theology of the Crown of Thorns*, 472.

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