

December 1987

A Report by a BLL Delegations Sent to Europe

With the aim of furthering the development of an international coalition against discrimination, a delegation from the Buraku Liberation League was sent to Europe for three weeks from August 22 to September 11, 1987. The delegation was headed by Tatsukuni Komori, Secretary-General of the BLL Central Headquarters. Kenzo Tomonaga, Secretary-General of the Buraku Liberation Research Institute, and Eiji Okada, Secretary of the Central Headquarters, were also members.

We visited five countries: Switzerland, France, England, East Germany and West Germany. We had the opportunity to exchange opinions with many people connected with the U.N. Human Rights Center and with several other organizations in each country which are fighting against discrimination.

In Switzerland we attended the sub-commission of the U.N. Minority Protection against Discrimination, obtaining credentials from WCRP. There we

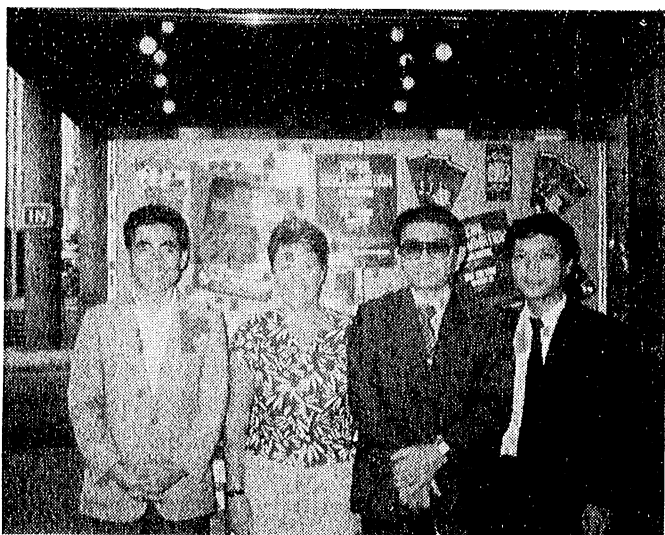
could talk not only with people from the U.N. Human Rights Center but also with people from the NGO who were attending the sub-commission. We learned about the serious discrimination in existence and the active movement against it.

In France we were able to meet people from MRAP and learn about the serious discrimination existing in that country today. Under the supervision of MRAP, we could talk to construction and sanitation workers, and also exchange views with immigrant laborers at their single dormitory located just outside Paris.

In France, we had the opportunity to have a friendly talk with the French Human Rights League and the International Federation of Human Rights, and also lodged an appeal with UNESCO in order to correct the present situation in which the Takahashi senior high school scholarships, an important component of the Dowa Taisaku (Integration Measures) policy, have declined sharply.

In England we could exchange views with people from the Minority Rights Group, the Anti-Slavery Society for the protection of Human Rights, the Institute of Race Relations, Amnesty International, the Socialist International, the Commission for Racial Equality and the Bangladesh Youth League.

At the Commission for Racial Equality, in partic-



With Ms. Margaret Michie, of the Commission for Equality, England

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ular, we learned about the concrete conditions in which people were wrestling with such issues as the Educational Declaration, advice and reconciliation over grievances, lawsuits, and an official enquiry and proposal to rewrite the law in order to properly implement the Race Relations Act.

In Bautzen City in East Germany, we called on the head office of the Domowina Association of Sorben people, the indigenous inhabitants. They introduced us to the way in which they respect their own unique language, culture and education. And we could also meet people from the East German Commission for Human Rights.

In West Germany, we exchanged views with the Zentralrat deutscher Sinti und Roma, and studied their traditional stonework, woodwork, basketry and exhibitions of relics from the Nazi holocaust. We were able to have a friendly chat with West German journalists.

We can summarize the findings of the BLL delegation to Europe under the following five heads.

(1) We were able to inform people connected with the U.N. Human Rights Center and people belonging to many private organizations about the existing state of the human rights in Japan, including the Buraku issue.

(2) We could get hold of information about existing serious discrimination and the state of human rights in each country, and also learned about their struggle against these problems from many people connected with the U.N. Human Rights Center and many private organizations.

(3) At present, we don't have a head office of a U.N.registered NGO in Japan. When we tackle discrimination or human rights problems, not only in Japan but also in Asia and Oceania, we need a Japan Head Office of a U.N.-registered NGO. We were able to investigate this issue.

(4) Japan must ratify the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination as soon as possible. Upon ratification of the convention, the biggest problem will be how to reconcile the prohibition of propaganda for and incitement to discrimination set out in the fourth clause of the convention with freedom of speech. We learned a lot about how to handle this issue.

(5) We learned that not only the U.N. but also private organizations have already started preparations for the 40th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights next year.

Looking back on the achievements of our delegation to Europe, we intend to execute the following assignments.

(1) We will reinforce our efforts to realize the establishment of a U.N.-registered NGO with a Japan head office and with the elimination of discrimination and the entrenchment of human rights as its object. In order to do so, it is necessary that the BLL, with a tradition of 65 years since the founding of the Zenkoku Suiheisha (National Levelers Association) and with great resources of power and influence, should cooperate with the Buraku Liberation Research Institute in performing the central role. At the same time, we have to ask for the cooperation from all people fighting discrimination throughout the world.

(2) We should immediately start our preparations for the 40th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights next year. In particular, we will make it our urgent task to have Japan ratify the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination as early as possible. We should also stage the 2nd World Congress Against Discrimination during Human Rights week in December 1988 here in Japan in order to promote the elimination of discrimination of every kind throughout the world.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to the many organizations and people who gave our delegation such a warm and cordial reception and would like to request their strong cooperation for the future.

Following the delegation to Europe, another delegation to Europe and America headed by Saichiro Uesugi, Chairman of the Central Headquarters of the Buraku Liberation League, went on a two-week visit from September 13, 1987. We intend to report the findings of this delegation in the next issue.





The Buraku literacy movement

Many buraku people in their 40's and 50's were unable to receive even compulsory education in the postwar days due to poverty and discrimination against burakumin. They remain illiterate even to this day.

As the buraku liberation movement grew in the 1960's, buraku literacy projects were initiated with the collaboration of school teachers. The first one started in 1963 in Fukuoka. Literacy was defined not just as an endeavor to learn to read and write but also as a practice by which the learner critically views his or her life and the discrimination woven in it so the learner acquires the perspective to cope positively with various programs for liberation.

Buraku literacy projects are under way in 292 localities today, and the Ministry of Education started to provide some financial assistance in 1982.

The case of Kiryu city in Gunma Pref **Why a City Authority Denies the Existence of Buraku**

Of the 70 local self-governing bodies (cities, towns and villages) in Gunma prefecture, 38 with Buraku districts within their administrative area legally define these districts as "Designated Areas." "The Area Designation for Buraku" is an administrative procedure according recognition to certain areas as Buraku defined in the laws providing for the various measures for improvement, and is the basic precondition

necessary to benefit from almost all the Dowa measures provided for the Buraku.

Yet the Buraku in Kiryu City have never been defined as "designated areas" -- even though it is a fact that about 1,000 Buraku families live in these districts.

The existence of these Buraku districts is quite clearly indicated in many records. For example, the



minute book of the Council for the Improvement of Slums (1912) and "The Yuwa (Integration) Projects Yearbook of 1926," published by the Central Yuwa Projects Association carry articles describing the state of affairs in these Buraku, as well as suggestions and plans for their improvement.

Even after World War II, the Kiryu City administration had on two occasions -- in 1963 and 1967 submitted reports on [redacted] cho and the eight other Buraku in the city to the Gumma prefectural government, thereby clearly recognizing the existence of these Buraku. The city actually used the fact to apply for special tax allocations from the national coffer for a period of seven years between 1964 and 1974, and was granted and received these allocations.

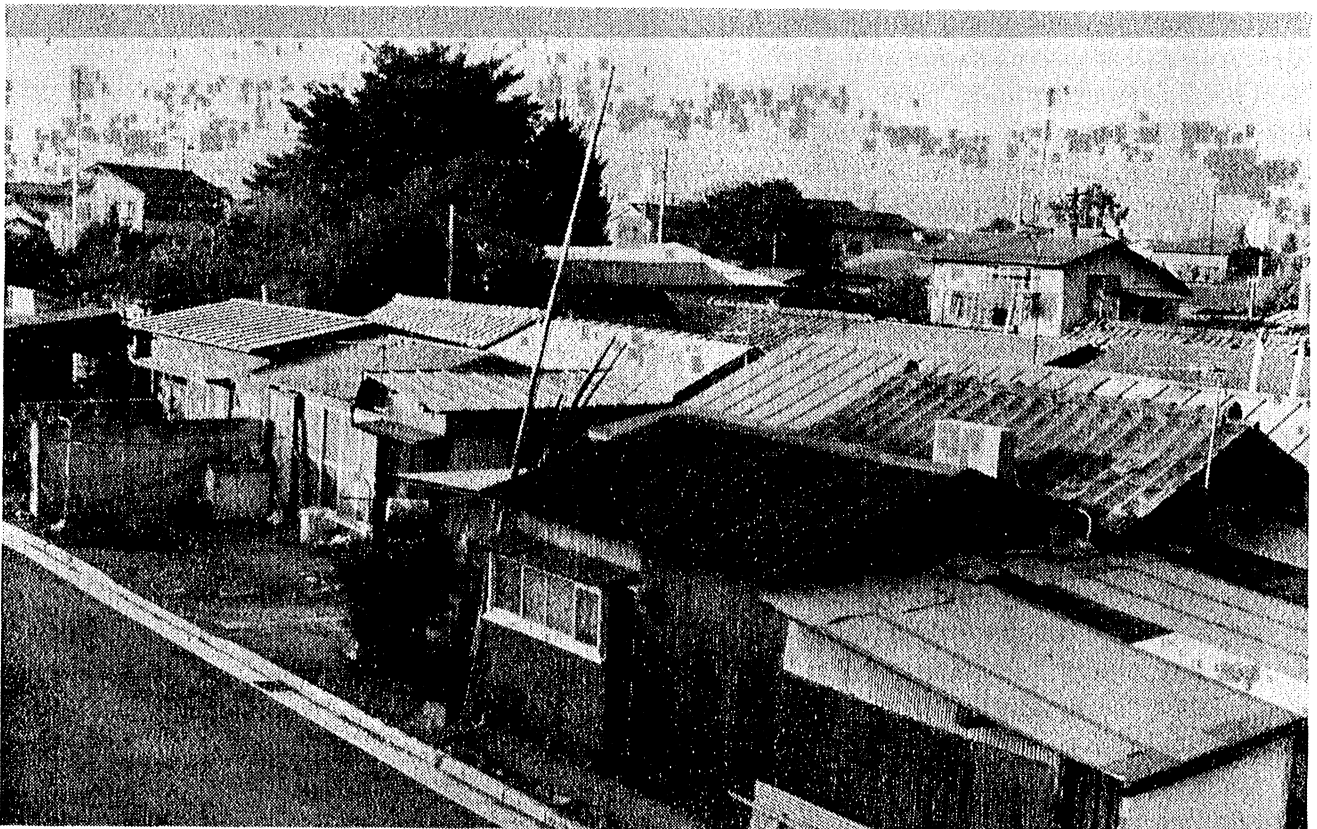
However, the city administration made a complete U-turn and began to deny the existence of these Buraku as they were obliged to implement the special measures projects for these Buraku when the Law on Special Measures for Dowa Projects came into force in 1969, and had stopped reporting their existence to Gunma Prefecture since then.

The Gunma Prefectural Federation of the Buraku Liberation League repeatedly tried to organize its branches in these Buraku in Kiryu City since about 1969 -- without much success, for the Buraku there

were under the influence of conservative elements, and the majority of Buraku people in the city wanted "to be left to themselves" and showed no desire to be openly identified as Burakumin.

The actual discrimination, however, continued as usual. For example, not even the city officials deny the fact that three Buraku in the [redacted] cho and [redacted] cho areas are located in the midst of what has long been known as an escape conduit for flood water -- at a spot where the city's two rivers [redacted] meet. Water from the two rivers would be channeled into this area whenever a flood threatened the city. So it's no exaggeration to say that "the history of [redacted] cho has virtually been the history of falling victim to repeated floods." The city authorities responsible for improving this disastrous condition ignored the problem and have done nothing about it.

In addition, a number of discriminatory incidents involving Burakumin have been revealed in the last few years: a case of marriage discrimination in 1982; a discriminatory statement made by a major sewing machine company salesman, a private detective investigating into Buraku family origins, and another case involving a discriminatory statement in a hospital -- all in 1985; the publication of a discriminatory article in "Hokkan Shimpo," a small community paper, the





discovery of derogatory graffiti on the wall of a public housing department in 1986, etc.

In 1972, a fire broke out in the center of the cho Buraku area, but the road was too narrow to bring in the fireengines. As a result, several houses were left to burn to cinders.

In 1984, a member of the Buraku Liberation League found "the section of the river flowing through the Buraku looking as if it had been dyed," since it had been polluted with so much human waste. The cause of the pollution was a sewage pipe pouring waste out into the river. The negligence of the city public hygiene and sewage authorities was appalling.

The Kiryu City branch of the Buraku Liberation League was finally organized in 1984, although with only 38 members at the start. It began to negotiate with the city to do something about the situation in the Buraku. Scholars and other people concerned also started to cooperate with the League.

The city, unable to deny the existence of the Buraku, began to admit it, saying: "There are Buraku in Kiryu, but there is no discrimination." They started reconstruction of the longabandoned dikes and covered the notorious sewage pipe with a rubber lid.

A liberal mayor was elected in 1987 to replace the conservative incumbent, who had held office for 16 years. He said "he is well aware of the Buraku's existence and the necessity of Dowa projects," and promised "to do more for enlightenment work, taking into consideration the actuality of Buraku living conditions and their culture, as well as their status in society."

Although the fact remains that the Buraku in Kiryu are not yet legally designated as "areas to be improved" after the passage of the Law for Special Budgetary Measures for Area Improvement Projects, the growing pressure of the movement for Buraku liberation is certainly being felt in Kiryu City.

Readers Page

Why the Evasion

Attitude of Japanese Newspapers to the Buraku Issue

It certainly is common knowledge among foreigners who are interested in and know something about Japanese society that the biggest human rights problem here is the issue of discrimination against Buraku. These foreigners quite naturally presume that the problem is often debated in the newspapers and other mass media.

But what is the reality? Take, for example, the fact that we have in Japan a week of events set aside as Human Rights Week in early December every year. The major Japanese papers virtually make it a custom to carry editorials to remind and enlighten their readers on the significance of other annual occasions, such as Children's Day or Respect-for-the-Aged Week. Therefore, one would naturally assume that editorials on the importance of Human Rights Week would be carried in these papers in December.

Let's have a look at how the four leading national daily papers -- Asahi, Mainichi, Yomiuri and Sankei --

dealt with the problem in last year's Human Rights Week. An Asahi editorial of December 4 commented on the internationalization of human rights problems and the development in the awareness of human rights. But this was only a general reference to human rights, and it never mentioned Buraku or other specific minority problems. Mainichi went after the issue of "ijime" (bullying) among school pupils in the December 6 edition and Yomiuri took up the same problem in their evening leader. Sankei never touched the human rights issue during the week.

Not one leading paper in Japan ever mentioned a single word about the biggest human rights issue in the country -- the Buraku issue.

It is an established fact that the newspapers in Japan, not only on human rights occasions but in day-to-day editions also, evade and rarely carry stories on Buraku affairs. Why don't they run more articles on such an important issue? This really must be hard to



understand for people from other countries, where the principal role of journalism is to focus on and engage in a constructive critique of contemporary social problems.

One of reasons is that the journalists themselves are still soaked in a discriminatory mentality. School lessons on Dowa education, which present children with the truth about the Buraku, have only begun recently. Even in the case of those journalists who have gone through it, their knowledge about the Buraku may be quite insufficient. The great majority of journalists active at the moment are still trapped to some extent in a sense of discrimination, and the roots of their prejudice against Burakumin lie deep. Although they know that the Buraku issue lies at the very core of Japanese society, they try to get by without mentioning it if possible. For they are strongly obsessed with the idea: "Burakumin are reckless people. You never can tell what they are going to do to you."

Another major reason is that no reader will ever file a complaint with the press if they fail to bring up the Buraku issue. The majority of the Japanese public hold such ideas as: "Things like the Buraku problem don't exist anymore"; "Even if there are such problems, they are very rare these days"; or "Leave the issue alone -- it will go away if we don't make a big fuss." The readers or the public in general also don't want to mention the fact that no one will criticize the press if they don't carry a single line about it.

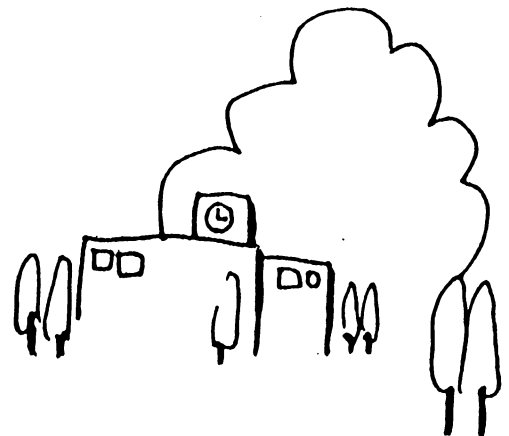
Reporters compete for stories, and so if they miss a story that all the other papers are carrying -- for instance, some particular move by a major faction in the ruling Liberal Democratic party -- they will be bawled out by their editor. But never in the case of the Buraku issue. On the contrary, even if one paper does carry an extra story on the Buraku, no one regards it as a scoop, and the other papers don't feel they have been caught out.

Besides, it takes a certain amount of determina-

tion for a reporter to decide to write about the Buraku. Because he has to encounter his own awareness of the discrimination long repressed within himself and has to answer it in some way, which is not an easy thing to do. Most Japanese journalists are rather hot on human rights issues. They respond quite sharply on such issues as apartheid in South Africa, the civil rights movements of American blacks, and what's happening in many countries ruled by juntas. But all these things are going on in places far from Japan. Nothing is likely to happen and boomerang back onto him if he has churned out some generalization along the usual guidelines.

Discrimination against the Buraku, however, is rooted so deeply everywhere in Japanese society that you never know when and where you'll come across it. Take, for instance, the case of a wedding: it will be extremely difficult for a person to do what he wants in the face of bitter opposition from his parents, brothers, superiors and long-time friends. To reflect upon and write seriously about discrimination against Buraku in this country can really be the most painful and depressing thing to attempt.

There have been trends in some sectors of the mass media to turn the clock of liberation backwards ever since the announcement of the statement of the Government's Council on Area Improvement Projects last year. On the other hand, it is fortunate that journalists who keep trying steadily to write stories on the issue are definitely on the increase. Human Rights Week will come round again this December. And the papers are sure to carry articles and editorials on human rights issues. How many of them will come out and mention the Buraku issue outright?





The Situation and the Problems Confronting Japan **On the Implementation in Japan of the International Covenants on Human Rights (1)**

1. Introduction

(a) Eight years have passed since the International Covenants on Human Rights came into effect in Japan on September 21, 1979.

(b) During these eight years, the movement for the elimination of discrimination and the entrenchment of human rights has surged forward with remarkable progress both at home and abroad. Nevertheless, there are many problems still confronting us.

(c) The next year, 1988, will mark the 40th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and we shall commemorate the significance of this occasion. Not only will we commemorate the year, but we shall be required to put in an extra effort to work for the realization of the principles in the International Bill of Human Rights.

2. Human Rights Problems in Japan

Unlike its struggle to become a major world economic power, Japan's progress in the human rights field has been very slow indeed. The major issues of today are as follows:

(a) Japan did not give full ratification to the International Covenants on Human Rights. She withheld ratification of the Optional Protocol. And three clauses in the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ... those concerning remuneration for holidays, the right to strike and the introduction of free higher education ... are still pending. The earliest possible implementation of these is an urgent necessity.

(b) There already exist some 20 conventions and treaties concerning human rights issues in the U. N. arena alone. Japan has only ratified seven of them ... 13 are yet to be ratified. In particular need of urgent action by Japan is ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, to which 124 of the 159 member countries of the United Nations are already state parties. This requires especial emphasis in the light of the racially discriminatory statement by former Prime Minister Nakasone about blacks, Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics in the United States.

(c) While Japan's military expenditure has seen an annual increase of almost 10 percent, the government is cutting down the budget for welfare and education.

(d) Even some of the politicians who have held cabinet posts are now brash enough to openly deny Japan's responsibility for the invasion carried out in World War II.

(e) Foreigners seeking jobs in Japan are on the increase; they are totally deprived of basic workers' rights and rarely paid decent wages. The number of foreign students, in particular those from Asian countries, is rising too. But they, in turn, are forced to endure difficulties caused by the high yen exchange rate and the arrogant attitude of the Japanese toward people from AA countries.

(f) Urgent legislation on the national level to ensure the protection of personal privacy is called for along the lines recommended by the OECD in 1981. A reduction in the long working hours, a target of strong international criticism, must be achieved, along with the improvement of other working conditions.



Foreign Students In a Human Rights Deficit Nation

By Takumi Ueda (Diet member and Vice-president of BLL)

Foreign Students and the High Yen

There is a Taiwanese president of company in Tokyo whom I have known for 10 years now. This summer he told me that foreign students are experiencing difficulties because of the strong yen. I immediately got in touch with a number of foreign students and sponsored a meeting, which was attended by Ms. Doi, head of the Japan Socialist Party, along with students from South Korea, the People's Republic of China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Ghana. I learned from the discussions at the meeting that they had to put in hours of part-time work every day to support themselves. They hardly had any time left to study.

It was not just a question of finance: prejudice and discrimination against students from Asia and Africa were also raised as serious issues. They had hardly expected to encounter such experiences when coming to this advanced industrialized nation called Japan.

According to the Education Ministry's statistics, there were some 18,000 foreign students in Japan as of May 1986. If we include foreign students studying in miscellaneous educational institutions and Japanese language schools, the figure exceeds 25,000. Some 87 percent of them are from Asian countries, such as PRC, Taiwan, South Korea, the Philippines and Malaysia. Only 3,000 of them are officially funded by Japanese government in the form of scholarships and tuition grants. Students making it on their own have a hard time. There are only 200 slots for scholarships available for "private fund" students.

Compared to Japanese students, who are free to enjoy their college life, these unfunded foreign students have to spend their time commuting between their colleges and part-time workplaces.

"No Foreigners Wanted" Still Prevalent

The first difficulty that incoming foreign students encounter is housing. There are only about 1,000 dormitories for them in the whole of Japan. Most have to search for private apartments. It is almost impossible to find an apartment with a rent below 20,000 yen a month ... their maximum living expenses must be kept below 40 to 50 thousand yen a month.

The vast majority, over 90 percent of students from Asia and Africa get rejected when they look for apartments. It is already nine years since the International Covenants were ratified stipulating, for instance, equality between foreigners and Japanese, but the "No Foreigners Wanted" policy is still widely practiced. Many students complain that real estate agents ask for guarantors and deposits. Female students feel angry when some are mistaken as prostitutes or so-called "Japayuki-san" ("girls coming to Japan.")

Japanese Human Rights Standard Questioned

Prime Minister Nakasone revealed in June 1986 a scheme to increase the number of foreign students to be received in Japan to 100,000 by the year 2000. Concurrently, the Ministry of Education is planning to create a new housing subsidy system for foreign students on private funds and to exempt them from 35 percent of the tuition costs at private universities. Whether these schemes will be sufficiently budgeted or not, however, is another question.

Japan is expected to play an important role in Asia. High expectations are placed on Japan being generous in its efforts toward cooperation with neighboring countries. The bulk of Japan's trade is conducted with Asian nations, and their future leaders are now studying in Japan. "How can Japan accommodate more foreign students without eliminating prejudice against Asian people?" "Where can we stay when there are not enough dormitories for students and urban housing problems are left unattended?" "It is hardly possible for us to study unless grant scholarships are offered." These voices of criticism poignantly illuminate the problems that exist in Japan ... deep-seated prejudice against Asians, poor housing conditions and lack of public support for educational expenses. The Rev. Jesse Jackson, a U. S. presidential candidate, characterized Japan as a "human rights deficit nation" when he visited Japan last year. Students from Asia and Africa are on a goodwill mission in various parts of the country. Standards of human rights in Japan are now under close scrutiny as the country undergoes rapid internationalization.