

WORKING FOR EQUALITY: ACTIVISM AND ADVOCACY BY BLIND  
INTELLECTUALS IN JAPAN, 1912-1995

By

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in History and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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## Abstract

This dissertation examines advocacy by blind activists as the primary catalysts in fighting for equal access to education and employment for blind people in Japan from 1912-1995. Highlighting profiles of prominent blind activists, the chapters describe how they used successful Western models of education and legal rights for the blind to fight for reforms in Japan.

Chapter 1 explains how the influence of Christianity and the invention of Japanese braille by Ishikawa Kuraji led blind activists to examine and adapt these western models to Japan.

Chapter 2 describes Iwahashi Takeo's advocacy for greater access to education and employment and the founding of the Nippon Lighthouse Welfare Center for the Blind in 1922. He invited Helen Keller to Japan in 1937 to help promote the importance to society of active participation by blind people.

The third chapter examines the career of Honma Kazuo who founded the National Library for the Blind in 1940. Losing his eyesight in childhood, he experienced first-hand the scarcity of books in braille, which drove him to establish a library for blind people with broader offerings.

The fourth chapter depicts government attempts in 1950 to improve welfare services for blind people by enacting welfare laws for the disabled. Although these laws guaranteed in principle all legal rights of people with disabilities, , accessing higher education and equal employment opportunities remained challenging hurdles.

Chapter 5 focuses on Matsui Shinjiro, a blind war veteran. The advocacy work of Matsui and supporters in the mid-1980s resulted in opening all governmental employment exams to blind people.

Blind activists continue working for equal access to education and employment in Japan, and this dissertation emphasizes the essential role played by blind advocates in leading these reforms.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Eric Rath, Dr. William Tsutsui, Dr. J. Greene for guidance and support for me throughout my research and writing work to complete my manuscript. I also would like to thank Ms. Iwahashi Akiko, Ms. Hayase Makiko, Nippon Lighthouse Welfare Center for the Blind in Osaka, Japan National Braille for the Blind, Japan Vocational Development Center for the Blind for providing abundance of resources I needed for my research. Finally I would like to thank my parents and all of my friends who generously provided emotional support throughout my graduate years at the University of Kansas.

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## Introduction

A history of blind people in Japan from 1912 to 1995 is a history of self-advocacy. My dissertation paints the positive picture of advocacy that was carried out primarily by blind people themselves. Simultaneously, blind activists worked with others to strengthen their advocacy network. Struggling to rebuild their lives after the Meiji Restoration and the abolishment of the guild system, blind people were forced to face their challenges to improve their situation for the benefit of themselves and the younger generation of blind people. The direction Japan as a nation took to learn from the advancements of Western countries in order to bring the country into the modern age also worked in favor of blind people. The Japanese elite, influenced by the West, realized that one important part of bringing the country up to the level of other powerful Western countries would be to pay serious attention to the welfare of people with disabilities.

To educate blind people according to the standard set by the government meant establishing schools for people with disabilities. The education system implemented during the Tokugawa period through the todoza was not operative after the breakup of the guild system in 1868. Literacy was also an essential part of education, and this essential goal led to the invention of Japanese braille in 1890 modeled after the braille alphabet invented in France in 1837. The first school for the blind was founded in Kyoto and Tokyo 10 to 13 years after the abolishment of the guilds, and the invention of Japanese braille occurred 22 years after the Meiji Restoration.

These first steps in modernizing the education of blind people was taken at a fairly fast pace. Partially this happened because of the impact of imported Western influences that Japan was being exposed to and partially because of sudden changes blind people faced with the breakup of the paternalistic guild system. Both influences pushed them to take action to improve

their situation. As they took these first steps successfully, blind people desired further advancement and began to look to the West to learn about development of welfare system and services existed in western countries to strengthen what they already had such as occupation of acupuncture and massage therapy. A combination of new learning and the old knowledge and skills of Moxibustion, acupuncture, massage therapy, storytelling, and music performance helped shape and motivate blind people to self-advocate for their welfare. Blind advocates chose to work with well-known social reformers such as Helen Keller to appeal to society about the necessity of improving welfare services for people with disabilities instead of remaining in their exclusive social circle that stood apart from the whole of Japanese society. Instead of rebuilding an old guild-like social network for blind people, these activist leaders decided to find ways for blind people to become active participants in mainstream society. They became the catalysts for the growth of self-advocacy, and they got others involved in their projects to broaden the influence of their ideas and accomplishments. They were not afraid to use what they learned from outside Japan to advance welfare services for people with visual disabilities.

A number of scholarly works have been published about the plight of blind people in Japan, but none have addressed the pivotal role played by Japanese blind people themselves in taking the initiative and leading the fight to gain their equal rights to society's benefits and the chance to contribute as full members of that society. The process by which welfare services for people with visual disabilities advanced have been discussed in biographies of well-known blind social reformers such as Iwahashi Takeo, Honma Kazuo, and Matsui Shinjiro. However, there has not been a major historical work published that discusses the history in particular of activism and advocacy for blind people in Japan. Taniai Susumu, an independent scholar and an advocate for the blind (whose work the writer of this manuscript uses as a reference throughout) is the

author of a significant work published in 1979 entitled *The History of the Blind (Mojin no rekishi)* which gives a historical survey of activism and advocacy work by blind people in Japan from the Meiji period of 1868 through the early 1970s. Although this work describes the struggles that blind people overcame in their fight for equality and a fully active role in society, it does not address why such advocacy work was needed and why it was necessary for blind people to take up the fight themselves.

Kato Yasuaki, who is a scholar of anthropology and social Education studies received doctoral degree in education from Tōkyō University of Education (Tōkyō Kyōiku Daigaku) examined the social history of blind people in pre-modern Japan. His work, *Study of the Social History of Japanese Blind People (Nihon mojin shakaishi kenkyu)*, focuses on the social status of blind people in the guild system during the Tokugawa period (1600-1868). His study describes how blind people were directly involved in the development and prosperity of their guild, known as *tōdōza*. They created a supportive network and welfare system within the *tōdōza* to aid those members who lacked sufficient financial and material resources. They also used patronage that they received from high-ranking samurai for their advantage to advance their occupations or to increase the overall prosperity of the guild. He illustrates the interaction between the Tokugawa shogun (bakufu) and the *tōdōza* to present a picture of a beneficial relationship for the guild between the bakufu and the leaders of the guild. He also depicts new professions (massage therapy, acupuncture, and money lending) created by members of the guild and how they used their relationships between members of the guild and the samurai to advance their professions.

In a work entitled, *Geographies of Identity in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Japan*, the pre-modern historian, David Howell, cites from an article written by Kato, “*The Social Ranking System of People with Disabilities in Pre-Modern Japan (Kinsei no shogaisha to mibun seido )*” to introduce

readers to a guild established for blind people. By using the article as a citation Howell illustrates the social status of the guild. Those who decided to become members of the guild instead of being dependent on their family members and continued to live in their registered locations.<sup>1</sup>

Kato makes the argument in his book that blind people had a better standard of living than they did after the Meiji restoration of 1868 because of tōdōza. Unlike the years after 1868, during the Tokugawa period blind people, through the network they created within the guild, organized a support system for those blind people who needed it; and professions such as acupuncture were not only created, but became the major occupations for blind people.

Kato also states in the introductory chapter of his 1974 work that the modern problem of a viable welfare system for blind people in Japan is directly related to the breakup of the centuries old tōdōza. When this guild-based, stable, social structure was broken up during the Meiji restoration of 1868, blind people lost their community-like social structure that had been providing education, occupations, and a supportive network for blind people. It was not until the early years of the twentieth century that advocacy for the blind broadened and blind intellectuals began taking an increasingly active role in advocating for rights for the blind and for their full participation in society. Although the government and the society talked of equality of people with disabilities and equal opportunities for all people, Japanese blind people have not been able to become full participants of the Japanese society in the beginning of the transition which Japan underwent from the samurai regime to the new.<sup>2</sup>

The work by Kato Yasuaki discusses the Tokugawa-era guild system and the social position of people with visual disabilities who belonged to the tōdōza. His work signifies creation of new occupation of blind people such as acupuncture and money rending business and

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<sup>1</sup> Howell, David L. *Geographies of Identity in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Japan*. Los Angeles California. 2005, p. 33..

<sup>2</sup> Kato, Yasuaki. *Nihon Mojin Shakaishi Kenkyū (the study of Social History of Japanese Blind People)*. *Kabushikigaisha Mirai Sha (Mirai INC.)*, Tokyo: Japan. 1974, (braille edition) vol. 1, p. 1.

vocational education of blind people who belonged to the tōdōza, however, only covers the years through the end of the Tokugawa period until two years after the Meiji Restoration the tōdōza of 1868. The invention of Japanese braille is discussed in the work by Okawara Kingo entitled *The History of Braille Letters (Tenji hatatsu shi)* as part of a broad historical context that includes the development of braille letters throughout Europe and Japan. However, this work does not address activism and advocacy conducted by blind people in Japan. The focus of the work is the history of the invention of braille letters throughout the world including Japan.

My dissertation aims to fill the gap in the historical literature of the activism and advocacy carried out by blind people in Japanese society from 1912 through 1995. The dissertation focuses on the methods and contributions of three leading blind advocates and the major advances they made in the quality of life for blind people in Japan. They chose to work with the blind as well as with the sighted in both the private and government sectors. Their collaborative methods in working for reform and their encouragement of projects that enlisted both the blind and the sighted were keys to integrating the blind into mainstream society. Their tireless and creative advocacy for developing greater opportunities for education and employment had a sustaining impact on improving the welfare of the disabled in Japan. These topics will hopefully contribute to filling the gap in the history of blind people in Japan throughout most of the twentieth century.

Chapter one, *Social Change and Blind People: Break-up of Tōdōza and the Beginning of Advocacy for the Education of Blind People, 1600-1912*, provides a background survey of social changes and their role in blind advocacy from the Tokugawa period (1600-1868) through the Meiji period (1868-1912). Both blind and sighted people worked to secure a place for blind people in society. As mentioned above, people with visual disabilities belonged to a guild known

as tōdōza through it, people with visual disabilities enjoyed the security of supportive networks and an apprentice system for education, and vocational training. Some blind people positioned themselves as *kengyō* (the head of the guild) and demonstrated strong leadership and professionalism. They served as teachers, organizers, mentors, and representatives of the guild. . They frequently assisted in maintaining the prosperity of the guild. Musical performing, storytelling, and massage therapy were commonly regarded as occupations for blind people. The guild provided people with visual disabilities a place where they could actively get involved, learn to live in independence, and receive support according to their need. The Tokugawa shogunate (*bakufu*) recognized the existence of tōdōza and acknowledged its usefulness for the welfare of blind people. Frequently, high-ranking daimyō distributed patronage to the *kengyō*, and in return the *kengyō* provided the services of massage therapy and acupuncture. The money lending profession that was also practiced by blind people and provided them an opportunity to interact with the higher ranked shogunate officials.

The vast social changes and the mandated abolishment of tōdōza of the Meiji Restoration of 1868, however, cut off the network and supports on which blind people had relied. Even the *kengyō* lost their privileges as leaders, patronage, and favorable interactions with the shogunate officials. Western missionaries, Japanese Christian converts, and government officials concerned about the education and welfare of people with disabilities thought that Japan, as a country striving to modernize, westernize, and compete as an advanced country, should have as a priority the creation of a welfare system for people with disabilities. The founding of the Kyoto School for the Blind (Kyoto Mogakko) in 1877 and the Tokyo School for the Blind and Deaf (Tokyo Moa Gakko) in 1880 marked the beginning of education for blind people in Japan. This success

was due to the joint efforts of missionaries, Christian converts, and blind advocates all of whom were working to improve the welfare system for the blind in Japan.

The opening of schools for blind people that were modeled after those of Western nations raised the question among educators of full literacy for blind people. Listening to and memorization of texts were the common ways for blind people to gain literary knowledge. Full literacy would need letters that the blind could both read and write. With the invention in 1890 of Japanese braille (modeled on the invention of French braille in 1837), became a significant leap forward in the literacy of blind people.<sup>3</sup> This invention became the motivational excitement for blind intellectuals, advocates, and social leaders who now had the key tool to opening up a world where they could gain new knowledge of all sorts, and particularly to learn about people with the same disabilities in other countries.

Chapter 2, *Self-Advocacy to Group Advocacy, 1912-1937*, presents the beginnings of activism carried out by leading blind advocates. Young blind intellectuals who were interested in learning about countries outside Japan became attracted to Esperanto. Iwahashi Takeo (1898-1954), who is the main focus of this chapter and a founder of Nippon Lighthouse Welfare Center for the Blind, was one of the blind intellectuals who wanted to learn more about things going on in the world outside Japan, including information about blind people in other countries. Iwahashi and others promoted education and employment for blind people. Using his friendship with Helen Keller (1880-1968) as the model, he stressed the capability of blind people as fully active members of mainstream society. Keller's visit to Japan in 1937 helped to make Japanese people aware that improvement of welfare services for people with disabilities could be possible in Japan and it would benefit the advancement of the country. A picture of blind advocacy through

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<sup>3</sup> Okawara, Kingo. *Tenji Hattatsu Shi (The History of Braille Letters)*. (Braille edition, vol. 14 p. 117.

cooperation with others began to emerge such as publication of braille books including the publishing of Esperanto Japanese braille dictionary.

The third chapter, *Honma Kazuo and the Japan National Braille Library for the Blind*, depicts the advocacy for the blind of Honma Kazuo (1916-2003) in establishing in 1940 the first national braille library which grew to provide a full range of literature and library services for blind people. Honma stressed the importance of braille literacy, and his library had a significant impact on the Japanese blind community and on other members of society who participated in its first ever volunteer programs for braille transcribing and producing audio books. Honma's library project also provided support and advocacy to blind people who wished to complete their college education. He also succeeded in attracting sighted people to become involved in his library project as volunteers.

During the late 1950s and 1970s Honma's library collection expanded from braille books to books on cassette tapes. Thus, Honma recruited more volunteers for braille transcribing and for recording books on tapes. Honma made it possible through his library project for blind people to have access to all kinds of literature for educational, recreational, and entertainment purposes. Honma also promoted the advancement of braille literacy for blind people which leading blind advocates had recognized as the single most important factor in advancing and improving the quality of education for blind people.

The fourth chapter, *Welfare Laws for Disabled and Blind People in Japan*, focuses on the education and employment of blind people during the postwar period from 1945 through 1985. The assertive nature of blind people is also discussed in this chapter. When the war ended in 1945 young blind people who had been advocates under Iwahashi Takeo's leadership expressed the need for the enactment of a law that would guarantee the rights of blind people. A proposal

had been made by the General Headquarters of the Allied Powers, GHQ, prohibiting blind people from practicing acupuncture, massage therapy, and moxibustion. This unreasonable action unified blind people to express their defiant response to the proposal. Iwahashi established the first national organization of the blind that motivated blind members to work for the creation of a law that would ensure them their conventional occupations and guarantee their rights as members of society. With Iwahashi as their leader, members of the organization talked with the government about the possibility of creating a law for people with visual disabilities.<sup>4</sup> In result, the government promulgated Welfare Laws for the Disabled in December of 1949 that were enforced in April of 1950.

This chapter focuses on catalysts that contributed to the enactment of Welfare Laws for the Disabled and the impact the laws had on the education and employment of blind people. Although these laws were not perfect, many blind people saw them as a significant step toward the future improvement of welfare services for education and employment of blind people. The advocacy efforts that blind people carried out to get these new laws promulgated demonstrated their ability to express their assertiveness tempered by their desire to cooperate with others.

Acupuncture, massage therapy, and moxibustion remained the conventional professions for blind people through the prewar, wartime, and into the postwar periods. After the government issued a licensing system in 1948 for all people working in acupuncture, massage therapy, and moxibustion, schools for the blind throughout Japan were pressed to re-examine their training courses and to make improvements. The acupuncture/massage therapy/moxibustion license that

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<sup>4</sup> Seki, Hiroyuki. Iwahashi Takeo: Gimu Yue no Michiyuki (Iwahashi Takeo: the duty and Sacrifice). (Braille edition vol. 2) p. 88.

was issued by the government required all prospective license holders to pass standardized exams set by the government.<sup>5</sup>

Blind advocates realized that obtaining more places of employment by relying on conventional occupations was not a satisfactory solution. They recognized that new employment opportunities needed to be created for blind people. In order to accomplish this goal, they needed to open a path to higher education. The leading blind advocates such as Iwahashi and Honma were not the only people who appreciated the importance of the idea. Young blind students who wanted to explore new avenues of employment besides the conventional ones began to seek ways to enter colleges and universities. This led those blind intellectuals who had already completed their higher education, such as Honma Kazuo and others, to advocate for these students. At the same time students who had succeeded in entering universities such as Doshisha University (Doshisha Daigaku) or Nihon University (Nihon Daigaku) from 1948-1957 began to realize that entering colleges and universities to obtain desired degrees would not necessarily open up new employment opportunities for blind people.

The fifth chapter, *Matsui Shinjiro: Working toward Equal Access to Education and Employment, 1948-1990*, delineates the efforts made by blind advocates to provide vocational training to enable blind people to enter into a working environment in which nondisabled people were the majority of the work force. What blind advocates aimed for was to train blind people to be able to perform their work with sufficient skill to work with sighted people in the same working environment. Although working with sighted people under equal working conditions created difficult challenges, blind advocates saw that with sufficient training and using the appropriate assistive equipment overcoming challenges could be possible.

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<sup>5</sup> Nihon Mojin Rengokai. Nihon Mojin Rengokai 50nen no Ayumi (the History of Japan Federation of the Blind: 50 years of Progress. Tokyo: Japan.Nihon Mojin Rengo Kai. 1998, (braille edition vol. 1) p. 2.

Matsui Shinjiro (1914-1995), a blind wounded war veteran and the founder of the Japan Vocational Development Center for the Blind (Nihon Mojin Shokuno Kaihatsu Center), was another prominent advocate for creating new employment opportunities for blind people. Through Matsui's example, the chapter discusses the work of creating new employment opportunities for blind people, the challenges blind people tackled, and the successes they experienced. Matsui used any tools and equipment he thought of that he could use to create new employment opportunities for blind people. He did not hesitate to adapt equipment from Western countries if he thought the equipment would be useful in the education and employment of blind people. He also frequently encouraged blind people to interact with sighted people and to work cooperatively alongside them. In both the academic and working environment Matsui never ceased to emphasize the importance of the integration of blind and sighted people as one of the key elements for successful outcomes.

The Welfare Laws for the Disabled allowed facilities that were providing training for blind people to offer them vocational training as well. Matsui used this regulation to establish a workshop where blind workers manufactured items such as paper cups, ladders, and rubber caps for containers. In 1980 he added training in which blind people could learn typing skills, computer operating skills, and word-processing or data processing skills. Prior to 1980 Matsui offered these vocational training courses on a small scale, but after obtaining property for a new building in 1980, he was able to expand the services offered into a full scale training center. Efforts made by blind advocates to create employment opportunities from the 1970s through the 1980s and into the 1990s gradually equipped blind people with the skills to be hired by corporations and government offices. In the late 1970s into the 1980s the civil court in Tokyo

hired a blind person as a typist. In the early 1980s another blind person was hired by a private corporation that manufactures cosmetics, Shiseido Corporation.<sup>6</sup>

By 1991 both local and national government offices allowed blind people to take examinations in braille for civil service positions.<sup>7</sup> This opened another path for a new employment opportunity for blind people. Although the number of blind people holding occupations other than acupuncture, massage therapy, and moxibustion was small, the fact that blind people were beginning to enter workplaces where the majority of workers were non-disabled was a significant development in the opinion of the blind activists. They also recognized that much still needed to be done for blind people to enter into the general workforce and be able to choose occupations according to their preference and credentials.

Not having one's eyesight means that the individual has limitation in his abilities. The main point that blind advocates continue to focus on, however, is not the limited abilities of blind people but on how successfully blind people could narrow the limitations their abilities placed on them to increase their overall capability and employability. The invention of Japanese braille by Ishikawa Kuraji in 1890 made blind people literate. The Japan National Braille Library for the Blind made it possible for braille books to be transcribed by volunteers and that gave them the opportunity to be able to read a wide variety of books. Advancements such as these and others (as described in these chapters) made under the leadership of blind activist intellectuals between 1912 and 1995 were pivotal to the success of building a life of opportunity for blind people in Japan.

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<sup>6</sup> Nihon Mojin Fukushi Kenkyukai Editor. *Shikaku Shogaisha to Daigaku Series 1: Monko Kaiho 40 nen no Ayumi (Blind People and College Education Series 1: Higher Education for Blind People the 40 Years of History)*. Tokyo: Japan. Nihon Mojin Fukushi Kenkyukai Mogakusei Joho Center. 1990, (audio edition) p. 61.

<sup>7</sup> Nihon Mojin Fukushi Kenkyukai Editor. *Shikaku Shogaisha to Daigaku Series 3 Tenji ni yoru Kokka Komuin Shiken ga Jitsugen Surumade (Blind People and College Education Series 3 Take employment Exams for Governmental Offices in Braille)*. Tokyo: Japan. Nihon Mojin Fukushi Kenkyukai Mogakusei Joho Center tosho Shuppan. 1991, (audio edition) p. 5.

In order for blind people to become full participants in society, they needed to add their own voices and ideas to advocate for improvements they needed to expand their educational and employment opportunities. Blind students who work to achieve higher education; blind people who make their effort to obtain professions other than Acupuncture, Massage Therapy, and Moxibustion are lower in numbers, invention of assistive technology, vocational training made available for blind people by facilities provide services for blind people have helped increase numbers of blind employees who integrated themselves into a workforce of non-blind people to work with those who are non-disabled. The path and its ultimate direction was forged by the work of blind people themselves and the dedication of their blind leaders to build cooperatively to improve their welfare.

## **Working for Equality: Activism and Advocacy by Blind**

### **Intellectuals in Japan, 1912-1995**

Chapter 1: Social Change and Blind People: Break-up of Tōdōza and the Beginning of Advocacy

for the Education of Blind People, 1600-1912

#### **Introduction**

This chapter traces the beginnings of activism carried out by blind and sighted people during the Meiji period (1868-1912) and describes the system of the guild (*za*) of the blind (*tōdōza*) that existed for more than 250 years during the Tokugawa period (1600-1868). The *tōdōza* provided blind people with education and employment opportunities as well as a supportive and protective social environment. Breaking up of the guilds (*za*) during the Meiji period, including those for blind people (*tōdōza*), was a major part of the Meiji government's plan for comprehensive modernization of the country. The overthrow of the hierarchical samurai system upset all of society, but particularly the educational and employment system for blind people and their supportive network. These societal changes and their effect on the blind community became the driving force and a perfect opportunity for some blind leaders to begin advocating for long-needed modernization and improvements in education and employment opportunities for blind people in Japan. These beginning attempts at welfare activism also caught the attention of some sighted intellectuals who joined the work of the blind activists.

Blind advocates sought ways in which blind citizens could gain more independence and become productive members of society. As historians point out, during the Meiji period Japan's leaders learned how to modernize the country by adapting and innovating from the advancements that had been made by Western countries. What they learned from the West they

adapted to Japan's culture and customs. Advocates for improvements in education and employment opportunities for blind people urged the blind community to learn about the welfare services and educational advancements being made in Western countries and apply them to improve education for the blind in Japan. These efforts opened the way for sighted intellectual Christian converts in the society and Western missionaries to work with blind activists during the Meiji period and down through the Taisho (1912-1926) and Showa (1926-1989) periods.

### **Characteristics of the Tōdōza System During the Tokugawa Period**

Prior to and during the Tokugawa period blind people were mainly cared for by their families and the village communities in which they lived. Even in this early era, there were blind people who sought an independent life and opportunities to enter occupations.<sup>8</sup> Those people left their families and joined tōdōza that were established by groups of blind people throughout Japan. Starting in Kyoto, tōdōza spread to Edo and to other parts of Japan, but the mainstream of tōdōza remained in Kyoto at first and moved to Edo during the Genroku period (1688-1705). Within tōdōza blind people not only established a network among themselves, but they also created an educational system that would prepare them for gainful employment.

Establishment of the new samurai government known as the Tokugawa Shōgunate (*Tokugawa bakufu*) marked the beginning of the Tokugawa period and it continued for 268 years to govern the country under the fifteen generations of the Tokugawa shoguns. The social structure during the Tokugawa bakufu evolved from neo-Confucian ideas which defined a hierarchical system of social rank based on traditional social classes. This system would maintain the governing authority of the Tokugawa bakufu headed by the Tokugawa shogun. The samurai

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<sup>8</sup> Taniai, Susumu. *Mojin no Rekishi (A History of Blind People)*. Tōkyō: Akashi Shoten. 1979, p. 73.

class was at the top, followed, in descending order, by peasant farmers, artisans, merchants, and finally a group of people identified as outcasts. According to Confucian philosophy, the highest social status enjoyed exclusive privileges, and the rest were expected to behave according to their social rank. Everyone in Tokugawa society had a defined place. Technically, this system kept people in order according to their hereditary distinct social rank in support of the authority of the Tokugawa regime and identified each group's contributory role. Thus, people with visual disabilities organized tōdōza as guilds for the blind, a social class, but at the same time ranked them, professionally, as artisans and merchants.<sup>9</sup> This system allowed them to establish a support network as well as a system for their occupation. The rank and status system established for Tokugawa society as a whole also applied to tōdōza.

According to David Howell, tōdōza set up their own self-governing and independent judicial systems within tōdōza, and each tōdōza established a small blind community.<sup>10</sup> In these small communities members established their own ranks that distinguished senior members from junior members. The senior members played the role of teachers and supervised education for the junior members of tōdōza, including newcomers. The highest and most distinguished rank of the senior members was known as “*kengyō*” who played the role of leadership educator and model to the rest of members of the guild. Some of the *kengyō*, through their contributions to the tōdōza's activities, invented new occupations for blind people. People in the position of *kengyō* were regarded not only as leaders with governing authority of tōdōza, but also undertook duties as teachers to the rest of the members.

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<sup>9</sup> Kato, Yasuaki. *Nihon Mojin Shakaishi Kenkyū (The study of Social History of Japanese Blind People)*. Kabushikigaisha Mirai Sha (Mirai INC.). Tōkyō: Japan. 1974, (braille edition) vol. 5, p. 54. Within tōdōza the rank was defined as *kengyō* at the top, *betō*, *kōtō*, and *zatō* as the rank of general members of tōdōza, more or less in the shape of a pyramid.

<sup>10</sup> Howell, David L. *Geographies of Identity in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Japan*. Los Angeles California. 2005, p. 33.

Education in tōdōza consisted of learning to play stringed instruments such as koto or shamisen, storytelling, and massage therapy, all of which were necessary skills in order to be able to take up those occupations commonly regarded as professions for blind people.<sup>11</sup> In the eighteenth century tōdōza also engaged in the moneylending business which gave them the opportunity to build their wealth.<sup>12</sup> Through some creative teaching methods and introducing new techniques the kengyō devised for educating members, blind people such as Hanawa Hokiichi and Sugiyama Waichi were able to hold unique professions within tōdōza.

By the beginning of the Genroku period in 1688, some blind people began to practice a new occupation, acupuncture, that considerably increased their occupational and employment opportunities. Blind healers had been practicing shamanism prior to the Tokugawa period, but as people began during the Tokugawa period to rely on the power of medicine for healing rather than prayer, the occupation of physician became popular. Blind healers also began to steer away from shamanism. Although shamanism used by blind people continued to exist throughout the Tokugawa period, people began to use massage therapy as a physical treatment tool. Also, acupuncture came to be regarded as another treatment technique, and some blind people viewed this as a potential occupation.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 75.

<sup>12</sup> Taniai, Susumu. *Mojin no Rekishi (A History of Blind People)*, p. 80.

## Acupuncture and Sugiyama Waichi (1610-1694)

One of the kengyō who entered the acupuncture profession was Sugiyama Waichi, generally known as Sugiyama Kengyō. Born in 1610, Sugiyama Waichi obtained the rank of kengyō at the age of 60, as he treated the fifth shogun, Tokugawa Tsunayoshi.<sup>13</sup> He invented new acupuncture techniques suitable for blind practitioners. The practice of acupuncture came to Japan from China prior to the Tokugawa period, but, being heavily vision-dependent, it was hard for blind people to practice it as a particular therapy method. Sugiyama, however, found an inventive way to insert a needle straight into the skin to directly contact pressure points. Utilizing these techniques, he opened a school and taught his methods to many blind people. His treatment with acupuncture techniques was well-received by the shogun and daimyō, domainal lords, which resulted in Sugiyama's promotion to a physician of the fifth shogun.<sup>14</sup> He was eventually promoted to become the leader of all other kengyō of the entire tōdōza.

Kyoto had been the place where the authority of tōdōza was the strongest of all tōdōza in other parts of Japan, including the Edo area. However, with Sugiyama as the head kengyō (*sokenkyō*) the influence and authority of tōdōza moved from Kyoto to Edo. As the head kengyō, Sugiyama trained as many guild members as he could in his techniques. These efforts assisted in securing the profession of acupuncture for blind people. With his increased prestige, he used the shogunate to secure acupuncture as a profession for the blind. He sent people whom he trained to the shogunate for treatment of the shogun, Tokugawa Tsunayoshi. Naturally this gave blind

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<sup>13</sup> Kato, Yasuaki. *Nihon Mojin Shakaishi Kenkyū* (*The study of Social History of Japanese Blind People*). (braille edition) vol. 5, p. 17

<sup>14</sup> Ibid (braille ed., vol. 4), 80.

people an opportunity not only to establish a close connection to the shogunate, but also to secure the profession for blind people.<sup>15</sup>

Sugiyama's acupuncture technique became increasingly well-known in Edo. Many blind people who had been working as acupuncturists within the tōdōza began to work as town physicians (*machiisha*), and the public began to rely on their expertise to cure their ailments. This growing popularity of acupuncture not only encouraged technical innovations in the profession, but it also created more job opportunities for blind people and in turn enabled them to make a contribution to Tokugawa society at large. The presence of Sugiyama and his acupuncture technique became an important asset to the tōdōza people in the Edo area. In 1792 Sugiyama was appointed by the shogun to the position of the top kengyō of the tōdōza (*sokengyō*). He used his network of bakufu officials and various daimyō that he had established through his position as a physician to connect members of tōdōza who trained under him with bakufu officials. This assisted many blind people to enter this profession, to establish a professional relationship with the bakufu, and to have a connection with nobles at the imperial court in Kyoto.

The author of the book entitled, *The Japanese History of Blind People (Mojin no rekishi)*, Taniai Susumu, argues that Sugiyama created his new techniques in acupuncture so that more blind people would have opportunities to master and enjoy occupations that could give them an avenue to better living conditions. As Sugiyama learned, none of the various longstanding acupuncture techniques commonly used were suited for blind people to learn and practice. In his early years in the tōdōza, however, he struggled to find the most effective and practical

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid (braille ed., vol. 4), 87

techniques that allowed blind people to practice the occupation. At one point he was suspended from the tōdōza that he belonged to.

Sugiyama's invention of a new successful acupuncture technique was regarded with importance among blind people in Japan. Because of his invention acupuncture became a profession exclusive to blind people along with massage therapy. Blind people who belonged to the lower status within tōdōza took up the profession to earn their living so that they did not have to be entirely dependent on aid from their family members. It was not until toward the end of the eighteenth century that blind people had to compete with some sighted people who had taken up the occupation of massage therapy in the Edo area.<sup>16</sup> Sugiyama himself, being the head kengyō, received a good amount of patronage from the shogun in the form of rice as well as a piece of property on which he built an extensive mansion. Toward the end of his life he was enjoying quite prosperous living conditions.

Sugiyama's case illustrates how his development of acupuncture techniques contributed to making this an occupation reserved exclusively for blind people. What was behind this success was the network of supporters that kengyō like Sugiyama had established within the bakufu hierarchy through their profession. These connections to the bakufu and daimyō created a mutually helpful situation between blind people in the tōdōza and prosperity for the tōdōza and kengyō. The authority of the shogun and the patronized status of blind people played an important role in the strength and prosperity of the guild and people who were members of

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, braille edition vol. 10, p. 100. By the end of the eighteenth century the profession of massage therapy spread widely among blind people including people who held lower status in their guild. At the same time some sighted people began to enter the profession because massage therapy could easily be mastered by anyone and a professional guild was created. This resulted in hostile opposition by blind people against tōdōza. Some demanded that the sighted masseurs should change their occupation since the profession was regarded as a profession exclusively for blind people. Blind people were sued by the guild of sighted masseurs. The bakufu ruled that the action taken by blind people was inappropriate. Nevertheless, a blind masseur with a cane and a flute walking around the town for clients became a familiar sight in Edo and other urban and rural areas by the end of the eighteenth century.

tōdōza. The support network between members of the government and blind leaders was evident in Sugiyama's case. The case also demonstrates the importance of establishing professional credibility, making it possible for blind leaders to keep secure connections with the bakufu. Through such connections blind leaders had a platform from which to advocate for more occupations and training that would earn blind people a more independent life in the tōdōza.

### **Japanese Literary Scholarship and Hanawa Hokiichi (1746-1821)**

Another well-known figure among kengyō was Hanawa Hokiichi who created a new profession and new opportunity for blind people in tōdōza of “national learning scholar” (*kokugakusha*) in ancient Japanese literature. He was born into a family of upper class farmers in a village in Kodama Goori currently in Saitama prefecture)<sup>17</sup>. In 1752 at the age of six, he lost his eyesight from illness. In 1769 Hanawa traveled to Edo and joined a tōdōza there to receive education and skills to enter a profession whereby he could earn enough money to support himself.<sup>18</sup> Upon entering the world of the tōdōza, his initial plan was to become a trained music performer or storyteller. He also decided to learn massage therapy at the tōdōza. However, none of those professions drew his interest, and he lost his motivation to learn.<sup>19</sup> Instead of expelling Hanawa from the tōdōza, the kengyō of Edo Tōdōza, Ametomi Kengyō,<sup>20</sup> told him that if his goal was to support himself without relying on anyone to be his caretaker, he needed to choose

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid (braille ed., vol. 14), 99.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 100.

<sup>19</sup> Sato, Kyoichi. “Hanawa Hokiichi and Helen Keller”. *Shikaku Shogai*, vol. 20. 1992, p. 15.

<sup>20</sup> Kato, Yasuaki. *Nihon Mojin Shakaishi Kenkyū (The study of Social History of Japanese Blind People)*. Braille edition, vol. 14 p. 100.

an occupation to which he could devote his life. Ametomi Kengyō promised Hanawa the full support of the tōdōza.<sup>21</sup>

This episode demonstrates how supportive the head of a guild was to its members. Instead of judging Hanawa as an untalented blind person who would probably be less likely to be useful to the tōdōza, the kengyō promised to help Hanawa and assured him he would have the support of the tōdōza while Hanawa was studying to enter a profession to which he could devote the rest of his life. These words of support gave Hanawa the encouragement and confidence to think seriously about his future occupation. He soon realized that he had good memorization skills and that he was fascinated by Japanese history and literature. While practicing massage therapy in his youth, he had associated with middle-class samurai who were well-educated in Japanese history and literature. Hanawa's passion for history and literature was soon noticed, and his excellent memorization of literature caught the attention of those intellectual middle-class samurai who were his clients. They took the time to read literature to Hanawa whenever he visited their residences for massage therapy sessions.<sup>22</sup> Hanawa decided to pursue his scholarship as a National Learning scholar (*kokugakusha*).

A challenge for Hanawa was how to obtain knowledge of various world literature without being able to read. He had mainly relied on his memorization skills as a learning tool. His writing was done by dictation.<sup>23</sup> He also tried to use paper strings in the shape of each letter glued on a board so that letters could be tactile for him to read.<sup>24</sup> (Similar tactics were later tried

<sup>21</sup> Sato, Kyoichi. "Hanawa Hokiichi and Helen Keller". p. 16.

<sup>22</sup> Kato, Yasuaki. *Nihon Mojin Shakaishi Kenkyū* (the study of Social History of Japanese Blind People). Braille edition, vol. 14 p. 98.

<sup>23</sup> Sato, Kyoichi. "Hanawa Hokiichi and Helen Keller", p. 23.

<sup>24</sup> Okawara, Kingo. *Tenji Hattatsu Shi* (The History of Braille Letters). Tōkyō: Tenji Hattatsu Shi Fukkan Iin Kai. 1987, braille edition, vol. 4 p. 3.

during the early Meiji period for blind people to have access to printed books to read.) In 1789 Hanawa joined a team of authors who published a work entitled, *The National History* (Dai Nihon shi, which became his first major work as a national learning scholar.<sup>25</sup> The most well-known work by Hanawa is a work entitled *The Categorized Stories* (*Gunsho ruiju*) (1786-1819).<sup>26</sup> For the publication of this work he played the significant role of researcher, collector, and editor of a variety of stories he collected by traveling all over Japan.<sup>27</sup> The Tokugawa Shōgunate supported Hanawa financially so that he could complete the book.

Hanawa Hokiichi was a forerunner of blind advocates who tried to open paths to what had been viewed as unconventional occupations for blind people. Later in his life Hanawa became one of the kengyōs in his guild and taught Japanese literature to tōdōza members. He became an inspiring figure to other members of the tōdōza. Hanawa was often invited by daimyō to lecture on Japanese history and literature. He also gained a number of friends among the samurai class who were willing to read books to him.<sup>28</sup> He maintained his association with people in the samurai class, many of whom provided useful assistance to Hanawa's work.<sup>29</sup> His work was recognized by the Tokugawa shogunate, and, following in Hanawa's footsteps, a few blind people entered the profession of "National Learning Scholar" of Japanese literature.<sup>30</sup> Hanawa presented himself as a representative of tōdōza as a kengyō to the shogunate and used

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<sup>25</sup> Kato, Yasuaki. *Nihon Mojin Shakaishi Kenkyū* (the study of Social History of Japanese Blind People). Braille edition, vol. 14 p. 102.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 102.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 102.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 104.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>30</sup> Sato, Kyoichi. "Hanawa Hokiichi and Helen Keller", p. 24.

his position of kengyō shrewdly to promote himself and other blind people who belonged to the tōdōza.<sup>31</sup>

Hanawa's story demonstrates that blind people could choose a profession on which to set one's mind and become successful by using the situation one is in to one's benefit. Activists who advocated for the welfare of blind people took it a step further and campaigned from the Meiji period onward for the equality of blind people as full members of society. A blind individual should be able to enter any occupation just like sighted people do. If an individual strives for a unique occupation, the individual should expect to work hard toward that goal with the full support of society. Instead of training for conventional professions for the blind such as becoming a storyteller or musician, Hanawa sought after an occupation that not only interested him but also fulfilled his desire for knowledge of Japanese history and literature. Accounts of tōdōza paint a picture of blind individuals creatively inventing their own careers.

### **Moneylending and Social Mobility**

The patronage that members of the tōdōza received from the bakufu and high-ranking samurai improved their living conditions and provided them with another occupation, moneylending (*kanekashi*). The economic growth from the late seventeenth through early eighteenth centuries gave members of tōdōza an opportunity to venture into the occupation of moneylending. The growth in productivity, particularly in farming and the local craft industry, generated more action in business transactions between sellers and consumers. The economic growth and a more active business environment made an impact on the prosperity of tōdōza. Blind people who belonged to the tōdōza, especially those who belonged to the rank of kengyō

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<sup>31</sup> Kato, Yasuaki. *Nihon Mojin Shakaishi Kenkyū (The study of Social History of Japanese Blind People)*. Braille edition, vol. 14 p. 140.

and kotō, could become wealthy from their traditional professions as musicians, storytellers, massage therapists, and acupuncturists. As the professions of massage therapy and acupuncture in particular became popular among townsmen, blind people were able to provide comfortable lives for themselves. With their increasing wealth, some kengyō, betō, and kotō ventured into the moneylending business. As more people began to use the services of moneylenders, the number of blind people who pursued the business also increased.

There were a few samurai who had prospered financially enough to reach the rank of *hatamoto* that was required to become a businessman. Even some daimyō class samurai borrowed money from blind moneylenders.<sup>32</sup> Members of the tōdōza used the money they earned in their traditional occupations as capital to enter the moneylending business and by charging higher interest rates, it was possible for them to accumulate a larger profit more swiftly.<sup>33</sup> But collection between the social ranks was sometimes difficult, especially if the higher rank samurai had borrowed more from the blind moneylenders than they were able to repay. Taniai Susumu paints a picture of blind moneylenders having to collect money from higher ranking samurai, daimyō, and hatamoto. He describes the moneylenders' determination to collect these debts as well as the sometimes violent treatment the blind moneylenders exacted from their high-ranking clients who did not pay their debts on time.

The blind moneylenders were tenacious and would bravely sit on the doorstep of a samurai's residence shouting out obscenities against the particular hatamoto for not paying off his debts.<sup>34</sup> This particular business was mainly conducted by the kengyō class of tōdōza; lower

<sup>32</sup> Kato, Yasuaki. *Nihon Mojin Shakaishi Kenkyū (The Study of Social History of Japanese Blind People)*. Braille edition, vol. 8 p. 115.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid (braille ed., vol. 4), 29.

<sup>34</sup> Taniai, Susumu. *Mojin no rekishi*, p. 83.

ranking members who were below the rank of kengyō, those who belonged to the rank of betō and kotō, also, got involved in the business. Almost all the blind moneylender business took place in Edo where the majority of samurai lived who were the largest borrowers. The bakufu disapproved of and opposed the practice of samurai borrowing money from moneylenders. Nevertheless, the moneylending business prospered during the eighteenth century. Besides gaining more wealth, some blind kengyō used their association with hatamoto and daimyō clients to elevate their social rank by marrying their offspring into the samurai class or in some cases buying their way into a higher social status by canceling a borrower's debts.<sup>35</sup>

Through the tōdōza blind people obtained vocational skills and a profession. Interaction with samurai benefited not only an individual blind person but the tōdōza as a whole. Those holding a lower status in tōdōza were able to obtain support from senior members of the tōdōza. Those who were prosperous tōdōza members used their position in the tōdōza to promote themselves to a higher social rank. A certain identity emerged for tōdōza blind people during the Tokugawa period. Newer professions developed within the tōdōza, such as with Sugiyama Waichi's new acupuncture techniques that increased the popularity of acupuncture as a profession and as a service.

The Tokugawa bakufu and society as a whole regarded the tōdōza as the rightful and proper place for the blind people who belonged to them. The obtaining of too much wealth by blind people, however, was frowned upon, especially with regard to those blind people who had reached the position of kengyō and displayed more wealth and status than what they were felt to

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<sup>35</sup> Kato, Yasuaki. *Nihon Mojin Shakaishi Kenkyū (The study of Social History of Japanese Blind People)*. Braille edition, vol. 8 p. 116. Katsu Kaishu was a great grandson of a kengyō who gained his wealth and relational ties with the samurai class through the moneylending business. Gaining wealth through the moneylending business drew public attention, but at the same time wealthy kengyō became the target of jealousy and criticism. The bakufu took the position of protecting the samurai class from inappropriate violence and abuse committed by blind moneylenders.

be worthy of. The security and stability that blind people gained through the tōdōza gave them a clear sense of their place in society. Moreover, the tōdōza provided members with vocational training and a resulting profession through that education. They also provided a welfare support system for those in need support through the *haitō* system whereby they could legally ask for donations of rice or money from the public as part of the activities of the tōdōza. The lives of blind people during the Tokugawa period were closely tied to the existence of tōdōza.

### **The Break-up of the Tōdōza and Transition to the Meiji Period**

The life and welfare of blind people were mainly dependent on the strong ties to the tōdōza, and when these ties were cut suddenly it had a profound impact on them. Japan went through a major transition when the samurai regime was replaced by a new regime under the Meiji emperor. As broad and dramatic change came to the country's social, political, and economic structure as a whole, it came as well to the lives of the blind. Breakdown of the samurai regime meant the breakdown of Japan's Confucian-based society. The Charter Oath issued by the newly established Meiji government in April of 1868 clearly states that the Confucian-based society was the "old way" and was being replaced by a new modernized social structure that was considered the appropriate path for Japan to follow in order to advance.

Soon after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the samurai class, the highest social status in Japan, began to be gradually yet systematically dismantled. The Meiji government changed the name of the city where the headquarters of the former regime had been located from Edo to Tōkyō, and they also abandoned the domain system that had existed throughout Japan under the daimyō, establishing prefectures instead. Each prefecture operated under its own government, yet the central government in Tōkyō held the real authority. The Meiji government also prohibited

the old privileges held exclusively by the samurai class throughout the Tokugawa era. The Satsuma rebellion and defeat of the anti-Meiji groups in 1877 clearly discredited the power and influence of the samurai social status and earmarked the end of the samurai in Meiji society. The Meiji government created a new society with a centrally controlled new outlook under the slogans of “Civilization and Enlightenment (*Bunmei kaika*)” and “Wealthy Nation, Strong Military (*Fukoku kyohei*).” Thus, the “old” system of tōdōza could no longer operate under the new policies being issued by the Meiji government that called for a new modernized structure for society.

Four years after the Meiji Restoration of 1868, as the Meiji government enforced the abolition of the agrarian province system (*han*) known as *haihanchiken*, it issued an edict prohibiting the existence of tōdōza or any business operating through the tōdōza network such as the moneylending. Thus, the status of kengyō had to be relinquished as well as the financial support blind people received through the tōdōza in the charitable provision (*haitokin*) system. During this time the status of the samurai was gradually being eliminated and any remaining associated customs were being abolished following the Charter Oath of 1868. The previous recognition of tōdōza by the Tokugawa bakufu was now considered by the Meiji government to be part of the old system and its customs.

The reason the government wanted to abolish the system of tōdōza was the same reason they abolished the Tokugawa-era outcast social status. Under the old regime people who were regarded as outcast created a guild and created rank and status within the tōdōza based on a hierarchical system of social class. The Meiji government abolished these ranks so as to make all people who belonged to the outcast group a part of the rest of the common people, known as *heimin*. Since tōdōza had also created ranks and status according to the old system, the

government enforced the registration of people who were members of tōdōza as *heimin*, as were the rest of the people in Japan. As Kato Yasuaki argues, the abolishment of the tōdōza and the position of kengyō released blind people from the old system created under a hierarchical society, but it also left many blind people without any kind of educational, employment, or financial support system.<sup>36</sup>

Blind people who were formerly ranked as senior members of tōdōza comprised only 16.7 percent of the entire blind population of Japan. They were still able for the time being to maintain their independent economic situation by self-employment as acupuncturists, masseurs, and music performers. The remaining 83.3 percent of blind people had been formerly regarded as lower in rank within the tōdōza. That group earned their living mainly as masseurs, and the majority was dependent on the support system of the tōdōza. Although they were still legally able to work as self-employed masseurs, without having any additional support system available, they became deeply impoverished as the tōdōza was abolished.<sup>37</sup>

The government harshly criticized the authority that kengyō enjoyed within the tōdōza and the wealth they thus accumulated because of their position. What the government overlooked was the fact that although the majority of blind people held a lower status than kengyō within tōdōza, the tōdōza still provided vocational training as well as financial support for those in need. The income from well-to-do members of tōdōza, such as kengyō, betō, and kōtō, was saved and used to provide funds to the lower ranking members of tōdōza which was on the average of 79.4 percent (in the 1830s).<sup>38</sup> After the abolishing of tōdōza, the support which those people relied upon was entirely lost. The government further overlooked the obligation to provide some form

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid (braille ed., vol. 12), 107.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid (braille ed., vol. 5), 82.

of employment, educational, and financial support for those who needed support. Instead, they simply took the view that the traditional blind professions of massage therapy and musical performance would provide sufficient income for blind people to be able to continue to support themselves independently. Those blind people who could not do so should just turn to their relatives for needed support. Thus, blind people found themselves literally thrown out of the old system and forced to rebuild their lives anew on their own, without any resources provided by the Meiji government.

The Meiji government established the first form of welfare laws in 1874. The laws (*jukkyū kisoku*), however, were only intended for people with physical illnesses who had absolutely no means of support. These laws did not consider disabilities such as blindness as belonging to the category of physical illness.<sup>39</sup> It was not until 1929 that the government enacted welfare laws that gave more extensive support to people who were considered physically ill and living in extreme poverty. Like the previous laws, however, this particular welfare law did not correctly categorize “blindness” as the clear form of physical illness that it is. Thus, the blind continued to be excluded from the population qualifying for welfare support from the government. These conditions that blind people faced continued until the enactment in 1950 of the welfare laws for the disabled. Until 1950, no accurate or legally guaranteed welfare system was in place to provide employment and financial support for the blind.<sup>40</sup>

In 1874, the same year that the first form of a general welfare law was enacted by the Meiji government, the Tōkyō prefecture government conducted a survey about the living and

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<sup>39</sup> Tsune Jiro. *Maketara Akan Kaenya Akan: Shogaisha Fukushi Wo Kirihi raki 60nenn (60 Years of Fight for the Improvement of Welfare Services for the Blind)*. Osaka: Osaka no Shogaisha Fukushi Wo Kangaeru Kai. 2004, braille edition vol. 1 p. 10.

<sup>40</sup> Taniai, Susumu. *Mojin no rekishi*, p. 56.

working conditions of blind people. According to the survey results, out of 825 blind people who resided in Tōkyō at that time, approximately 435 blind people, or 52.7 percent, were jobless and had no income.<sup>41</sup> This group represented more than half of the blind people who resided in Tōkyō in 1874. The break-up of the tōdōza system lowered the standard of living for blind people while removing opportunities for them to hold onto their occupations. The welfare laws enacted in 1929 stated that anyone who is in poverty shall receive support from the government, but the same law stated that poverty was considered an outcome of negligence and not directly related to one's disabilities. The law further stated that only those who were without family and with a certain type of clear physical illness that prevented them from performing any physical activities were eligible to receive financial and welfare support from the government. Thus, that 52.7 percent of blind people in Tōkyō in need of support were not included in the coverage stipulated in the laws.

Moreover, the government prohibited blind people from asking people for any compensation for performing prayers or healing. This meant that the acts of professionally conducting prayers and performing healing ceremonies to earn funds to support oneself were considered illegal activities, just as was the act of begging. One blind man, Kuzuhara Bishiichi, wrote in his diary in 1871, "The spring I enjoyed very much is gone, like a sudden high wave come and gone." [Author's translation]<sup>42</sup> As Taniai Susumu concludes, Kuzuhara's diary describes how shocking and incomprehensible the new laws were for many of the blind who had been accustomed to building their own lives independently from their own stable work, as it was for those blind people who had relied on welfare support through the tōdōza. Many of the blind

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 60.

were forced to become itinerant street music performers or masseurs and had to rely on income that fluctuated from one day to the next.

These conditions provided no economic stability, and as time passed some blind people began to seek their own solutions by breaking from their old ways. Despite economic hardships, some blind people took this as an opportunity to begin to rebuild and improve their living and working conditions. They kept the old occupations of massage therapy, acupuncture, and in some cases music (*biwa* or *koto*) performance. They also began seeking new ways to improve their living conditions. The image of a blind masseur walking down the street, seeking a client with his cane and flute (*anmabue*) became a negative icon of blind people in poverty.

### **Yamao Yozo and Blind People**

The blind were not the only people who regarded the poverty of blind people as a social problem. Sighted people also recognized it. One of them who voiced his opinion about his own observations of these issues was Yamao Yozo (1837-1917), a 34-year-old educator in 1871 when he founded and was the head of the School of Industry. He observed blind street musicians and masseurs walking the streets with their canes and flutes in search of clients. Yamao felt compelled to do something about this state of affairs. He submitted a formal proposal to the government to work to establish national and prefectural schools for the blind in Japan so that they could be educated for a gainful profession instead of walking the streets. Yamao's request articulately describes his observation that blind people in the streets of Tōkyō was not a good image of a country wanting to move swiftly toward modernization. He went on to indicate that blind people in Western countries such as Britain were well-educated and their communication and vocational skills were quite sufficient for them to be as active in society as anyone else. He

emphasized that a civilized country should not abandon people with physical disabilities, leaving them living in poverty with no significant profession. If Japan wished to be recognized by Western nations as a country civilized enough to collaborate on an equal footing with Western nations, then it was necessary to provide educational support for people with physical disabilities.<sup>43</sup>

How did Yamao Yozo acquire such ideas? Yamao Yozo, born in 1837 and the son of Chōshū han Daimyō, Yamao Chōjirō grew up embracing anti-Tokugawa ideas. After Admiral Perry's arrival in Japan in 1853, Yamao did not hesitate to express his anti-Western feelings (*joi*), as did many of the Chōshū and Satsuma samurai. He even joined the radical anti-Western (*shishi*) group and got involved in the assassination of a Westerner. In 1862 he and other samurai attempted to operate a British gunboat that had been recently purchased by the Chōshū han, but they failed. Through that bitter experience Yozo quickly realized that he needed to learn the technology of the West; that realization led him to travel to Britain in 1863. While in Britain, he learned not only naval technology but ship navigation skills as well, and in 1868 he returned to Japan. In 1870, thanks to his knowledge of shipbuilding that he had acquired at a ship factory in Glasgow, he was invited by the Meiji government to work for the newly established Ministry of Industry.

In 1871 Yamao solicited the government to establish a new school where various industrial technologies could be taught to young Japanese students. The request was granted, and at the age of thirty-four he was appointed the head of the Japanese School of Industry. His experience in Britain convinced him that in order for Japan to become a country with the strength

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<sup>43</sup> Honma Isaburo. *Genryū Wo Saguru: Osaka no Mojin Fukushi*. Osaka, Japan: Nippon Raitohausu (Nippon Lighthouse Welfare Center for the Blind), p. 5.

and wealth of Western countries it was vitally important that Japan should learn from the West and he, like Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901) and Katsu Kaishū (1823-1899), supported the ideas expressed in the government's slogan, "Wealthy Nation, Strong Military" (*Fukoku kyohei*). He believed that all Japanese citizens should participate in the work of strengthening the country as much as one could. He felt it was no different for people with disabilities. The government should view them as assets to society and provide sufficient welfare and employment opportunities to encourage their contribution to the country, as was customary in Western nations. People with disabilities had a role to play in advancing Japan to the level of Western nations.<sup>44</sup>

While studying in Britain, Yamao observed deaf people working in carpentry and blacksmithing. He realized that Japanese blind people could join the same professions if provided with an opportunity to be properly trained. These observations fed directly into the aspirations of the Meiji government in the 1870s to build Japan into a civilized and cultivated country, the equal of other Western nations. It became increasingly clear to some of the Japanese elite that if they wanted to emulate the West and its advances, they would have to increase policies favorable to the welfare of the blind and disabled as well. Yamao took advantage of this frame of mind, emphasizing the fact that providing a proper education and welfare system for the blind and disabled was one way to demonstrate the humanitarian policies and feelings characteristic of a highly civilized society equal to other Western nations. He did not regard the blind as a group of people who were only a burden on society because of their physical disabilities. Instead, he saw them as resources that could help advance the country if opportunities were provided by the country.

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<sup>44</sup> Kato Yasuaki, Nakano Yoshitatsu. *Waga Kuni Tokushu Kyoiku no Seiritsu*. Tōkyō, Japan: Toho Shobo, p. 144.

This attitude resembled that of the blind advocates who were working to ameliorate the poor welfare conditions of blind people. As Yamao was boldly expressing his ideas about people with disabilities in Japan, the country was still in a dilemma. The national government was moving the country toward increased Westernization and such a direction was supported and advocated by intellectuals like Fukuzawa in the early Meiji period. At the same time there were many who still supported the samurai regime and the old social system.

Yamao's idea of a workable school system for the blind and deaf was also an opinion held by other Japanese intellectuals who had been associating with Western missionaries. For the country as a whole, however, such an idea of establishing a school system for people with visual and hearing impairment had not yet been seriously considered. During the Tokugawa era, as previously noted, the education of blind people had been limited to training as musicians, storytellers, massage therapists, and acupuncturists. But those training opportunities only existed within tōdōza. What Yamao and other intellectuals pictured was a school system serving any blind person, young or old, that not only taught vocational skills useful for blind people exclusively, but also the same subjects being taught to students in general such as reading, writing, mathematics, and religion who were following a Western-style educational program.

Although Yamao's request was not under consideration at a high governmental level, it inspired those intellectuals who were seriously thinking that something needed to be done to educate people with disabilities. Yamao became an advisor to those who wanted to take their plans into action to found a school for the blind and deaf.

### **Rakuzenkai and a School for the Blind and Deaf**

The first school for the blind and deaf was established in Kyoto in 1878. This school was initially opened in 1875 as a small private school for the deaf by two private citizens of Kyoto, Furukawa Tashiro and Sakuma Ushio (b. unknown, d. unknown). Two years later in 1877 Furukawa Tashiro began to accept blind students. This was the beginning of the Kyoto School for the Blind and Deaf (*Kyoto Moa Gakko*), the first school in Japan to educate blind and deaf students.<sup>45</sup> A year prior to the founding of a school for the deaf in Kyoto, 1876, a group of people, including Japanese Christian converts and Western missionaries, assembled and established an organization called Acting for a Good Cause (*Rakuzenkai*). Furukawa Masao, Tsuda Sen, Nakamura Masanao, Kishida Ginko, Dr. Burchardt, and Dr. Henry Faulds were the primary members of this small organization.<sup>46</sup> Although there were only six members, Rakuzenkai had a clear agenda for their organizational activities.

Like Yamao Yozo, they had come to the conclusion that blind people in Japan should be given an opportunity to receive a proper education, and they planned to provide them with educational materials necessary for them to learn to read. To start the process, in the first meeting held in May of 1876 they decided to order a book from the Bible written in tactile letters for blind people through the American Bible Society.<sup>47</sup> Members of Rakuzenkai understood that, like education for sighted people, learning to read and write was the basis of all further education. However, they did not have a clear idea of how to teach blind people to identify letters. Members came to an agreement that it would be best to teach using romanized Japanese (*romaji*) letters invented by James Curtis Hepburn (1815-1911) who was a missionary and ophthalmologist from the United States, and then the American Bible Society could transcribe

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<sup>45</sup> Okawara, Kingo. *Tenji Hattatsu shi* (*The History of Braille Letters*). Braille edition, vol. 4, p. 7 p. 8.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 29-30. What they ordered was the Gospel of John, Chapter 9.

the Bible that was translated into Japanese written in Hepburn's romanized letters in the tactile format as a good model. Soon after that, they ordered a tactile Bible transcribed into the Japanese letters (*katakana*) printed by the National Blind Society of Scotland.<sup>48</sup>

From the first meeting they also discussed about establishing a school for the blind in Tōkyō. When Furukawa Tashiro and Sakuma Ushio began teaching a blind student in 1878, Rakuzenkai worked closely with them to prepare for a new school like the one in Kyoto. Nakamura Masanao who had expressed his concerns that Japanese blind people had no way to learn to read and write, worked closely with Yamao to obtain textbooks for students. In his advisory role to Rakuzenkai, Yozo supported the establishment of the Tōkyō School for the Blind and Deaf (*Tōkyō Moa Gakko*) that began operations in January of 1880.

According to the reports written by Rakuzenkai, in the beginning reading, writing, and mathematics were the main courses taught in the Tōkyō School for the Blind and Deaf, but by the end of 1882, the curriculum had expanded to include geometry, geography, music, Japanese history, the national ancient culture and anthropology (*kokutai*), acupuncture, and massage therapy.<sup>49</sup> The same reports mention that tactile printed textbooks were used to teach those courses. They also report that the school began to teach subjects that could be useful for blind students to obtain an occupation.

What Rakuzenkai was aiming for was to design a school for blind people to serve as a full-fledged educational institute where blind people could acquire the same knowledge that was available to sighted students and at the same time a place where they could gain the skills necessary to obtain an occupation. By 1885 Rakuzenkai agreed to turn over management of the

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 43-46.

Tōkyō School for the Blind and Deaf to the Japanese Ministry of Education (*Monbusho*). The Kyoto School for the Blind and Deaf was also placed under the management of the education ministry, but Rakuzenkai continued to provide both the Tōkyō and Kyoto Schools for the Blind and Deaf with financial and material support.

### **Beginnings of Advocacy by Blind People**

During the times sighted intellectuals were working to improve the system of education for blind people, the blind were also working to advocate for themselves. Although advocacy activities by blind people for themselves became more frequent later on in the Taisho period (1912-1926), during the Meiji period on a small scale some blind people made efforts to improve the lives of people with visual impairment. One of the cases of self-advocacy by a blind person was the founding of the Christian Blind School under the leadership of Nobutaka Sakon (b. unknown, d. unknown) in 1905.<sup>50</sup> According to the *Japan Christian Yearbook*, a man named Sakon from Kobe became blind from an injury he received fighting in a war, though the particular war is not mentioned. He became a Christian while he was adjusting to his blindness. The experiences he had as a blind person inspired him to set out on a goal of establishing a Christian Blind School in Kobe. Sakon's contribution to establishing the Christian Blind School in Kobe is one example of a blind person's working to improve the lives of people with the same disability.<sup>51</sup>

Another case of advocacy was the invention of tactile letters that made it possible for blind people to acquire information through reading, thus improving communication with others. Most learning and communicating up till that time had been done orally. Having access to the

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<sup>50</sup> Taniai, Susumu. *Mojin no Rekishi*, p. 63.

<sup>51</sup> Monbusho editor. *Tokushu Kyoiku 100nen shi*. Tōkyō: Monbusho, 1978. p. 85.

same printed materials as sighted individuals was a challenge for blind people. During the Meiji period many blind people recognized the importance of education. Despite the opening of schools for the blind and deaf in Japan during the Meiji era, educational facilities for blind people were not yet widely enough available to reach every blind person. Yet they invented ways to read printed letters. A blind man who lived in Niigata prefecture, Watanabe Wanoichi, invented a way in 1888 to identify pictographic letters (*kanamoji*) by folding sheets of paper and began to teach these letters to other blind people in the local community.<sup>52</sup> In 1890 another blind person, Usuda Chiyokichi, who lived in Tottori prefecture invented a different way to shape kanamoji with ropes, from a hint he had gotten from a method of tactile letters that was used in Britain.<sup>53</sup> Neither invention was considered very successful, but these cases demonstrated the strong desire blind people felt to find a way to expand their means of communication to be able to acquire knowledge. Although these acts of advocacy played only a minor role, it nevertheless became clear to educators that a profound way of comprehending and reading kanamoji for blind people needed to be invented.

### **Invention of Japanese Braille Letters**

At the same time that Watanabe Wanoichi and Usuda Chiyokichi came up with their inventions of kanamoji identification for blind people, the Ministry of Education asked educators in the Tōkyō School for the Blind and Deaf to investigate the possibility of converting braille letters (invented by Louis Braille in the 1820s) to Japanese braille letters based on kanamoji. Educators in the Tōkyō School for the Blind and Deaf aimed to create letters for blind people

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<sup>52</sup> Okawara, Kingo. *Tenji Hattatsu shi* (*The History of Braille Letters*). Braille edition, vol. 4, p. 54. A mayor of the village was impressed by the invention of Watanabe Wanoichi and wrote a letter to a principal of the Tōkyō School for the Blind and Deaf asking whether Watanabe's invention could be useful in the school.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 59.

that could be both read and written. But although the tactile letters of kanamoji invented by several blind people could be read by blind people, they were not made for writing.

In 1890 a teacher at the Tōkyō School for the Blind and Deaf, Ishikawa Kuraji (1859-1944), invented Japanese braille modeled after Louis Braille's six-dot system that he had invented in France in the late 1820s (not officially publicized until 1837).<sup>54</sup> Until then, educators in Europe as well as in Japan had tried to teach blind students using tactile letters from which printed letters could be made. Even with the invention of codes using a combination of twelve dots (first invented by Marries Charles Varvier in 1823 then modeled after the work of a group of Japanese educators attempted to invent letters for Japanese blind people), reading and writing for blind students were still problematic. As happened after the invention of the original braille letters by Louis Braille, after the invention of Japanese six-dot braille by Ishikawa, blind people were able to read properly as well as write.

The introduction of six-dot braille into Japan illustrates how the society adapted inventions from the West. Invention of Japanese braille letters is one clear demonstration of the attitude of the Meiji government and Japanese educators toward Western learning. Instead of taking the six-dot braille letter system invented by Louis Braille and imitating it, Ishikawa Kuraji made innovations to the basic system, creating another type of original braille letters that were adjusted to the layout of kanamoji. The historian Eleanor D. Westney further confirms Sheldon Garon's observation by writing in the introduction to one of her publications that the Japanese adopted a wide range of new institutions and manufacturing and communications technologies from the West; the adaptation of braille letters originally invented by Louis Braille was a part of

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 117.

Japan's effort to learn from the West to strengthen and improve education and the welfare system of the country.<sup>55</sup>

The invention of Japanese braille widened the access to education for blind people. Even though it took several more decades for education for the disabled to become a part of the compulsory education system in Japan, blind educators began to see a clearer purpose and expanded goals. After the invention of Japanese braille, it was now possible for students and teachers at the various schools for the blind to publish braille magazines such as "*Magazine Akebono*".<sup>56</sup> Those magazines contained information mainly about acupuncture techniques and basic medical knowledge necessary for blind people to learn about how to improve their skills as acupuncturists. For the first time, blind people could acquire and advance their knowledge of vocational skills by reading about them instead of by memorizing material that had been read to them. Because acupuncture remained as the primary conventional occupation for blind people even after the break-up of the tōdōza, acquiring the knowledge about acupuncture techniques through reading was regarded as a truly important and revolutionary advancement by many blind people.

### **Esperanto and the Interest in Foreign Countries and Cultures**

Information about foreign cultures was very scarce in school textbooks or magazines. As the Meiji period ended and Japan moved into the Taisho period (1912-1926), young blind intellectuals became more motivated to learn more about foreign countries and their cultures, including lives of blind people. Esperanto, whose very title means "hope," was a language invented by Lazarus Ludwig Zamenhof (1859-1917), a Polish linguist and ophthalmologist who

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<sup>55</sup> Eleanor Westney. *Imitation and Innovation: the Transfer of Western Organizational Patterns in Meiji Japan*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987, p. 1.

<sup>56</sup> Taniai, Susumu. *Mojin no Rekishi*, p. 68.

was dedicated to working to unite the world. It was his belief that the variety of languages in the world was the main obstacle preventing nations from communicating effectively with each other and that language differences could and should be resolved by everyone using one primary language. He published the Esperanto language in 1887. Although Esperanto did not become a primary international language, it found its way into Japan in 1902.

The Japan Esperanto Organization was formed in 1906 by a group of Japanese intellectuals. Esperanto attracted the attention of sighted intellectuals in Japan as well as the attention of young blind intellectuals. This interest eventually led to the introduction into Japan of the braille Esperanto magazine published in Sweden in 1904 entitled, *Esperanta Ligilo*. As late as the early 1920s the only way that young blind Japanese intellectuals could obtain information about the lives of blind people outside Japan was to read the Esperanto braille magazine.

Braille became the eyes of blind people. Young intellectuals wishing to learn about the world outside Japan and how disability issues were handled in Western nations began to obtain braille magazines published in Western countries. The invention of Japanese braille motivated those young intellectuals to learn and adapt other modern discoveries and advancements from outside of Japan. This resulted in producing active blind advocates from the Taisho period onward who were knowledgeable about developments in the rest of the world that needed to come to Japan as well.

The first two young blind intellectuals to turn their attention to the lives of blind people in foreign countries were Kumagai Tetsutarō (1883-1979), a blind Esperantist and well-known blind minister, and Torii Tokujirō (1894-1970), a blind educator who taught at a school for the

blind in Shizuoka prefecture and later became the founder of the Kyoto Lighthouse for the Blind. Another blind educator and social reformer, Iwahashi Takeo (1898-1954), and Torii Tokujiro were two of the foremost advocates among the blind intellectuals supporting the learning of Esperanto. Torii was convinced that Esperanto was the language tool that Japanese blind people could use to learn about the outside world. The interest of these blind intellectuals to learn about the world outside Japan energized them to become active advocates for improving the educational and employment opportunities for blind people by adopting the lessons learned and modern practices developed in Western countries. As Ishikawa Kuraji and other educators at the Tōkyō School for the Blind and Deaf had hoped, Japanese braille letters became the key to enable these blind intellectuals to broaden their learning environment to the progress being made by the world outside Japan.

### **Agitation for Workers' Rights and the Blind**

According to Andrew Gordon, Japanese laborers began forming labor unions during the latter part of the Meiji into the Taisho period. He describes in the introductory chapter of *Labor and Imperial Democracy* how urban laborers began protesting against the government in demonstrations and riots, even before the first major labor union was organized in 1912 by urban workers in Tōkyō and Osaka. Urban laborers fomented some nine riots on the streets of Tōkyō from 1905 to 1918.<sup>57</sup> From the latter part of the Meiji through the Taisho periods urban laborers came together to form a systematic group to better demonstrate their demands for better working conditions and the universal rights of workers. A political party known as *Kenseikai*, a rival of the *Seiyukai* political party, began supporting the workers. This support from the Kenseikai

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<sup>57</sup> Gordon, Andrew. *Labor and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, California: California University Press. 2005, p. 1.

political party was not strong enough to completely win over the opposition party, Seiyukai. But a network of Bourgeois (*Zaibatsu*) started working closely with the Seiyukai. The Zaibatsu was a social movement demanding equality for laborers and for women. This cooperative effort was instrumental in gaining the support of those who were not labor unionists.<sup>58</sup>

The blind in Japan did not have any distinct organizations during the latter part of the Meiji and throughout the Taisho periods. For most of this time, the blind in Japan acted individually in expressing opposition to the government. During this period, teachers working at schools for the blind in Osaka joined with socialist-leaning private citizens to organize support groups for blind people who were seeking training and skills to become acupuncturists and masseurs in Osaka.<sup>59</sup> As Andrew Gordon notes, urban workers' efforts to create a support network spread and "touched on" the lives of ordinary blind citizens.

Because acupuncture skills were generally mastered through apprenticeship, no public educational institutions existed where blind people could learn or improve their skills. Even though many schools for the blind began to offer courses in massage techniques and in some cases acupuncture, the traditional apprenticeship route into these professions was still strong. Therefore, training opportunities were not widespread enough to encourage the official establishment of training centers in these professions. A strong organization driven by blind people themselves was necessary for such a system to change. In the first part of the Taisho period, however, no suitably strong organization existed to take on the job of fighting for more diverse vocational training and welfare improvements for the blind. Things began to change as the Taisho period ended and the Showa period began in the mid-1920s. Middle class blind

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>59</sup> Honma Isaburo. *Genryu Wo Saguru: Osaka no Mojin Fukushi*. p. 35 .

citizens who were mainly educators continued to seek ways to improve the general welfare services for the blind. They also started joining together to work toward organizing advocacy groups.

The various actions taken by Japanese blind people and other ordinary Japanese citizens were at first small-scale efforts that did not have the substantial involvement of the Meiji government. Their efforts, however, took the same direction of imitation and innovation as what the historian Westney depicts. The Meiji government adapted and worked to make innovations on Western technology, to build institutions, increase manufacturing production, and establish a communication system modeled after the West. Both the blind and sighted who worked to improve the lives of blind people in Meiji society also lobbied hard to draw the attention of the government to the importance of creating welfare systems for the blind and people with physical disabilities modeled after the West, though it was significantly less substantial and adapted to Japan innovations from the West.

During the Meiji and into the Taisho era, the government gradually began to get involved in the management of the schools. However, assisting blind people seeking employment opportunities remained primarily in the hands of private citizens. Just as the government began to take notice of and listen seriously to the voices of urban laborers, they also began to listen to the voices of blind people, even though their plight was not yet being seriously addressed.

Establishing schools and inventing a written language for blind people.

It became increasingly clear to some of the Japanese elite that if they wanted to emulate the West and its advances, they would have to increase policies favorable to the welfare of the blind and disabled as well. Japan's transformation from a feudal samurai regime to the new was

earmarked by the Meiji Restoration of 1868. By 1871 the Meiji government carried out reform of the country by abolishing the old system and customs that existed during the Tokugawa period, abolishing domains which had been under the authority of daimyō. The government aggressively began to model itself after Western nations. The Japanese army was modeled after Germany, the police after France, the Japanese navy and postal services after Britain. Ambitions to strengthen industry and to be able to respond to Western encroachment led Japan to learn from the West, build a strong military, and institute compulsory educational programs for its citizens.

The advocacy work for blind people took a pattern that was very similar to the rest of society was doing. The idea of establishing educational institutes came from a group of intellectuals who had experienced Western-style education. Yamao's idea that society should regard people with disabilities as resources for strengthening society was formulated from his first-hand observations of British society. Literacy of blind people using braille letters was promoted by Japanese educators following on the development of braille letters originally invented by a blind educator, Louis Braille, in France. Just as Japan on the whole needed to learn from Western nations how to advance and strengthen itself, the welfare of blind people needed to model itself after what had been learned and implemented in Western nations in order to create a welfare system for blind people of its own.

## **Working for Equality: Activism and Advocacy by Blind Intellectuals in Japan, 1912-1995**

Chapter 2: Self Advocacy to Group Advocacy, 1912-1937: The Leadership of Iwahashi and the Lighthouse Welfare Center for the Blind

### **Introduction**

The formation and growth of organized labor unions during the Taisho period (1912-1926) under dedicated leaders gave a louder voice to the widespread but localized advocacy of individuals fighting for workers' rights and more humane working conditions. Blind people, likewise, needed activists to come forward who were willing to lead the sincere but disparate advocacy efforts to improve the lives of people with visual disabilities, focusing on specific issues as a group. From the Taisho era onward education and employment emerged as the two key issues necessary for reform that would have the most important, immediate, and residual impact on the overall welfare for the blind. But without organizing as a group under forceful and dedicated leadership, progress would stagnate.

This chapter focuses on the life and contributions of the well-known blind Japanese professor and intellectual, Iwahashi Takeo (1898-1954). It describes the crucial role his leadership played in working to improve welfare services for the blind. His most significant initiatives included: building a network of advocacy among blind Japanese intellectuals, establishing a Lighthouse Welfare Center for the Blind, increasing the number of publications in

braille, encouraging learning from the West and study abroad opportunities, hosting two lecture visits to Japan by Helen Keller, negotiating for more educational and employment opportunities and accommodations for the blind, and joining up with sighted advocates. These initiatives all helped advance welfare services for the blind and to transform the movement from a dispersed effort by individuals to a national platform for group advocacy.

### **Iwahashi Takeo and His Advocacy for Education for Blind People**

A well-known blind advocate during the late Taisho to early Showa periods was Iwahashi Takeo. Iwahashi was born in 1898, the eldest son of Iwahashi Otokichi (b. 1864). The house of Iwahashi was a mid-rank samurai family retained by the Andō daimyō clan in the area of Kishū (Wakayama prefecture). Otokichi was one of only a few who made the successful transition from the status of samurai to well-to-do businessman, and his business continued to prosper after the family moved from Wakayama to Osaka in the same year that their first child, Takeo, was born.<sup>60</sup> Iwahashi was a bright student growing up. After he completed his secondary education, in 1916 he entered Waseda University (*Waseda Daigaku*) to pursue his undergraduate degree in engineering and science. However, shortly after he entered the university he suddenly became ill with high fever and lost his eyesight. This devastating incident forced him to withdraw from the university. After surviving a suicide attempt in 1918 at the age of twenty, he made a determined decision to start his life over, and he entered the Osaka School for the Blind.

In May of the same year Kumagai Tetsutarō (1883-1979) happened to visit the school, where the two met.<sup>61</sup> Kumagai, then thirty-five, was a blind Christian educator and worked as a

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<sup>60</sup> Hiroyuki, Seki, *Iwahashi Takeo: The Duty and Sacrifice (Iwahashi Takeo: gimu yue no michiyuki)* (braille ed., vol. 1), 8.

<sup>61</sup> Seki, *Iwahashi Takeo* (braille ed., vol. 1), 21.

pastor in Osaka. When Kumagai was a student at the Tōkyō School for the Blind he was greatly influenced by a Canadian Methodist missionary, C. J. L. Bates, and that influence led him to become a Methodist pastor.<sup>62</sup> Listening to Iwahashi's ideas, Kumagai strongly recommended that he enter Kwansei Gakuin University (*Kwansei Gakuin Daigaku*) in Kobe where Kumagai had also previously studied. Meeting Kumagai made an indelible impression on Iwahashi that inspired and encouraged him to pursue a meaningful future. The impact Kumagai had on Iwahashi also led him to accept the Christian faith, and he was baptized in 1919. Kumagai also provided Iwahashi the opportunity to get to know other prominent blind intellectuals who were similarly determined to fight for equal educational and employment opportunities for the blind.

What was fortunate for Iwahashi was that all the people with whom Iwahashi was becoming acquainted were interested in learning from foreign countries. Through Kumagai, other important links to the educated activist community started to develop. Kumagai was an alumnus of Kwansei Gakuin University,<sup>63</sup> and before he entered the university he had taught English at the Yokohama Christian School for the Blind (*Yokohama Kunmo Gakuin*) and the Kobe Christian School for the Blind (*Kobe Kunmo Gakuin*). The Kobe school was founded by a blind Japanese Christian convert in 1906 and the Yokohama school by an American missionary.

Another prominent blind intellectual Iwahashi got to know through his relationship with Kumagai was Nakamura Kyotaro (1880-1969) of *Daily Braille* (*Tenji Mainichi*). Nakamura worked as a journalist and editor for the Mainichi Braille Newspaper Publishing Company and was working to expand the publishing projects of the company. ](As a result of Nakamura's

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<sup>62</sup> Seki, *Iwahashi Takeo* (braille ed., vol. 1), 23.

<sup>63</sup> Seki, *Iwahashi Takeo* (braille ed., vol. 1), 26.

work in the early 1900s, the company continues to the present day to publish a braille newspaper and is regarded as one of the main information and literature suppliers for the blind in Japan.)

Even while he was a student, Iwahashi dedicated his time to the expansion of his project to establish a Lighthouse for the blind in Japan modeled after a similar facility located in New York City. Iwahashi envisioned that the main purpose of the facility would be the publication of educational materials in braille. Iwahashi also believed that a blind individual should be able to choose an occupation just as sighted people did. However, he was aware that in Japan the number of professions that blind people could choose from was severely limited. Cases like Kumagai, the teacher and Christian pastor, or Nakamura, the newspaper writer and editor, were unique and rare. At the same time, the unconventional success of these two blind intellectuals was clear testimony that if blind people could obtain the proper education and training, there was nothing else preventing them from enjoying new employment options from which they could choose their occupation of interest.

The project that was purported to be Iwahashi's first major project of his Lighthouse Welfare Center for the Blind was the publication in 1922 of the first braille Esperanto/Japanese dictionary while he was still a student at Kwansei Gakuin University. It was a small-scaled project and compiled, written, and published privately. This project, however, was a significant stepping stone for Iwahashi and his goals for a Lighthouse-type center. (By the 1960s it had grown into a facility that published all secondary school textbooks for the blind.)

Iwahashi and the people of like interests with whom he was becoming acquainted thought much could be learned from the accomplishments of Western countries in improving welfare services for the blind. His desire to study abroad to see these accomplishment for himself grew

out of the exciting educational and intellectual environment he found during his study at Kwansei Gakuin University. He entered the university in April 1919 as a full-time student and devoted his time to the study of John Milton. He graduated in March of 1923 and began working at the Osaka School for the Blind as an English and Japanese instructor.<sup>64</sup>

Iwahashi and Nakamura both traveled abroad to study in Great Britain: Nakamura to England in 1912<sup>65</sup> and Iwahashi to Scotland in 1925.<sup>66</sup> They were both supported by a man named Yoshimoto Tadasu (1878-1973), a Japanese businessman who had emigrated to England and was a strong supporter of Japanese blind intellectuals. What impressed Iwahashi and Nakamura were the welfare systems and services for blind people in Britain. They considered the Royal Institute of Braille Library a model for a library facility for Japan, which they both hoped to establish in the near future. They worked to make their vision a reality after their study abroad.

Iwahashi spent three years studying at Edinburgh University from 1925-1928, completing his M.A. in English Studies. Upon his return to Japan in 1928 he was appointed to a faculty position at Kwansei Gakuin University in the field of English studies, philosophy, and religious studies.<sup>67</sup> He also resumed his teaching position at the Osaka School for the Blind.

Iwahashi was regarded as one of very few blind people who was able to enjoy the unique experience of studying abroad and being employed as a university professor. Iwahashi could have just remained satisfied with his accomplishments, but as he commented later on, being a faculty member at Kwansei Gakuin University and an instructor at the Osaka School for the

<sup>64</sup> Seki, *Iwahashi Takeo* (braille ed., vol. 1), 58.

<sup>65</sup> Seki, *Iwahashi Takeo* (braille ed., vol. 1), 25.

<sup>66</sup> Seki, *Iwahashi Takeo* (braille ed., vol. 1), 65.

<sup>67</sup> Seki, *Iwahashi Takeo* (braille ed., vol. 1), 80.

Blind reminded him from time to time that there were many blind people who needed more and better opportunities for education and employment.<sup>68</sup>

With Iwahashi on its faculty, Kwansei Gakuin University attracted many young blind intellectuals who hoped for a better future for themselves and all blind people. They frequently gathered around Iwahashi and discussed the future of the country and welfare services for Japanese blind people. They expressed a keen interest in Iwahashi's experiences in Scotland and the system of welfare services in that country. Iwahashi expressed how genuinely impressed he was with the welfare system for blind people that he found in Britain. In 1929, a year after he returned to Japan from his study abroad, he wrote an article publicly praising the efficiency of the welfare system and laws for the blind in Britain.<sup>69</sup> The article was published by a publisher interested in the condition of people with disabilities in Japan. What Iwahashi intended to convey to his readers was that blind people should be treated as first-class citizens and given the respect equal to that of sighted citizens. Moreover, equality for blind people meant that they should be regarded as fully active people who could be expected to contribute to the welfare of society. Therefore, blind people had the right to equal access to the same educational and employment opportunities as were available to sighted people.

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<sup>68</sup> Japan Federation of the Blind, Editor. "Nichimoren 50shunen shi (50-year History of Japan Federation of the Blind)". Tokyo: Nichimoren shuppan. Issue August 1949. Electronic version, 4.

<sup>69</sup> Seki, *Iwahashi Takeo* (braille ed., vol. 1), 91-92. According to Seki Hiroyuki, Iwahashi's intention in publishing this article was to promote well-organized welfare services for blind people and to point out the importance of modeling these services after Western countries such as Great Britain. As Seki states, Iwahashi's opinion of the welfare services for blind people in Japan at the time of his return from Scotland in 1928 was that they were still in the "immature" stage.

What Iwahashi discusses in his article is what was to become the foundation of his ambition and mission for a Lighthouse for the blind in Japan. He was not proposing that blind people would merely create their own exclusive network within society, somewhat resembling the protective functions of the *tōdōza* during the Tokugawa period. Rather, he envisioned people with visual disabilities becoming full members of society, actively participating beside others. Thus, blind people should be given the right of equal access to education and employment which was available to sighted people. He wrote:

“I believe that people with visual disabilities should be considered as fully active members of Japanese society and are entitled to ask for the support of the society that enables us to actively get involved in the making of this society with the rest of its members,”[author’s translation]<sup>70</sup>

This article reflects Iwahashi’s the nature of his purpose and mission for a Lighthouse for the blind in Japan.

Christianity, to which Iwahashi was exposed when he met Kumagai for the first time in 1918, also influenced Iwahashi’s opinions. By the time Iwahashi returned from Scotland in 1928 he was a firm supporter of the Quaker church which had supported him during his study abroad.<sup>71</sup> Iwahashi’s basic ideas about equal opportunity for blind people in Japan had been formed primarily during the time he was studying at Kwansei Gakuin University and during his studies abroad in Scotland.

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<sup>70</sup> Seki, *Iwahashi Takeo* (braille ed., vol. 1), 92.

<sup>71</sup> Seki, *Iwahashi Takeo* (braille ed., vol. 1), 70. A journalist friend of Iwahashi whom he met soon after he graduated from Kwansei Gakuin University was an American Quaker. He wrote letters to Quaker churches in the United States, Britain, and Australia asking their support for Iwahashi’s study abroad.

## The Impact of Christianity on Education for Blind People in Japan

Since the Meiji period Japanese Christian converts and Western missionaries in Japan had been closely involved in humanitarian work and the education of the Japanese people. Missionaries built secondary schools and universities for enhancing education and thereby spreading Christian doctrine in Japan. But they also worked to build schools for people with disabilities so as to enhance welfare services and humanitarian care. The establishment of the Tōkyō School for the Blind and Deaf by the *Rakuzenkai* group organized by Japanese Christian converts and Western missionaries in 1880 was one example of work undertaken by missionaries and Japanese Christian converts working together.<sup>72</sup> This group recognized the importance of education for people with visual and hearing disabilities to enhance their quality of life alongside their companion purpose of spreading Christianity. The impoverished living conditions of blind people also drew the attention and sympathies of missionaries.

Western missionaries, like the general public, seeing a young blind person walking down the street playing the massage whistle (*anmabue*) to solicit clients for his massage service was a sight that symbolized the poverty and destitute living conditions of blind people. By providing them with a proper basic education, Western missionaries believed they would be able to obtain better work that would in turn help improve their standard of living. An American Protestant missionary, Mrs. C. P. Draper, was one of those missionaries who had encountered a young blind girl who had collapsed on the street from starvation while looking for a client for her massage service.<sup>73</sup> This encounter drew her attention to the general impoverished state of blind people in

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<sup>72</sup> Kingo, Okawara. *The History of Braille Letters (Tenji hattatsu shi)*. (Tōkyō: Tenji Hattatsu Shi Fukkan Iin Kai, 1987), 43.

<sup>73</sup> Yokohama Kunmo Gakuin, Ed. *Seeking for the Light (Hikari wo motomete 90nen)*, audio ed. (Yokohama: Yokohama Kunmo Gakuin, 1979), 5.

Yokohama and Tōkyō.<sup>74</sup> In 1880 she decided to build a secondary educational institution for blind people in Yokohama that would provide a basic education. It was known as the Yokohama Christian School for the Blind (*Yokohama Kunmo Gakuin*). The school remained a privately run Christian school for blind children.<sup>75</sup>

Mrs. Draper and teachers at the school were convinced that in order to establish a more comprehensive educational system for blind students, it was vital for educators as well as students to learn from the experiences of Western nations where the educational system for blind students had a longer history of development. Protestant missionaries who acted as board members of the school continued to encourage educators to implement Western-style education in school curricula. They also encouraged teachers to train their students to become sufficiently equipped to play an active role in society.

One way that the Yokohama Christian School for the Blind could provide a sufficiently Western-style education was to learn from a Western school for the blind that was well-regarded in Japanese society. In the early 1930s, therefore, the school established a close relationship with the well-respected US Perkins School for the Blind. The establishment and growth of the Yokohama Christian School for the Blind demonstrated that with a clear focus on basic education and humanitarian care made by Western missionaries and Japanese Christian converts, the welfare of people with visual disabilities could be significantly improved.<sup>76</sup>

The formation and goals of the Yokohama Christian School for the Blind were similar to those of the Kyoto and Tōkyō schools for the blind and deaf founded in 1877 in Kyoto and in

<sup>74</sup> Yokohama Kunmo Gakuin, Ed. *Seeking for the Light* (audio ed.), 6.

<sup>75</sup> Yokohama Kunmo Gakuin, Ed. *Seeking for the Light* (audio ed.), 1.

<sup>76</sup> Sheldon Garon, *Molding Japanese Minds* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 11.

Tōkyō in 1880. One distinct difference, however, between those three secondary educational institutions was that while both the Kyoto and Tōkyō schools became state- (prefecture-) owned institutions after six years of private management, Mrs. Draper's Yokohama Christian School for the Blind continued operations under the management of Christian missionaries and private Japanese citizens. Their goal was to provide students with a Western-style education along with the concepts of Christianity. The Yokohama institution relied heavily on donations from private citizens and churches in the United States that had strong ties with missionaries. These connections developed into an opportunity for the institution to link up with the Perkins Institute for the Blind.

### **The Perkins Institute for the Blind and the Yokohama Christian School Study-Abroad Program**

The Perkins Institute for the Blind, located in Watertown, Massachusetts, has been one of the most internationally known and respected schools for the blind since its founding in the early 1830s. Founded by a prominent wealthy family from Boston, this school is considered the oldest and most prestigious academy educating blind students in the United States. Soon after the school opened, it began educating both blind students with a single disability as well as blind students with multiple disabilities, such as blind and deaf students.

The Perkins Institute became well-known to the public because of the singular quality of the education it provided. Both Annie Sullivan and Helen Keller were alumnae of the school, and that fact alone had brought fame to the school both in the United States and Japan. Also, well

known to educators was the success of Samuel Howe, one of the founders of the school, in educating Laura Bridgeman, his first student who was both blind and deaf.<sup>77</sup>

In 1931 because of the close ties between the Yokohama Christian School and the Perkins Institute, the Perkins extended an invitation for two blind female students from the Yokohama Christian School to study for three years at the Institution. They would also provide a three-year scholarship to cover their expenses to study at the school. The principal of the Yokohama Christian School, Imamura Ikuta, chose two female students, Takei Ine and Sarutani Keiko. Both young students accepted the offer and attended the Perkins School for three years from 1931 to 1934.<sup>78</sup> This study-abroad opportunity for two of his students provided a way for Imamura to improve his school's curriculum so as to graduate more capable students. Moreover, the school and its students would benefit even more from his plans to employ Takei and Sarutani at the school as soon as they completed their studies at the Yokohama Christian School.<sup>79</sup>

Since the Meiji period the middle class had been built by people who had risen to a position of “political, business, intellectual” leadership in Japanese society by competing with people who historically had been considered “elite” by conventional Japanese society. Thus, higher educational achievement gradually became an essential element that would improve one’s social status. Likewise, Imamura believed that education for blind students had to be strengthened in order to produce students who could successfully compete in Japanese society at large.

<sup>77</sup> Joseph Lash, *Helen and Teacher*, electronic ed. (New York: Delacorte Press, 1980), 15.

<sup>78</sup> Takei Ine, *My Memory of Perkins (Kami ga kakaseto omoide)*, audio ed. (Tōkyō: Nihon Kirisuto Shinbunsha, 1972), 12.

<sup>79</sup>Takei, *My Memory of Perkins* (audio ed.), 12.

Thus, the study-abroad offer from such a prestigious educational institution in the United States gave Imamura and the Yokohama Christian School the opportunity to elevate the quality of the school's curriculum. When Imamura told the two selected female students about the offer from the Perkins Institute, he conveyed his intention to offer them teaching positions at the Yokohama Christian School upon their return to Japan. Both Takei and Sarutani agreed to Imamura's offer and promised him their support. Thinking back on her three years at Perkins, Takei writes that those years were "blessing times." [author's translation]<sup>80</sup> Besides their regular academic curriculum, they learned English, social interaction, decorum, and handicrafts. Through their varied subjects and their teacher training classes, both students learned how blind students were trained and educated in the United States. Upon their return to Japan, both resumed their remaining studies at Yokohama Christian School for the Blind and became employed as teachers at the school.<sup>81</sup> Their three years of study at the Perkins School for the Blind gave them the confidence and knowledge to design their own courses along the guidelines they had learned in the United States. The story of these two female students demonstrates how Japanese educators teaching blind students have relied on inculcating the experience of the West. Educators believed that information from Western nations could further advance education and employment for the blind in Japan.

The guiding principle at Perkins was that the "blind should be educated to become self-reliant and to regard themselves as 'active' citizens of the Commonwealth."<sup>82</sup> This principle

<sup>80</sup> Takei, *My Memory of Perkins* (audio ed.), 10.

<sup>81</sup> Takei, *My Memory of Perkins* (audio ed.), 37. Sarutani Keiko who studied with Takei Ine at Perkins later continued her teaching career at a Christian school organized by an American missionary as a full-time English instructor of sighted students. This school was designed as a private school for girls. Sarutani Keiko became one of the blind women who were pioneers in obtaining a teaching position at a private school for sighted students.

<sup>82</sup> Lash, *Helen and Teacher* (electronic ed.), 16.

made a strong impact on the two female students who studied at the Perkins Institute. The principle matched with the same notion of equality and identity of blind people in Japan that Iwahashi had begun to promote shortly after he returned from Scotland in 1928. According to Takei, a book that they read during their sea voyage was a work by Iwahashi entitled, *Light from Darkness (Hikari wa yamiyori)*.<sup>83</sup> This was a book that Iwahashi had written and published in 1928 after he graduated from the University of Edinburgh with his Master's degree in English Studies.<sup>84</sup> This is one illustration of how much Iwahashi and young blind students were influenced by these Western principles that recognize implicitly the equality of blind people in society. It also signifies how much of an influential figure Iwahashi was becoming to communities of blind people in Japan.

### **Japan Lighthouse Center and its Advocacy for Blind People**

The earliest idea to establish a Japan Lighthouse for the blind did not originally come from Iwahashi, despite the fact that he was known as the founder of the Nippon Lighthouse Welfare Center for the Blind and that he claimed that the very first project of the Japan Lighthouse Center had been the publication of a braille Japanese/Esperanto dictionary in 1922. The Lighthouse campaign promoting the establishment of the Lighthouse Welfare Center for the Blind in Japan first came from an organization established by a group of scholars who were interested in studying the living conditions of blind people in Japan. This organization was known as the Japan Foundation for the Blind (*Chūō Mōjin Fukushi Kyōkai*), and it was established in April of 1928. Its president was Barron Shibusawa Eiichi (1840-1931); Okubo

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<sup>83</sup> Seki, *Iwahashi Takeo* (braille ed., vol. 1), 97. The English title for *Hikari wa Yamiyori* was obtained upon the publication of the English translation of the book when Iwahashi traveled to the United States in 1934; the book which Takei and Sarutani read was the original Japanese publication of Iwahashi's work.

<sup>84</sup>Takei, *My Memory of Perkins* (audio ed.), 20.

Toshitake (“Marquis Okubo,” 1865-1943) and Nitobe Inazo (1862-1933) were the vice presidents.<sup>85</sup> Prevention of blindness and surveying of blind individuals to collect statistics about their personal situation were the primary activities of this particular organization. They published an annual newsletter to advertise their activities and meetings.<sup>86</sup>

In June of 1929 the Japan Foundation for the Blind invited Mrs. Rufus Graves Mather, the executive director of the New York Lighthouse Center for the Blind, to Japan. The Japan Foundation wanted to learn about the New York Lighthouse facility and to discuss with her the potential of building such a facility in Japan. Mrs. Mather introduced her Lighthouse facility and delivered presentations mainly in the Tōkyō area. The Japan Foundation for the Blind was looking for an interpreter for Mrs. Mather’s lectures, and one of the Foundation’s board members, a Quaker missionary named Gilbert Bolls who had come to Japan in 1901, asked Iwahashi to serve as her interpreter.<sup>87</sup> Mrs. Mather’s talk about the Lighthouse campaign moved Iwahashi to think seriously about the project. Encouraged by Mrs. Mather, the Foundation decided to build a Lighthouse facility for the blind in Japan, modeling it after the facility in New York City.

At the annual meeting held in 1928 the members drew up a proposal to work on the following ambitious projects: (1) complete a survey of living and working conditions of blind

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<sup>85</sup> Seki, *Iwahashi Takeo* (braille ed., vol. 1), 87. Akiba Umaji and Kawamoto Unosuke were known to be the two main founders of the organization. They had the experience of studying abroad and were interested in the welfare of blind people. As Seki Hiroyuki indicates, this organization contained influential members who had ties to the government. What was lacking in this organization, however, was the involvement of blind members. No blind person was a member of this organization. Iwahashi first associated with this organization as a guest interpreter in 1929. His association with the organization continued till 1945. Iwahashi, however, did not become a member of the organization.

<sup>86</sup> Chuō Mōjin Fukushi Kyōkai. “Japan Foundation for the Blind Newsletter” (“Chuō Mōjin Fukushi Kyōkai Kaishi”), Issue 1937. Tokyo: Chuō Mōjin Fukushi Kyōkai. 1937 (electronic ed.) The source states the name of Mrs. Mather under her married name, not her personal name.

<sup>87</sup> Seki, *Iwahashi Takeo* (braille ed., vol. 1), 88.

people; (2) develop a prevention of blindness campaign; (3) push for the compulsory education of blind students; (4) work to integrate blind and sighted students with each other; (5) unify braille publishing projects; (6) establish a library for the blind; and (7) establish a research institute for blindness and visual impairment. This proposal was approved and signed by members of the organization.<sup>88</sup>

The opportunity to meet and talk with Mrs. Mather gave Iwahashi a fresh approach to the improvement of welfare services for blind people in Japan. He readily agreed to the seven projects proposed and issued by the Japan Foundation for the Blind. He also supported the idea of a Lighthouse campaign promoting and soliciting support from the public on improving the welfare of blind people.<sup>89</sup> Iwahashi's approach to the improvement of welfare services for blind people was to have blind people and the public work together on the same project with a universal purpose. Seeing the project statement of the Japan Foundation for the Blind, Iwahashi hoped that the agenda of establishing the Japan Lighthouse for the Blind would become reality. However, the project never came close to becoming a reality due to the lack of general support, inadequate financial resources, and poor organizational leadership for the project. Although Iwahashi was bitterly disappointed, it gave him new purpose and made him even more determined to build a Lighthouse for the blind in Japan.

Iwahashi began to look for an organization made up of middle-class blind people. During the 1920s and '30s no nationally organized associations had yet been established by blind people, but they had had a support network at the local level that had grown out of informal gatherings of interested young blind professionals. Young middle-class blind people residing in

<sup>88</sup> Seki, *Iwahashi Takeo* (braille ed., vol. 1), 90.

<sup>89</sup> Seki, *Iwahashi Takeo* (braille ed., vol. 1), 89.

the Osaka area had established in 1926 a small group known as the Osaka Association of the Blind (*Osaka Mojinkai*). The blind journalist mentioned earlier, Nakamura Kyotaro, worked for the Mainichi Newspaper Publishing Company, and he was the advisor of the association. This association had no strong well-organized leadership,<sup>90</sup> but its members had been excited about the prospect of establishing a Lighthouse for the blind and expanding it to the national level. They had held high hopes that the Japan Foundation for the Blind would take the lead in initiating any major actions toward that goal. However, the absence of any strong leadership role being undertaken by either the Foundation or the Osaka Association resulted in delaying any significant action for two years. Many members of the Osaka Association of the Blind were young and full of enthusiasm. They recognized the need for strong leadership to keep their small organization moving ahead. Getting together to discuss Christianity or blindness was not enough for those young energetic blind people who were eager to tackle all the issues affecting blind people needing urgent reform.

In 1933 one of the members of the Osaka Association asked Kagawa Toyohiko (1888-1960), a well-known writer and Christian social activist who had been supportive of the association, for his assistance in recruiting or recommending someone who could provide strong leadership for the association. Kagawa also had connections with Nitobe and other members of the Japan Foundation for the Blind. He had met Iwahashi previously and knew him well. Upon hearing the request for his assistance in recommending someone as their leader, Kagawa immediately suggested that they should ask Iwahashi to take the position of president of the association. Iwahashi accepted the position in October of 1933.<sup>91</sup> This development provided

<sup>90</sup> Seki, *Iwahashi Takeo* (braille ed., vol. 2), 2.

<sup>91</sup> Seki, *Iwahashi Takeo* (braille ed., vol. 2), 3. The friendship between Iwahashi and Kagawa continued through the postwar period. Having the same religious beliefs, Kagawa was a good advisor to Iwahashi. Seki

Iwahashi with a platform to lay out his long-held ideas to establish a Lighthouse facility for blind people in Japan. At the same meeting that Iwahashi accepted the presidency, he announced to the members that he and this association would begin work on the project of establishing the facility and expanding services for blind people as the Japan Lighthouse Center for the Blind, and he asked for the support of the members.<sup>92</sup>

Soon after he announced his decision to establish the Lighthouse facility, he began to outline a clear mission and the operational goals of the facility. Iwahashi intended his Lighthouse facility's fundamental principles to be based on Christian doctrine. Besides spreading Christianity to blind clients, his basic mission for the Lighthouse was the publication of braille books, the establishment of braille book library services, and the provision of vocational training. In order to publish braille books Iwahashi began coordinating a volunteer group in the Osaka area. This group was known as "*Reikokai*" and began in August of 1933 to produce good braille transcribers.<sup>93</sup> Initially the services of this braille transcribing group remained on a small scale. Later, however, this service successfully developed into a much larger operation by another blind advocate, Honma Kazuo (discussed in chapter 3).

Building a new facility for the Lighthouse became another major project for Iwahashi. In August of 1934 Iwahashi traveled to the United States on a lecture trip. He made plans to visit Quaker churches and universities there. The focus of his lectures was his experience as a blind

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Hiroyuki recounts in 1946 when Iwahashi decided to run for the seat in the national Diet from the Osaka district, his son Hideyuki asked Kagawa to make a supporting speech for his father's campaign. Kagawa refused, saying, "A theologian should not be a politician. Tell your father I said that he is stupid to think of such a thing." (braille ed., vol. 2), 73; author's translation). This account gives an interesting perspective of Kagawa toward Iwahashi. He never saw Iwahashi as a blind activist and social reformer; he saw Iwahashi as a theologian whose concern for the welfare of the blind was motivated by his religious beliefs. Despite gaining many supporters throughout the campaign, Iwahashi did not win the election of November 1946 (braille ed., vol. 2), 74.

<sup>92</sup> Seki, *Iwahashi Takeo* (braille ed., vol. 2), 4.

<sup>93</sup> Seki, *Iwahashi Takeo* (braille ed., vol. 2), 5.

person in Japan. He hoped to inspire blind people in the United States through his lectures. He also talked about his religious and philosophical views. His lecture trip started in California and ended in Iowa,<sup>94</sup> and had two major goals: to raise funds for his Lighthouse facility and to meet with Helen Keller. Iwahashi returned to Japan in January of 1935, but before his return voyage, he met with Helen Keller in December of 1934 and invited her to visit Japan.<sup>95</sup>

The project of building a new Lighthouse facility began in earnest soon after Iwahashi returned from his trip to the United States. By October of 1935 a two-story building appeared on the south side of the city of Osaka. For this memorable occasion Iwahashi invited Mrs. Mather to Osaka to show her the new facility. She visited Japan in April of 1936 to show her support.<sup>96</sup>

According to the 1935 work report of the Lighthouse, the institution had already begun many projects to expand and improve services for blind people. The work report included activities such as bringing knowledge of new discoveries to both blind adults and youth; holding special seminars about the research on welfare services for young blind people; organizing a braille training class; presenting lectures and seminars on different topics; employment counseling for blind people; and work on a survey about living and working conditions of blind people residing in the Osaka area. These are just some highlights; the list of projects continues.

Iwahashi's hard work on many fronts to improve the living and working conditions of blind people led to the early expansion and improvement of the facility and the services of the Lighthouse for the Blind (Nippon Lighthouse Welfare Center for the Blind). Iwahashi and Nakamura were prominent members who understood the key importance of learning. Resources

<sup>94</sup> Seki, *Iwahashi Takeo* (braille ed., vol. 2), 11.

<sup>95</sup> Seki, *Iwahashi Takeo* (braille ed., vol. 2), 14.

<sup>96</sup> Hideyuki, Iwahashi, *The Song of the Bluebird (Aoi tori no uta)*, braille ed., vol. 1. (Tokyo: Nihon Hosho shuppan Kyokai, 1980), 83.

about blind communities, education, and employment opportunities as found in Western countries were considered valuable information. The enthusiasm displayed by young blind people for expanding the resources for living, education, and work through learning from the West was also shared by the Yokohama School for the Blind, a secondary educational institution, with its links to the US Perkins School as discussed above.

Helen Keller expressed her support for Iwahashi's new Lighthouse facility in a letter written in April 1935: "The Lighthouse which the Japanese are to dedicate in October is a gratifying ..."<sup>97</sup> Although Japan continued to maintain formal diplomatic relations with the United States, relations began to deteriorate during the 1930s. The aggressive activities of the military increased, and incidents such as the Manchuria incident of 1931 followed by the creation of a puppet state under the control of the Japanese military (known as *Manchukuo*) and subsequent withdrawal of Japan from the League of Nations did not constitute a display of friendship to European nations. The United States also criticized Japan for her reckless action toward China in invading Manchuria. However, on a personal level, international and diplomatic relations between citizens of Japan and the United States remained friendly.

### **Helen Keller's Visit to Japan in 1937**

Iwahashi's motive in inviting Helen Keller to Japan was to inspire Japanese people with disabilities, including the blind, and to show the public that blind people were able to fully contribute to society as actively as all other citizens of Japan. He also hoped to promote the idea that blind people and the public could work together for the improvement of welfare services for people with disabilities. Keller's visit to Japan, however, did not occur immediately. In the same

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<sup>97</sup> April 6, 1935, letter from Helen Keller to Iwahashi Takeo, Helen Keller Archive Papers, box 62, folder 4, copyright dedicated to the American Foundation for the Blind.

letter that she wrote to Iwahashi in April 1935, Keller politely declined his invitation due to the illness of Annie Sullivan who died in October 1936. It was not until April 1937 that Keller finally visited Japan. Iwahashi and the Lighthouse organized the overall visit of Keller, and the Asahi Newspaper Publishing Company (*Asahi Shinbunsha*) contributed financial support for the visit. Helen Keller was not a stranger to the Japanese, whether blind or sighted people. Iwahashi had already been translating some of her works into Japanese. In 1936 Iwahashi completed these translations and published *The Complete Works of Helen Keller*. So, by 1937 Keller was a well-known figure among the Japanese.

Born in 1880 in the small rural town of Tuscumbia, Alabama, Helen Keller spent a very happy childhood for the first two years of her life. When she was two years old, she suddenly became ill with a high fever. Her illness eventually damaged her ability to see, hear, and speak. Until Annie Sullivan was hired by her parents as a governess/teacher, Helen was virtually left “undisciplined and wild.” Annie Sullivan was greatly influenced by Dr. Samuel Howe and the case of Laura Bridgeman, the first deaf and blind person to be educated at the Perkins Institute for the Blind. Under Sullivan’s supervision, Keller’s accomplishments impressed teachers at Perkins during all the years of her stay at the school. By 1904 she graduated from Radcliff College, and in 1931 both Annie Sullivan and Helen Keller received honorary degrees from Temple University.<sup>98</sup> These accomplishments brought worldwide fame to Keller and to Annie Sullivan as the teacher who succeeded in educating a blind and deaf student.

Japanese newspapers began writing about Keller’s visit months before her arrival. An interesting account can be found in the Japanese newspaper, Yomiuri Newspaper (*Yomiuri*

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<sup>98</sup> Lash, *Helen and Teacher*, New York: Delacorte Press, 1980), chronology.

*Shinbun*). A column had been written by a woman named Ishihara Kiyoko on Keller's impending visit entitled, "Viewing Miss Helen Keller from a Woman's Perspective" that appeared in the morning issue of the paper on February 19, 1937.<sup>99</sup> In her column Ishihara states that various Japanese organizations, like the Japan Women's Association, had been eagerly awaiting Keller's visit. She predicted that Keller's visit would have a major impact on people with disabilities such as the visually impaired because of Keller's own physical disabilities. She also admits that, even though she did not know much about Keller, she would like to view Keller not as a victim of her disabilities, but as someone who demonstrated to others that the true values of life should be viewed not through one's physical conditions but through an individual's efforts to advance the quality of their life. She ends her column by stating that she very much looked forward to an active exchange of ideas between Keller and the Japan Women's Association.

This newspaper piece exemplifies how much the Japanese general public was interested in Keller primarily because of her inspiring character and not because of her disability. Women who were active participants in Japanese society were interested in "exchanging ideas" with Keller. People with visual disabilities were not the only group of people wanting to learn from the Western world; sighted people as well were eager to have an opportunity to learn from the West and to hear new ideas. A history of the Nippon Lighthouse notes the fact that there were disputes about modifying Keller's lecture schedule so that people in locales besides the Nippon Lighthouse could hear her lecture and exchange ideas with her, again pointing to how widespread was the desire in Japanese society to participate in her visit.

In January 1937 a Japanese diplomat living in New York expressed his concern that Helen Keller might openly express her strong anti-war beliefs during her visit. In response the

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<sup>99</sup> *Yomiuri Shinbun*, Newspaper, the morning issue, February 19, 1937, p. 9.

American Foundation for the Blind, to which Helen Keller belonged as a field representative, sent a message indicating that there was no need to worry, as Keller would not make any statement criticizing Japan's diplomacy in any of her comments regarding international relations.<sup>100</sup> In 1937 Japan was ready to declare war against China, which eventually occurred in July of the same year. In the United States, Keller was quite well-known for her opposition to warfare. Having a strong military standing in the Japanese government, the diplomat was afraid that had Keller spoken about her strong opposition to war, it could create a problematic distraction among the Japanese people. In a letter Keller wrote to Sullivan sometime in 1916 during the First World War, she expressed her opinion that the United States should not go to war and stated her exasperation toward the Japanese socialist party that had voted down the motion calling for organizing a strike against war.<sup>101</sup>

During her visit to Japan, however, Keller played the role of a good will ambassador, according to Josef Lash. Descriptions of Keller's visit published in various Japanese newspapers support Lash's statement. Keller was frequently referred to as a "saint," and the image of her presented in the newspapers was that of a friendly peacemaker. Her visit covered almost all areas of Japan, and included parts of Korea and Manchuria, during which she emphasized the importance of the modern facilities which Japan was bringing into other Asian countries, putting a positive spin on the colonization motivations of the Japanese government. Keller also stated that Japan was the most advanced country in Asia and as such could bring unity and peace to the Asian region, as well as protection by the Japanese government of people in the colonies. Thus,

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<sup>100</sup> Seki, *Iwahashi Takeo* (braille ed., vol. 2), 31.

<sup>101</sup> Kim E. Nielsen, Ed. *Helen Keller Selected Writings* (New York: New York University Press, American Foundation for the Blind. 2005), 99.

Keller's emphasis was that they should cooperate with the government so that they could participate and benefit from Japan's continued advancement and modernization.

According to her lecture schedule, Keller visited Manchuria and Korea from July 12-26, 1937. Her visit was mainly focused on schools for the blind in both Korea and Manchuria as well as hospitals for people with leprosy. From July 12-15 she visited a school for the blind in Seoul, and 7,000 people gathered to welcome her and listen to her lecture. Keller went to Manchuria from July 17-18 and there 1,500 people gathered to hear her. She arrived on July 21 at the Dairen School for the Blind, and 9,000 people welcomed her.<sup>102</sup> Originally Keller was scheduled to stay in Manchuria longer to give more lectures around the country. However, due to deteriorating diplomatic relations between Japan and China, her planned visit to China had to be cut short after Japan's declaration of war against China, which followed the Marco Polo Bridge incident on July 7, 1937. She had to cancel her plan to extend her visit to China originally scheduled for after her visit to Manchuria.

Keller became an inspiring figure not only to people who had similar kinds of disabilities, but on another plane: she was skillful diplomatically in handling the difficult and sensitive issues of the day without offending anyone. In her letter to John H. Finley, her colleague and chief editor, she describes the situation in Chosen, Korea, as improving. She writes, “[Living] conditions are still primitive; ignorance and disease are distressingly prevalent. But [for] the last thirty years the Japanese and Koreans have been working together, and what they have already done is encouraging.”<sup>103</sup> Keller tactfully justifies Japan’s action of colonizing Korea in this letter. She notes that the facilities in Korea had been modernized, and the living conditions of the

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<sup>102</sup> Iwahashi, *The Song of the Bluebird* (braille ed., vol. 1), 191.

<sup>103</sup> Nielsen, Ed. *Helen Keller Selected Writings*, 192.

people, although still needing improvement, were progressing under the cooperation between Korea and Japan. She describes how well constructed and clean the roads were in the capital, Seoul.

Keller's diplomatic attitude and kindness toward Japan and its people were also on full display during Keller's visit to Japan's capital, Tōkyō. The banquet held in her honor shortly after her arrival was widely broadcast on the radio by NHK.<sup>104</sup> Many influential government officials, including Prime Minister Hayashi Senjuro (1876-1943) and Tokugawa Iesato (1863-1940), the head of the sixteenth generation of the Tokugawa Clan, were present to welcome Keller. The flags of Japan and the United states were displayed side by side during the banquet to symbolize the friendly diplomatic relations between the two countries.

For audiences with disabilities, Keller emphasized the employment options and educational opportunities that the blind in the United States were entitled to, and this drew the interests of Japanese educators. Iwahashi not only worked as an interpreter for Keller and Polly Thompson who was Keller's secretary and interpreter, he also tried to work with the government regarding the organization of Keller's lecture trip. Despite the wishes of the government to make Keller's visit a stately occasion, her visit was treated as personal, private travel. Due to the pointed request made by Iwahashi, Keller was invited not as a high profile guest of the government, but as a private, honored guest of the Nippon Lighthouse Welfare Center for the Blind. Iwahashi made a point that his Nippon Lighthouse was collaborating with the Japan Foundation for the Blind in jointly hosting and welcoming Helen Keller.

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<sup>104</sup> Iwahashi, *The Song of the Bluebird* (braille ed.), 111.

According to an article written by Asa Hiroshi entitled, “The Impact of Keller’s Visits to Japan on Japanese Society” (*Helen no rainichi ga motarashita mono*) [author’s translation], soon after Keller left Japan, the Japan Foundation along with Iwahashi and the Lighthouse began discussing with the Home Ministry, the Education Ministry, and the city government of Tōkyō on building a Tōkyō Assembly Hall for the Blind. This hall would make books accessible to people with visual disabilities and provide employment opportunities and counseling services for blind people and their families. The planners intended this building to be the second Nippon Lighthouse. The plan developed into a real project, and in 1939 the Tōkyō Assembly Hall for the Blind was completed and began operations. This hall eventually developed into what became today’s Japan Helen Keller Association for the Blind (*Tōkyō/Nihon Helen Keller Kyokai*).<sup>105</sup>

Referring to himself as a Quaker and thus a believer in simplicity and directness, Iwahashi held that personal-level diplomacy would be more successful in accomplishing peacemaking proposals through compromise and negotiation. A series of articles published by the Asahi Newspaper Publishing Company supported Iwahashi’s ideas. At a meeting on April 28, 1937, organized by the newspaper company and the Tōkyō Women’s Association, Keller took questions from educators who were specialized in educating deaf and blind students. The Asahi company printed the meeting’s exchanges in newspaper articles in the May 1 through May 3 issues.<sup>106</sup> According to the articles, questions were posed to Keller from those educators who were focused on realistic issues such as employment for people with disabilities, health issues, and systems of education for the disabled in the United States from which they might learn. The newspaper articles show that the people in these meetings who were asking Keller the questions

<sup>105</sup> Hiroshi, Asa “What Helen Keller Brought to Japan” (“Helen kera no rainichi ga motarashita mono”), *Shikaku shougai*, issue no. 156, July 1-21, 1998, 14.

<sup>106</sup> Asahi Shinbun, Newspaper, the evening issue, May 1, 1937; May 2, 1937; May 4, 1937, 4.

were not high government officials but middle class educators “on the ground” who interacted in schools or in hospitals on a daily basis with people with visual or hearing disabilities. In contrast, the meeting between Keller and Prime Minister Hayashi was vague, indirect, and less productive in spite of its friendly nature.<sup>107</sup> The meeting with the Tōkyō Women’s Association also showed the directness of educators, their serious concerns for students with visual and hearing disabilities, and how best to improve the educational system for them. They tried to learn as much as they could from Keller as a valuable resource.

Keller’s lecture schedule reflects how many schools for the blind throughout Japan she lectured to. Iwahashi Hideyuki, a son of Iwahashi Takeo, recounts in his book entitled, *The Song of the Bluebird (Aoi tori no uta)*, that cities that had students attending schools for the blind but which were outside the scope of Keller’s travel were deeply offended to find out that Keller would not be visiting their city and school.<sup>108</sup> Every school for the blind waited in anticipation for Keller to come to their facility. They were eager to learn anything they could from Keller about blind people outside Japan.

Two incidents showed the warm and close connection people felt for Keller and the inspiration she generated in those who were visually disabled and those who were not disabled. Both incidents showed the generosity of the Japanese people toward Keller and Thompson. Shortly after Keller and Thompson arrived at the port of Yokohama, Keller’s wallet was stolen. Although the actual person who stole the wallet was not found, various Japanese newspapers wrote articles about the incident and the news quickly spread throughout Japan. Letters of apology poured in, and numerous donations were made by ordinary Japanese people, asking

<sup>107</sup> Mainichi Shinbun, Newspaper, the morning issue, April 18, 1937, 6.

<sup>108</sup> Iwahashi, *The Song of the Bluebird* (braille ed.), 135.

Keller not to think badly of Japan and its people. Instead of taking the money that had been donated, Keller gave the donations to the Lighthouse, asking Iwahashi to use the money for improving welfare services for blind people in Japan.

The second episode revolved around Keller's simple affection for dogs. Her down-to-earth attraction to dogs was unexpected in a world-renowned "miracle worker." This trait was another confirmation of Keller as a "regular" human being with whom anyone disabled or nondisabled could easily interact. An Akita dog was given to Keller during her visit to Akita prefecture. Bred by a police officer and named Kamikaze, the dog was a pure-bred Akita dog, according to the account described by Iwahashi Hideyuki. Keller insisted on paying for the dog, but the person who gave the dog to Keller adamantly refused to take any payment from her, saying that it was indeed an honor to give the dog to her. Iwahashi Hideyuki observes how diligently Keller looked after the dog while she was traveling throughout Japan with the Iwahashi family.<sup>109</sup> Unfortunately, however, Kamikaze died shortly after Keller and Thompson returned to the United States. As soon as the news reached Akita, the people of the city sent another Akita dog (named Kenzan and a brother to the first dog) to Keller, despite the fact that Japan was at war with China and would soon declare war against the United States in 1941.<sup>110</sup> The Japanese people interacted positively with Keller, expressing their kindness, generosity, and genuine interest in Keller's welfare.

Upon Keller's departure from Japan in July 1937, she made a statement of her appreciation for the friendly reception which she and Thompson had experienced during their stay in the country. She also expressed her wish that her visit would promote more awareness

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<sup>109</sup> Iwahashi, *The Song of the Bluebird* (braille ed.), 150.

<sup>110</sup> Iwahashi, *The Song of the Bluebird* (braille ed.), 150.

among the public of the need for expanding welfare services, such as more educational and employment opportunities, for the blind and for people with other disabilities. She indicated that such kindness as the Japanese people had shown her could also be directed toward people with disabilities in Japan.

### **Japanese Blind Veterans**

After Japan's declaration of war on China in 1937 (known as the second Sino-Japanese War), the number of blind people in Japan began to increase each year as the numbers of wounded and disabled veterans increased. One of the immediate concerns of the military and government was to rehabilitate blind veterans to enable them to once again serve the country. Any information about blindness and the lives of blind people in other countries became essential resources for the government and military to develop effective rehabilitation programs suitable and tailor-made for each individual veteran who had lost his eyesight. Any organized groups that had dealt with matters related to visual impairment became valuable resources. In the 1930s, however, a well-organized national group of blind people had not yet been formed. Although some local groups organized by blind people were active at the local level, those groups did not have the central network necessary to unify them into one large organization of the blind until some years later in 1948 when the United Association of the Blind (currently known as the Japan Federation of the Blind) was established.

The Japanese military and the government, therefore, relied heavily on the resources supplied by an association, Japan Foundation for the Blind, made up of people who were interested in studying about the medical aspects of blindness and the lives of blind people. The majority of these people were highly educated, occupied prominent positions in society, and had

some network connections with the government and the military. Information about tools for blind people was continuously supplied on a personal level.

Keller was well-known for her sympathy for blind veterans. During the war she frequently visited wounded veterans in the United States. The Japanese government's interest and efforts to expand the program in Japan for blind veterans was also one of Keller's interests as well. The government's strong desire to improve and expand the rehabilitation program for blind veterans led them to seek out and learn more about possible resources from the West, which is briefly discussed in chapter 5.

### **Moving Toward Group Advocacy for the Blind**

After the Meiji restoration the newly established government abolished the old customs and traditional ways and put their efforts into leading the country to becoming a more "civilized" society. The guild system which secured and protected the societal position of blind people was eliminated by the government. As a result, many blind people lost their means of earning their living. That led them to petition the government for jobs and more stable living conditions for the benefit of future generations instead of just passively succumbing to governmental authority. Some active blind people along with sighted intellectuals such as Yamao Yozo, Nakamura Masanao, and Henry Folds supported schools for the blind and deaf in Kyoto and Tōkyō during the Meiji period. Through these initiatives, people were encouraged to establish more schools throughout Japan to educate blind people.

While the traditional occupations for blind people such as masseuse and acupuncturist were supported by blind people, they also petitioned the government for more secure living conditions. Although the government prohibited the forming of a guild system, they had to allow

blind people to practice the traditional occupations that were for the most part all that was available to them. Those jobs, however, did not bring sufficient income to many blind people, and their living standard remained low and unstable compared to the rest of society. The government continued to entrust care of those who were disabled to the hands of ordinary people. Thus, both blind and sighted people began to work toward improving welfare services for the blind and for people with other disabilities.

The blind intellectuals realized that in order for them to improve the welfare system it was necessary to use the resources and influence of both the government and the private sectors. The resources that Western nations could offer such as Helen Keller and Yokohama Christian School for the Blind's affiliation with the Perkins School for the Blind were essential to learning from the West, as well as to convince the government of the necessity to improve the Japanese welfare system for people with disabilities along the same lines as in Western countries. Garon argues that active middle class reformers in society used state authorities and other means of social influence to bring about the reforms they desired.<sup>111</sup> Blind activists such as Iwahashi, Kumagai Tetsutaro, and Nakamura Kyotaro, advocated for better welfare services for blind people in Japan. Their main purpose was to build a more advanced society and their advocacy work directed toward specific targets such as education and employment of blind people led by private citizens. The establishment of the Nippon Lighthouse Welfare Center for the Blind gathered together people who had the same interests. Young blind intellectuals gathered to support blind activists like Iwahashi and discussed aspects of their future in positive yet realistic terms. They chose to work together with sighted intellectuals, government officials, and the

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<sup>111</sup> Garon, *Molding Japanese Minds*, 20.

private sector to further improve the working and living conditions and educational opportunities for blind people. These were the crucial steps that had to be taken if the disabled and the blind were to become full participants in society. These goals were embedded into the governing principles of Iwahashi's Lighthouse Welfare Center for the Blind.

## **Working for Equality: Activism and Advocacy by Blind Intellectuals in Japan, 1912-1995**

### Chapter 3: Honma Kazuo and the Japan Library for the Blind

#### **Advocacy for the Blind Broadens**

Iwahashi had taken the initiative to meet the internationally known Helen Keller when he was in the United States in 1935 and invite her to visit Japan. It proved to be a major event for the country. Keller's three-month visit to Japan from mid-April through early July of 1937 was not only memorable and inspiring for enthusiastic blind people, themselves striving for better welfare services, but it also turned out to be a motivational tool for others advocating for blind people. Indeed, thousands of people attended her talks all over Japan. The broad popularity of her visit among the general public as well as the blind community illustrates the increasing awareness of the need to improve in particular educational and employment opportunities for the blind.

Education for blind people was one of the major topics in Keller's lectures. The government of the Meiji period regarded education for all Japanese children an important issue. Elementary education became compulsory under the Meiji constitution of 1890. The government even convinced farmers of the importance of sending their children to school, and by 1907 the elementary level was extended from four years to six years. Compulsory education, however, did not extend to students with special needs, such as students with visual disabilities, despite the existence of schools for the blind and deaf. The importance of basic education for people with disabilities was not strongly promoted by either the national or the local government. Frequently,

therefore, parents of children with visual disabilities saw no need to educate their disabled children and consequently neglected to send them to school. Schools also did not promote, specifically, basic education for people with visual disabilities. Schools were generally too busy taking care of students who were already enrolled, so their focus was on serving these students rather than recruiting new students.

Hearing Keller describe educational opportunities in the United States for people with disabilities (through Iwahashi's excellent translation), Japanese audiences were impressed by the fact that in Western countries the disabled as well as the nondisabled had the opportunity to receive basic education. When Iwahashi returned from his study abroad (1925-1928) in Scotland, he continually spoke of the efficiency of welfare services in that country. These ideas began to have more meaning to Keller's audiences as she talked about education and employment for blind people in the United States from her own experience and observations. Keller also introduced to her audiences new technological advances such as the production and use in the United States of braille books and talking books (audio books), and she talked about the importance of literacy for blind people.

As Helen Keller left on her journey back to the US, she expressed her gratitude to the Japanese people for their warm welcome and for the enthusiasm shown her during her stay in Japan. She encouraged the Japanese themselves to actively support and work for the improvement of welfare services for people with disabilities in their country. She charged the Japanese people as a whole to continue to champion the importance of education for people with disabilities and to work to reform not only basic education, but higher education as well.

Keller's visit created a lot of excitement, and its residual benefits made the time ripe for prominent Japanese intellectuals to take action. People became more receptive to hearing the

opinions of activists like Iwahashi who were advocating strongly for better services for blind people.

Both Keller and Iwahashi became inspiring figures among young blind people. Strong advocacy for welfare services for blind people began to advance from the mid-1930s. A library, opened in 1940 specifically to serve blind people, continued operations throughout the war, serving blind war veterans by lending out braille books. Promotion of braille literacy for blind people and the recruitment of volunteers to transcribe books into braille became the stepping stones to making educational materials more widely accessible to blind students and, in turn, advancing braille literacy throughout schools for the blind nationwide.

Blind pioneers such as Iwahashi Takeo and Kumagai Tetsutaro (1883-1979) were the most influential figures among young blind people. Their tireless advocacy was a source of enthusiasm to which the younger generation of blind people responded. Kumagai was known as the first blind person to be ordained a minister of the Methodist church in Japan. When Iwahashi met Kumagai for the first time in 1918, Iwahashi was impressed with Kumagai's strength of personality. Kumagai also saw in Iwahashi the determination of a young blind student, seeking new ways to have better educational and employment opportunities, and who believed if he worked hard, he could achieve whatever goals he set for himself.<sup>112</sup> This attitude was also held by many young blind people, especially in light of what their mentors had accomplished.

As they had in the 1920s and early 1930s, young blind people continued to look to the West for a model for reform to guide them in the late 1930s to early 1940s, a time in which Japanese society had begun to focus more intensely on the war in which the country was engaged. Efforts continued to be made advocating for the welfare of blind people, even though

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<sup>112</sup> Seki, Hiroyuki. Iwahashi Takeo: Gimu Yue no Michiyuki (Iwahashi Takeo: the duty and Sacrifice). Japan: Tokyo: Nihon Mojin Fukushi Kenkyukai. 1983, (braille edition vol. 1) p. 26.

the country was at war and therefore slower progress was made during the prewar period, through wartime, and into the postwar period. Projects for the blind continued to advance, though slowly, during those years.

### **Honma Kazuo's Education and Seeds of His Activism**

One of those young students who decided to join the efforts to advocate for the blind was Honma Kazuo (1916-2003) who founded a small library for the blind in Japan in 1940. Honma was born into a relatively well-to-do merchant's family living in Hokkaido. His childhood was happy and financially comfortable. When he was five years old in 1920, however, he was suddenly struck with a mysterious fever and began to lose his eyesight. By the time his family had decided to take him to an ophthalmologist in the city of Sapporo, his eyesight and his family's hope for his recovery were completely lost.<sup>113</sup> Nevertheless, they took him to Tokyo and he spent a couple of years there to get treatment for his failed vision. His eyesight never recovered. Uncertain about how they should educate their blind son, the family decided in 1929 to send him to the Hakodate School for the Blind and Deaf (*Hakodate Moa Gakko*);<sup>114</sup> there Honma learned the pleasure of reading.

"I never forgot the day when I went to the school for the very first time. The president of the school handed me a bulky booklet. Touching it, my first impression was the roughness of dots on the paper that I learned later was the 1929 May issue of the Daily Braille Newspaper (*Mainichi Braille Newspaper*)."<sup>115</sup> [author's translation]

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<sup>113</sup> Honma, Kazuo. *Yubi to Mimi de Yomu: Tenji Toshokan to Watashi (Reading with Fingers and Ears: Japan National Braille Library for the Blind and I)*. Tokyo: Kabushikigaisha Iwanami Shoten; 1980, (audio edition) p. 10.

<sup>114</sup> Honma, *Reading with Fingers and Ears*, audio ed., 19.

<sup>115</sup> Honma, *Reading with Fingers and Ears*, audio ed., 20.

It was a significant moment for Honma who had never had a chance to read books on his own after he lost his eyesight. As Honma recounts in his autobiography, this was the first time he touched braille letters.

One of his teachers was Araki Shinichi who had recently graduated from the Tokyo School for the Blind and had become a teacher at the Hakodate School for the Blind and Deaf. After learning how to write and read braille from Mr. Araki, Honma's secondary education began. In 1929 when Honma entered the school it was still a school for students with visual disabilities and hearing impaired students.

"I enjoyed my life at the Hakodate School for the Blind and Deaf. There were a total of thirty students in the school while I was studying and thirteen teachers; so, I was able to get the instructor's attention easily. Looking back, my learning experience at the school was a valuable one for me." [author's translation]<sup>116</sup>

The Hakodate School for the Blind and Deaf was founded by Mrs. C. P. Draper in 1895 while she and her son were doing missionary work in Hokkaido.<sup>117</sup> Earlier, in 1889, Mrs. Draper had founded the Yokohama Christian School for the Blind (*Yokohama Kunmo Gakuin*).<sup>118</sup> Thus, the Hakodate School for the Blind and Deaf was under the same leadership as the Yokohama Christian School for the Blind. The school in Hakodate was first named the Hakodate Christian Church for the Blind (*Hakodate Kunmokai*) at the time of its establishment, but by the time Honma entered the school in 1929, the school had changed its name to the Hakodate School for the Blind and Deaf. Like the Yokohama Christian School for the Blind, the Hakodate School for the Blind and Deaf was a private school and relied heavily for its finances on fundraising and

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<sup>116</sup> Honma, *Reading with Fingers and Ears*, audio ed., 21.

<sup>117</sup> Yokohama Kunmo Gakuin Editor. Hikari wo Motomete 90nen: Yokohama Kunmo Gakuin 90nen no AYumi (*Seeking for the Light: the 90 Year History of Yokohama Kunmo Gakuin Educational Institution for the Blind*). Yokohama: Yokohama Kunmo Gakuin. 1979, (audio edition) p. 247.

<sup>118</sup> Yokohama Kunmo Gakuin, *Seeking for the Light*, audio ed., 1.

donations from the general public. As Honma observed, “I remember that school finances were tight and frequently instructors went to collect donations from people after school.”<sup>119</sup>

Honma learned rapidly in school, and his reading ability had improved markedly by the summer of 1929. He noted, “Braille gave me a tool that enabled me to read without relying on anyone else and my passion for reading grew.”<sup>120</sup> At the same time he complained about the shortage of braille books. The majority of the books that were displayed in the classroom at the school were related to the occupations of massage therapy, acupuncture, and moxibustion (Anma, Hari, and Kyu). (Moxibustion is the application of heat from the burning of a small bundle of herbs, moxa, to targeted acupoints). All students were required to take these three subjects at the completion of their elementary-level courses. What Honma had hoped to read were the books that were read by young people his age, most of which had not been transcribed into braille. Honma felt that the shortage of braille books plagued him throughout his college years. He wrote in his autobiography, “The smallest number of textbooks was accessible to us in the classroom. They were hardly sufficient. There were hardly any recreational publications in the library, and I read what they had again and again.”[author’s translation]<sup>121</sup>

### **Honma Finds His Profession**

As he approached the end of his junior high education, Honma began to contemplate his future. Although he took the acupuncture, massage therapy, and moxibustion classes offered at the school, according to his autobiography, he felt no interest in taking up any of them as his

<sup>119</sup> Honma, *Reading with Fingers and Ears*, audio ed., 26.

<sup>120</sup> Honma, Kazuo. *Waga Jinsei: Nippon Tenji Toshokan* (*My life: Japan National Braille Library for the Blind*). Japan: Tokyo: Kabushikigaisha Nihon tosho Center. 2001, (Audio edition), 11.

<sup>121</sup> Honma, *My Life*, audio ed., 12.

profession. “Massage therapy, acupuncture, and moxibustion were the primary occupations for blind people. I was very much aware that socially these professions were not highly regarded. I was hoping to obtain a different profession.”<sup>122</sup> This statement by Honma illustrates the significant fact that although acupuncture, massage therapy, and moxibustion were common occupations for blind people, young blind people were seeking alternative employment opportunities. It was only by receiving teaching positions at schools for the blind that these professionals then would be regarded as elite occupations for blind people. It was extremely rare and extraordinary for a blind person such as Iwahashi to be hired for a faculty position at a college. But the fact that a blind person could receive such an appointment made Iwahashi an inspiring figure to young blind people such as Honma who hoped for new opportunities and more promising futures. One of the instructors at the Hakodate School for the Blind and Deaf, Araki Shinichi, Honma’s braille teacher, believed that literacy for blind people could be a powerful tool that would open new education and employment opportunities to young blind students.<sup>123</sup>

Honma met Iwahashi while he was attending the school in Hakodate in 1933. Iwahashi was conducting a lecture tour with his fellow lecturer, Kagawa Toyohiko, and they came to Hokkaido. In a small hall of a local community union building Iwahashi talked about his blindness, his study abroad experience, and his work at Kwansei Gakuin University (*Kwansei Gakuin Daigaku*).<sup>124</sup> Iwahashi’s talk not only encouraged Honma to have hope for his future, but it convinced him that it is possible for a blind individual to obtain an education and follow the

<sup>122</sup> Honma, *My Life*, audio ed.

<sup>123</sup> Furusawa, Toshio. Honma: Ko no Hito So no Jidai (*Honma: His Life and History*). Tokyo: Kabushikigaisha Zenponsha. 1997, (audio edition), 40.

<sup>124</sup> Furusawa, *Honma: His Life and History*, audio ed., 58.

profession of his choice rather than letting the world relegate him to a conventional occupation because of his blindness.

A year later, in 1934, Kumagai Tetsutaro, who was the pastor of a Methodist church in Osaka, visited the Hakodate School for the Blind and Deaf. Kumagai's talk had a strong impact on Honma. He was inspired when he learned that Kumagai had graduated from the Tokyo School for the Blind and entered Kwansei Gakuin University. As Iwahashi had been encouraged by Kumagai, Honma was also encouraged by Kumagai's talk to seek higher education. The fact that Kumagai was originally from Hokkaido gave Honma a feeling of affinity with him.<sup>125</sup>

Honma was also familiar with a publication written by Yoshimoto Tadasu (1878-1973). He was a businessman who emigrated to England. One of his publications entitled, *Libraries of Great Britain (Igirisu Tooshokan Jijo)*, happened to be among the library collection at the Hakodate School for the Blind and Deaf.<sup>126</sup> From this publication Honma learned about the Royal Institute for the Blind and its braille library. Honma's frustration toward the lack of braille books had been with him since he had learned how to read and write braille at the Hakodate School for the Blind and Deaf. What he learned from the talks of Iwahashi and Kumagai and from Yoshimoto's publication finalized for Honma the course of his education and the direction for his lifework. He wrote:

“The first possible occupation was to obtain a teaching license from Tokyo School for the Blind and teach at Hakodate School for the Blind and Deaf, and the second possibility was to become a *biwa* (lute) player/teacher, but despite support of my family members [none of these] possibilities really interested me.<sup>127</sup> Listening to Prof. Mr. Iwahashi and Mr. Kumagai and what I learned about a library for the blind in England pushed me to

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<sup>125</sup> Furusawa, *Honma: His Life and History*, audio ed., 61.

<sup>126</sup> Furusawa, *Honma: His Life and History*, audio ed.

<sup>127</sup> Honma, *Reading with Fingers and Ears*, audio ed., 29.

make my decision: there is no library for the blind in Japan and somebody should establish it and the somebody should be me.”[author’s translation]<sup>128</sup>

## Honma’s Library Project

Honma began his library project in November of 1940 on a modest scale. Increasing the number of publications in braille and allowing free and easy access to them became the central goal of Honma’s library project. He joined Iwahashi in these efforts, and, together, they became well-known blind activists, advocating for and initiating increased options for education and employment for blind people. The key to realizing that ambition centered on developing services at Iwahashi’s Nippon Lighthouse Welfare Center for the Blind and at Honma’s as-yet smaller operation. Gradually Honma began to expand his library’s services and programs from a small, private, local scale to one serving the entire country, to promoting the engagement of blind people in volunteer work, to managing a lending library, and to providing blind students with equal access to an increasing variety of educational materials through books in braille.

The service of publishing books in braille had begun in 1922 when Iwahashi published a braille Esperanto/Japanese dictionary at his private residence in Osaka (as discussed in chapter 2).<sup>129</sup> In the same year the Braille Mainichi Publishing Company (*Tenji Mainichi Shuppansha*), a part of the Mainichi Newspaper Publishing Company (*Mainichi Shinbunsha*), also began publishing a braille newspaper generally known as the *Mainichi Braille Newspaper* (*Tenji Mainichi*) headed by Nakamura Kyotaro (1880-1969), its chief editor and a fellow advocate for blind people.<sup>130</sup> Later, in 1938, a year after Helen Keller’s visit to Japan, Iwahashi increased his

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<sup>128</sup> Honma, *Reading with Fingers and Ears*, audio ed., 32.

<sup>129</sup> Honma, *Reading with Fingers and Ears*, audio ed., 56.

<sup>130</sup> Honma, *Reading with Fingers and Ears*, audio ed., 53.

publication of braille books.<sup>131</sup> Therefore, when Honma began his library project in 1940, some of the facilities were already in place for publishing braille literary works for blind people. However, it was still a fledgling project and the number of published braille books quite few. People who wished to obtain braille publications, including the *Mainichi Braille Newspaper*, had to purchase them instead of borrowing them. Setting up a library system where braille books could be borrowed for free would in turn increase access to educational opportunities.

Braille transcription in the early twentieth century had to be done manually with no computer-based assistance as became common in the twenty-first century. The publication of Iwahashi's Esperanto/Japanese dictionary in 1922 was done on a manual braille printer. Volunteers who transcribed printed books into braille for Honma's library used a handheld braille writer which consisted of a wooden board for securing a sheet of a paper, a slate for lining up the paper against the wooden board, and a stylus for punching dots onto the paper to make each braille letter on the slate. It took several months to transcribe a printed book into braille. The pace of a transcribing project varied from one volunteer to another depending on the individual volunteer's speed in braille writing.

Honma recognized the importance of increasing the production of more braille publications, but his main purpose was to create a service whereby every blind person could borrow braille books for free, thus being able to check out books from local libraries just as sighted people do. The braille book project carried out by the Nippon Lighthouse for the Blind remained specialized mainly in producing and selling braille books and braille textbooks, a direct benefit to educational opportunities for blind people.

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<sup>131</sup> Honma, *Reading with Fingers and Ears*, audio ed., 57.

Both Iwahashi's Nippon Lighthouse for the Blind and Honma's smaller braille library project needed the public's support. Iwahashi and Honma recruited volunteers to transcribe printed books into braille. Iwahashi relied mainly on local people around the Osaka area for that task. Honma, on the other hand, expanded his recruitment of volunteers to the whole country, as he believed that library services were insufficient to reach blind people scattered throughout the country who had little access to an adequate supply of braille reading materials. In order to recruit braille transcribers, Honma launched a series of workshops to teach participants how to write in braille. Volunteers learned how to punch a pattern of six dots by using a slate and stylus, thereby learning the punched dot patterns for each letter. He, like Iwahashi, worked with both blind and sighted people to expand the services of his newly established library.

### **Honma's Higher Education Challenges**

Honma realized that Western nations such as Great Britain had the most advanced libraries for the blind in the world. He understood the importance of learning English so that he could learn from those libraries new ways to develop his own library. Honma's choice to study English followed in the footsteps of Kumagai and Iwahashi. Honma decided to enter Kwansei Gakuin University after graduating from the Hakodate School for the Blind and Deaf in 1935. Soon after his graduation he began to prepare for his upcoming college work. Honma was able to obtain a copy of *The New Crown Reader* that had been transcribed into braille. It turned out to be useful for learning the basics of English.<sup>132</sup> Honma entered Kwansei Gakuin University in April of 1936. While attending Kwansei University he became close not only to Iwahashi but also to other blind educators such as Nakamura Kyotaro (1880-1969), the head of the Mainichi Braille Newspaper Publishing Company, and Torii Tokujiro (1894-1970), the founder of the Kyoto

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<sup>132</sup> Honma, *Reading with Fingers and Ears*, audio ed., 34.

Lighthouse Center for the Blind. His interaction with them was the beginning of Honma's network of blind intellectuals.

The major concern for handling his coursework hit Honma hard shortly after he began attending college as a full-time student. Unlike Iwahashi who had his younger sister's assistance for everything from taking notes to reading course materials to him during the time he attended Kwansei University,<sup>133</sup> Honma tried to tackle his coursework by himself. He wrote: "Not having enough course materials in braille was a problem; the first year I tried to transcribe textbooks into braille by myself with the help of friends as readers, but it took most of my spare time and my studies got behind." [author's translation]<sup>134</sup> Although there were books being transcribed into braille throughout Japan, their numbers were small compared to the need. Much braille publishing work was being done by the Lighthouse under Iwahashi's leadership and Mainichi Braille Newspaper Publishing Company, but the scale of the work was insufficient to cover all areas in Japan or all topics. Furthermore, braille transcribing had not yet been efficiently systematized at the time Honma was attending Kwansei Gakuin University.

Beginning with his second year in college, Honma hired one of the few braille transcribers in Tokyo to transcribe his textbooks into braille. At a per-page charge of 4 sen for Japanese and 5 sen for English, costs were quite expensive for Honma to spend for multiple hundreds of pages of textbooks throughout the remainder of his school years.<sup>135</sup> He admits in his autobiography that

<sup>133</sup> Iwahashi, Hideyuki. *Aoi Tori no Uta: Helen Keller to Nippon (The Song of the Bluebird: Helen Keller and Japan)*. Tokyo: Nihon Hoso shuppan Kyokai. 1980, (braille edition vol. 1) p. 50.

<sup>134</sup> Iwahashi, *The Song of the Bluebird*, audio ed., 38.

<sup>135</sup> Honma, *Reading with Fingers and Ears*, audio ed., 38. 1 yen during the 1930s was roughly 4-thousand yen (approximately 43 US dollars) in current value. 1 sen was 1/100 of 1 yen. Therefore, 4 and 5 sen could be roughly estimated as 160 yen and 200 yen (approximately 1.7 and 2.1 US dollars) in current value. Based on a rough calculation, a 100-page Japanese textbook would have cost Honma about 4 yen (16-thousand yen or approximately 170 US dollars) in current value and for an English textbook 20-thousand yen (approximately 215 US dollars) in current value. In the 1930s on average a 10 kilogram (approximately 20 pounds) bag of rice cost 2 yen 50 sen that is roughly 10-thousand-Yen (approximately 107 US dollars) in current value.

he was only able to do it because of the financial support of some of his wealthy family members.<sup>136</sup> Honma relied on his friends to read for him any other of his course materials that could not be transcribed into braille.

As Honma indicates in his autobiography and also indicated in a biography of Honma written by Toshio Furusawa, in 1930s Japan, Kwansei Gakuin University was the only institute of higher education that accepted students with visual disabilities as full-time, degree-seeking students.<sup>137</sup> According to Honma, when he attended Kwansei Gakuin University only four blind people, including Honma, were studying for their undergraduate degrees. Seo Masumi, who entered a year before Honma, was majoring in religious studies and theology. Shimozawa Masashi who entered the university at the same time as Honma was an alumnus of Yokohama Christian School for the Blind. He later became a staff member at Honma's library and worked closely with Honma. A third blind student was Takao Masanori who majored in sociology and became actively involved in the public speaking club during his college years. After graduating from Kwansei Gakuin University he became an active member of a local organization for the blind and later became president of the Shimane prefecture affiliate of the Japan Federation of the Blind which was a local affiliate of private national organization created by blind people.

Honma's struggle to complete his coursework illustrates the fact that although Kwansei Gakuin University accepted students with visual disabilities, the university provided no systematic aids or accommodations to support these students. A student was expected to take the entire initiative to tackle the tasks of obtaining course materials accessible in braille, finding adequate assistance for note-taking, and arranging for the university to make reasonable accommodations for them by adjusting the method of taking course examinations. The word or

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<sup>136</sup> Furusawa, *Honma: His Life and History*, audio ed., 79.

<sup>137</sup> Furusawa, *Honma: His Life and History*, audio ed., 40).

even the concept of “accommodation” was nonexistent, reflecting the general lack of understanding or flexibility blind and visually impaired students faced. Honma took notes himself in braille, he negotiated with professors about taking course exams, and he made the necessary arrangements to obtain whatever assistance he needed to complete his coursework. As Honma indicates, although this was a serious problem, it also served to toughen the student, and it only increased Honma’s determination to advocate for creating a system of assistance for students with visual disabilities so as to remove obstacles to learning during their college years.

Honma’s struggle to make his course materials more accessible made him even more determined to establish a library for the blind in Japan where all blind patrons could borrow any type of braille books. Honma’s ability, initiative, determination, and success in overcoming these difficulties drew Iwahashi’s attention. According to Honma, Iwahashi had not responded with any positive comments to a letter that the Hakodate School for the Blind and Deaf had written in 1935 to Iwahashi, who was on the university faculty, in support of Honma’s application to enter Kwansei Gakuin University.<sup>138</sup> However, toward the end of Honma’s college years, Iwahashi began to regard Honma as a promising future staff member for his Lighthouse center.<sup>139</sup>

Honma also toyed with the idea of working for Iwahashi for a few years before establishing his library in Tokyo. Just before graduating from the university in 1919, Honma received a letter offering him a job in Tokyo. The job offer was from the Training Center for Blind Women (*Yokokai*) in Tokyo, a small company from which Honma had frequently requested braille transcriptions of his course materials.

“I wanted to open my library in Tokyo, the place that I regarded as the center of culture; therefore, the job offer from [the] Training Center for Blind Women was a great

<sup>138</sup> Furusawa, Toshio. Honma: Ko no Hito So no Jidai (Honma: His Life and History). (Audio edition) p. 78.

<sup>139</sup> Furusawa, Honma, audio edition, 87.,

opportunity for me... When I told [him] that I wanted to take the job offer of the training facility in Tokyo Mr. Iwahashi supported me by telling me that I did not have to work here in Osaka to improve welfare services for blind people.”[author’s translation]<sup>140</sup>

Upon his graduation Honma moved to Tokyo and began to work for the Training Center for Blind Women, a small educational/training facility opened exclusively for blind women and run by Saito Yuri (1892-1947), a blind Christian educator.<sup>141</sup> There at the center, Honma assisted Saito Yuri and her husband, Saito Takuya for Saito Takuya (B unknown-1947), in publishing a braille newsletter and magazines for users of the facility.

### **Saito Yuri and the Training Center for Blind Women (Yokokai)**

Saito Yuri was born in 1892 in a small rural town in Aichi prefecture. Saito had visual disabilities from early childhood. She moved to Tokyo in 1909 and entered the Tokyo School for the Blind to learn to be an acupuncturist and masseuse. She also took a course to learn how to teach future acupuncturists. After her marriage to Saito Takuya, she attended the Tokyo College for Women (*Tokyo Joshi Daigaku*), where she completed several higher education courses as a non-degree-seeking student. She came to realize, however, that despite the fact that she had completed some university-level courses it remained much harder for women with visual disabilities compared to men with the same disabilities to pursue the education necessary to qualify for the employment of their choice. That realization led her to establish the training facility.<sup>142</sup>

According to Honma’s account, the Training Center for Blind Women occupied a small two-storied wooden building. Women who came to the facility learned braille reading and

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<sup>140</sup> Honma, Kazuo. *Yubi to Mimi de Yomu: Tenji Toshokan to Watashi (Reading with fingers and ears: Japan National Braille Library for the Blind and I).* (Audio edition) p. 44.

<sup>141</sup> Honma, *Yubi to Mimi de Yomu*, audio ed, 44..

<sup>142</sup> Honma, Kazuo. *Tenji Arebakoso: Deai to Kansha to (Braille and I: My Memory of Meetings and Gratitude).* Tokyo: Kabushikigaisha Genponsah. 1997, (audio edition) p. 42.

writing, handicrafts, and daily living skills.<sup>143</sup> Compared to men with visual disabilities, women with the same disabilities did not have the same educational or occupational opportunities. Under no compulsory education mandate in the 1930s to serve people with special needs, both the society and the government saw little value in educating women with visual disabilities. As exemplified by the four students with visual disabilities at Kwansei Gakuin University who were all males, it was common for men to take precedence over women for educational and employment opportunities. So, Saito's founding of the Training Center for Blind Women was significant to the advancement of education and vocational training for women with visual disabilities.

Saito was an advanced thinker and pioneer in the movement to improve the education and employment of women with visual disabilities, an attitude not shared by the majority of blind educators. Her facility with its progressive approach, however, drew young people, especially young women, both blind and sighted.<sup>144</sup> Honma worked as the head editor of a braille magazine that the Training Center published entitled the *Braille Club (Tenji Club)* that appealed to young blind women with ambitions to build a better future. The main discussion topic for the magazine was how to advance society to a point where both blind and sighted people could work together side by side. What should young blind men and women themselves do to make a society that stands on such equality? It encouraged young blind men and women to create new employment options. It also encouraged young blind women to have an optimistic attitude toward marriage.<sup>145</sup>

<sup>143</sup>Honma, *Tenji Arebakoso*, audio ed., p. 43.,

<sup>144</sup> Honma, Kazuo. *Yubi to Mimi de Yomu: Tenji Toshokan to Watashi (Reading with fingers and ears: Japan National Braille Library for the Blind and I).* (Audio edition) p. 45.

<sup>145</sup> Honma, *Yubi to Mimi de Yomu*, audio ed, 45,. As an editor Honma wrote editorial articles regularly for this monthly publication. Unfortunately original copies of the *Braille Club* magazine were destroyed during wartime.

Young blind people in the Tokyo area frequently visited the facility and had jam sessions about their future, their discussions often continuing into the dawn. Frequently Honma joined the group. Also, from his position as the chief editor of *Braille Club* magazine, he had a forum and a receptive audience for his editorials. As Honma recounts he often wrote in his editorials his opinions and goals about how to provide welfare services for blind people. In his very first article Honma wrote that the limited local facilities for blind people were not equipped to expand their services to the national level. Instead of having multiple facilities with very limited services scattered around the country, the goal should be to put more resources into establishing one nationally organized facility for blind people to provide services on a national scale.

In another article he wrote about a number of new facilities that had been established in Japan for blind people such as the Training Center for Blind Women and the Nippon Lighthouse Welfare Center for the Blind. But he pointed out that only a few of those facilities were able to sustain long-time operations. In order for a newly founded facility for blind people to continue its operations for a long period of time, the founder(s) must conduct extensive research in order to plan and organize the services to be provided.<sup>146</sup> Although Honma later criticizes his articles as too idealistic and too obnoxious, what he wrote was his opinion about the state of welfare services for blind people during the late 1930s and why they should be improved for the future. In fact Honma fully intended from the beginning for his library to be a national library, not a library that only provided services locally.

Services that the Training Center for Blind Women provided, however, never grew beyond the local level. Why was it that such a facility, so popular among both young blind men and women, did not grow? One possible answer is the attitude of society. Although the assertiveness

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<sup>146</sup> Honma, *Yubi to Mimi de Yomu*, audio ed, 47.

of women was increasing, they were still regarded as inferior to men during the prewar years. Hence, a person such as Saito Yuri who had advanced ideas was still in the minority. It is perhaps understandable that ideas such as those expressed by Saito Yuri, being ahead of their time, were only received well among young people and did not spread among older and wealthier people who had useful resources to contribute.

Another contributing factor was that no strong leadership came forth among those young people such as that displayed by Iwahashi. The discussions and debates they had at the Training Center for Blind Women did not reach the outside world to result in clear action. The third possible reason that the Training Center for Blind Women failed to expand beyond the local level was the meager and relatively insecure financial state of the facility. The main source of funding for its operations came from what Saito Yuri and her husband earned through acupuncture and massage therapy services. They relied on public donations for the rest, since the facility did not receive any financial or material support from the government. Both Saito Yuri and her husband did not seek funding from either the private sector or from the government. Thus, services were only sufficient for the small group of people who worked for the facility, and financial resources were insufficient to allow further outreach. The financial difficulties of the Training Center continued till its closing in 1947 when Saito Yuri died.

Working for the Training Center for Blind Women was a useful learning experience for Honma. During the year 1939-1940 Honma built on his basic idea of establishing a national library and clarified the steps he needed to take. Honma came to realize that the publication of braille magazines and books, though important work, could not alone expand the library project.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>147</sup>Honma, *Yubi to Mimi de Yomu*, audio ed, 52.

### Honma's Library for the Blind (*Nihon Mojin Toshokan*)

Honma resigned his position at the Training Center for Blind Women in May of 1940, and on November 10<sup>th</sup> of the same year he opened his library in part of his residence in the Toshima ku Zoshigaya area of Tokyo.<sup>148</sup> The library had 700 braille books on the newly acquired bookshelves. Blind students from the Tokyo School for the Blind, staff members from the Training Center for Blind Women, and Yoshimoto Tadasu (1878-1973) a Japanese businessman and a prominent supporter and a leading advocate for the blind who knew Iwahashi and Honma from England, came to celebrate the opening festivities.<sup>149</sup> Iwahashi also honored Honma by writing a congratulatory message for the first newsletter Honma published commemorating his newly established library.<sup>150</sup> When Honma first opened the library, he had intended to provide library services for all people with visual disabilities. He named his library the Japan Blind Library (*Nippon Mojin Toshokan*),<sup>151</sup> afraid that the name braille (*tenji*) was not very well-known at the time to the general public including blind people. Later, in 1948, he changed the name to the Japan National Braille Library for the Blind (*Nihon Tenji Toshokan*) in 1948.<sup>152</sup>

Honma was ambitious about expanding his library. He made three resolutions at that opening in November 1940. The first resolution was to build a new facility for the library within five years; the second was to increase the number of publications in his library collection to

<sup>148</sup> Furusawa, Toshio. Honma: Ko no Hito So no Jidai (Honma: His Life and History). (Audio edition) p. 121.

<sup>149</sup> Furusawa, Honma, audio ed, 121.

<sup>150</sup> Honma, Kazuo. *Tenji Arebakoso: Deai to Kansha to (Braille and I: My Memory of Meetings and Gratitude)*. (Audio edition) p. 106.

<sup>151</sup> Honma, *Tenji Arebakoso*, audio ed, 202,. Honma Changed the name of the library to the current name, Japan National Braille Library for the Blind (Nihon Tenji Toshokan) in 1948.

<sup>152</sup> Honma, Kazuo. *Yubi to Mimi de Yomu: Tenji Toshokan to Watashi (Reading with fingers and ears: Japan National Braille Library for the Blind and I)*. (Audio edition) p. 54.

5,000 braille books within five years; and the last resolution was to equip the library with books from every category, including Japanese classics, Western literature, massage therapy, acupuncture, moxibustion, Japanese and foreign language dictionaries, and preparatory books for higher education.<sup>153</sup> He accomplished his first goal within less than two years. The second resolution took Honma eleven years to accomplish.<sup>154</sup> The third resolution was made possible through the work of a network of people with whom Honma became acquainted.

### **Goto Seiko (1884-1975) and the Library's Volunteer Program**

Despite drafting such ambitious resolutions, Honma's first concern was how he should increase the number of braille books in the library. Most of the braille books that had been published by 1940 had already been purchased by Honma for the library. Honma's friends gladly donated some books in braille to him. A total of only 700 books, however, was hardly sufficient for a national library. Without adequate funding and human resources, the project to increase the number and variety of braille books seemed to Honma almost impossible.

One day Honma paid a visit to an acquaintance of one of his friends, Goto Seiko (1884-1975). Goto had established an organization known as The Home of the Heart.<sup>155</sup> This organization had grown to approximately 100 members nationwide. Through The Home of the Heart organization, Goto launched a campaign promoting mutual respect to build a productive and progressive society. Goto's philosophy was that sincerity and caring among people would

<sup>153</sup> Honma, *Yubi to Mimi de Yomu*, audio ed, 56.

<sup>154</sup> Honma, *Yubi to Mimi de Yomu*, audio ed, 54. In 1942 and 1943, 3000 and 400 braille books, respectively, were added to the library collection. Honma states that the reason behind the slowed growth of braille books in his library was largely based on the Pacific War. Lack of writing paper or wood to make braille writers hindered the project. The complete destruction of the library building by air raids in the spring of 1945 also contributed to the slow growth of braille books. By 1982 there were 3 million braille books in the library. Most of the books had been transcribed by volunteer braille transcribers.

<sup>155</sup> Honma, Kazuo. *Tenji Arebakoso: Deai to Kansha to (Braille and I: My Memory of Meetings and Gratitude)*. (Audio edition) p. 49.

make society a better place. Thus, serving others for good causes was the essence of the good of society.

Goto Seiko was born in 1884 in the city of Takeda in Oita prefecture. He graduated from the Tokyo School of Teaching (*Tokyo Shihan Gakko*) and taught mathematics at schools for women in the prefectures of Nagasaki and Kagawa. In 1918 he returned to Tokyo to seek ways in which he could contribute to building Japan's future. He organized a movement to promote the importance of secondary and higher education for all Japanese citizens.<sup>156</sup> At that time compulsory education for Japanese students had been guaranteed under the Meiji constitution that had been officially enacted some twenty years earlier in 1890. Despite these guarantees, however, Goto argued that the constitution itself was not enough to ensure the provision of compulsory education for certain groups, such as people in poverty or people with disabilities, and these groups had been excluded from obtaining secondary education until 1948.

Goto further argued that all members of society must work together to ensure the provision of equal educational opportunities for every Japanese citizen. Goto lectured throughout Japan to promote his philosophy. His lectures drew the public's attention, and under Goto's leadership many became devoted to volunteering their efforts to help those in need.

Honma told Goto Seiko about his project of starting a national library for blind people. In response, Goto asked Honma what his plan was for obtaining the number of braille books required for such a comprehensive library for the blind. Goto was astonished when he heard that Honma had been collecting books only by purchasing published braille books and that he did not have a firm plan in mind as to how he would accumulate the wide variety of books necessary. Goto readily offered to assist in recruiting volunteers willing to become transcribers. Goto

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<sup>156</sup> Honma, *Tenji Arebakoso*, audio ed, 45.

emphasized to Honma that the only way to obtain braille books and to increase the size of the library collection was to enlist volunteers to work exclusively in transcribing printed books into braille, starting from Japanese printed books and after the war adding books in English and other foreign languages. Goto Seiko added that such volunteer work was well established in Western countries such as Britain and that Japan should develop such a system and model its program after the Western countries.

Goto encouraged Honma to be optimistic. He was confident that if Honma would make an appeal to recruit volunteers from the public, people would respond positively. Honma, who had not yet thought out a plan in such depth, recognized the logic behind Goto's suggestions. He also understood that in order to secure a sufficient number of volunteers to work for the library as braille transcribers, a plan had to be devised to recruit volunteers and to train them in the construction of Japanese braille letters. Goto Seiko offered his personal assistance to Honma. From that point on, Goto became both a reliable assistant to Honma and a close advisor.

Goto trained many of the supporters of his philosophy, encouraging them to become braille transcribers for the newly established library. He also began recruiting other volunteers and with Honma organized training seminars for braille writing and reading for the general public beginning in November 1940. This was the beginning of a systematic volunteer recruitment plan specifically for the benefit of blind people. Through the recruitment and training seminars the number of volunteers increased, and besides braille transcribing, volunteers were used as readers and sighted guides to assist with outings for blind people.

These types of volunteer activities have continued to develop from the early postwar years in the 1940s down to the present. The training seminars drew quite a lot of people from diverse backgrounds. Some were related to people with visual disabilities through either their

acquaintances or family members. Some had never had any relations with blind people, yet they felt compelled to offer their assistance for such a worthy cause which they believed would be a fine contribution to supporting society's progress. A daughter of Ishikawa Kuraji (who had invented Japanese braille letters in 1890) joined the group of braille volunteers working for Honma's library because she believed that "this is something her father wanted her to do."<sup>157</sup>

A few people decided to become volunteer braille transcribers because of their own illness, for they felt that by dedicating their time to others brought more purpose to their lives. Daughters and wives of military officers were also common volunteer transcribers. Blue-collar workers employed at the Military Operations Factories (*Gunji Kojo*) mainly in the Tokyo area also became important participants and were known for their speed in transcribing many books in a short period of time.

The library was received with unanimous support from blind people, and the number of patrons continued to increase steadily. Books newly transcribed by volunteers were lent out immediately. According to Honma's account, none of the braille books stayed on the shelf for long!<sup>158</sup> Many of the library's patrons were young blind students from schools for the blind in Tokyo and areas outside of Tokyo, many of whom later became strong advocates for the welfare of people with visual disabilities.<sup>159</sup> Honma started his library with 700 braille books and those books were constantly checked out to users. In early 1943 many blind war veterans began to use the library, and the facility was officially recognized by the government in May 1942 as a

<sup>157</sup> Honma, *Tenji Arebakoso*, audio ed, 21.

<sup>158</sup> Honma, Kazuo. *Yubi to Mimi de Yomu: Tenji Toshokan to Watashi (Reading with fingers and ears: Japan National Braille Library for the Blind and I)*. (Audio edition) p. 61.

<sup>159</sup> Honma, *Yubi to Mimi de Yomu*, audio ed, 58.

nonprofit organization that provided blind people, especially blind war veterans, with library services.

### **Collaborative Growth and Financial Support**

Goto Seiko and his training and recruitment seminars for volunteer braille transcribers attracted some newspaper publishing companies. The Asahi Newspaper Publishing Company (*Asahi Shinbunsha*) and the Mainichi Newspaper Publishing Company (*Mainichi Shinbunsha*) reported on one of the training seminar events that Honma had organized for volunteer braille transcribers and how the operation was being supportive of blind war veterans who needed braille books in order to read independently.<sup>160</sup> Through this kind of publicity, the existence of the library became national news. Following this report, the local government encouraged people to attend the training seminars to support war veterans with visual disabilities. The training seminar which was held in June 1943 in the Tokyo area drew about 100 people who were interested in volunteering for the library.

Honma admits in his book recounting his earlier years when he was just starting the library that he did not plan out, as he should have, the details of what direction the library's growth would take and how it would be achieved. Instead, he was helped by many people who turned out to be his "best and most valuable of friends."<sup>161</sup> Despite his lack of a carefully thought-out plan for his organization, because of the dedication, hard work, and support of his network of friends, Honma's library was a resounding success. From the beginning, Honma encountered people such as Goto Seiko who had the experience to advise him in the essential

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<sup>160</sup>Honma, *Yubi to Mimi de Yomu, audio ed*, 65.

<sup>161</sup>Honma, *Yubi to Mimi de Yomu, audio ed*, 212.

factors crucial to the library's growth and success. Likewise, Honma's interaction with the volunteer braille transcribers became a starting point for what developed into an interactive relationship between blind and sighted people. Although Honma was the founder of a library for blind people, its further development depended on the work of two groups of people, sighted and blind.

The timing of the library's opening also proved auspicious for Honma. Opening the library during wartime seemed to be a reckless move on Honma's part, but that timing, as he indicates, turned out to garner much more widespread publicity than he had expected. As he noted, "November 10, 1940 became a memorable day for me. Japan was celebrating the 2600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the country. About ten or more people came to celebrate the opening of my new library. As I remember that day I cannot help thinking how excited I was." [author's translation]<sup>162</sup>

As Japan entered into war with the United States, not only did the number of injured war veterans increase rapidly, but so did the number of disabled war veterans. When Honma established the library in November 1940 Japan was already at war with China, and a little over a year later Japan would declare war on the United States. Support for war veterans was not only encouraged by the government, but by the public as well. This support greatly helped Honma's efforts to recruit more volunteers to transcribe publications into braille and increased the popularity of the library among the general public.

By July 1941 Honma was able to hire his first full-time employee to assist him. According to Honma's description, the very first full-time worker was a woman in her early thirties with

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<sup>162</sup> Honma, Kazuo. *Waga Jinsei: Nippon Tenji Toshokan* (*My life: Japan National Braille Library for the Blind*). (Audio edition) p. 106.

vitality and motivation. Honma describes his plan: “I have decided to do most of [the] work which did not necessarily require one’s sight; and I asked [my] newly hired worker, Saito Chiyo-San, to do the work which required a person’s sight such as keeping the library work record.”[author’s translation]<sup>163</sup> By November of the same year Honma needed to hire two more workers to keep up with the heavy load of lending out their library books. In order for the library to provide its services to more people with visual disabilities, unlike the regular public library service, they had to lend out their books by mail. Blind patrons would receive their books at their residence, and when they had finished reading, they simply returned the book to the library by mail. Thus, a lot of recordkeeping was a necessary part of the library’s administrative activities.

In response to Honma’s dedication and hard work for the library, blind patrons under the leadership of Tachibana Koichi, president of the Tokyo Association for the Blind, began a movement to support the library financially. A small nonprofit organization was formed to raise funds to provide the library with firmer financial support. The organization was known as Reverence and Support for the Japan National Braille Library for the Blind (Heijokai) and began operations in January of 1942. The formation of a fundraising entity had significant meaning to the library’s operations and growth. Instead of being just passive recipients of library services, these blind people were now called upon to become active contributing patrons that included participating in fundraising to keep the library solvent.<sup>164</sup>

By 1943 the number of library users had increased to over 1,000 and among them, in great numbers, were blind war veterans. As mentioned above, both the government and the military had been encouraging people to demonstrate their support for the war veterans. At the same time, government officials had already begun to notice Honma’s library operations, and a

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<sup>163</sup> Honma, *Waga Jinsei, audio ed*, 61.

<sup>164</sup> Honma, *Waga Jinsei, audio ed*, 63.

few times, according to Honma, visited the library and closely observed its operations. As the library's services became known to more people, Honma's work began to get more attention. Soon the library's shelf space ran out, and he needed more space to house the ever-increasing number of braille books. Also, as the war progressed some materials, such as paper, became quite scarce, but Honma and the volunteers managed to find paper that they could use. In these conditions—growth in demand and lack of essential materials—donations were the most critical and essential resource for the library. Contrary to Honma's expectations of hardship in collecting donations, many influential and upper class individuals donated generously to the newly established Library for the Blind.

Just one year after the library began its operations Honma needed more administrative space and more shelf space for books. Honma moved from Zoshigaya located in Toshima town in Tokyo to the Takada no Baba area of Tokyo, the current location of the library.<sup>165</sup> Honma was fortunate to have a relatively wealthy merchant among his closest family members. With his financial support, Honma was able to buy a piece of property and build a new building for the library and for his living quarters. Because of the space demands of the rapidly increasing number of braille books in the library, by 1942 Honma and his staff decided to add another building on the property. However, his family members could only cover the expense of the original property and were not in a position to pay for an additional new building. Honma and his library staff members, therefore, had to solicit donations for the new building.

In May of that same year the prefecture government of Tokyo officially recognized the library as a public facility providing services for people with visual disabilities. This official endorsement motivated Honma to initiate his new building project for the library. He had to

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<sup>165</sup> Honma, *Waga Jinsei, audio ed*, 60..

accept, however, that being officially recognized by the local government did not necessarily mean that the facility could get enough financial support from the government to pay for the construction of an additional building. The library had to be financially self-sustaining.

### **Increasing Fundraising to Support Growth**

Honma and his assistant, Kato Yoshinori, looked through an official listing of the prominent and wealthy members of society and almost randomly chose names of people from the list to ask for donations for their new building. Honma and his hired employees drafted letters of request for donations. To their surprise, their letters were answered by some people through their donation of 10 yen. Konoe Fumimaro (1891-1945), a former Japanese prime Minister, and Tokugawa Musei from the Tokugawa family, were among those who donated. A famous writer and poet, Takahama Kyoshi, was also among those who donated to the library.<sup>166</sup> Honma was able to collect about 2 man yen (2000 Man-Yen is roughly \$2 million at current values) through donations.<sup>167</sup>

Many of the people whom Honma had written to had no connection to blind people or for that matter concern about people with visual disabilities. They decided to make their donations to the small library because of their belief that good deeds would not only be gratifying, but their generosity would serve a good cause in society's duty to support the needs of people with visual disabilities. They knew as well that the library could be very useful to war veterans who had become blind. They believed their donations would demonstrate their support for the increasing

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<sup>166</sup> Japan National Braille Library. "A list of donors" Tokyo: Japan Library for the Blind. 1944, p.1 p. 2. A school teacher's average wage per month was about 50 yen. Roughly 1 yen was 4 thousand yen in current value (approximately 43 US dollars) in current value. 10 yen would be about 40-thousand yen (approximately 430 US dollars).

<sup>167</sup> Honma, Kazuo. *Waga Jinsei: Nippon Tenji Toshokan* (*My life: Japan National Braille Library for the Blind*). (Audio edition) p. 110.

number of war veterans with visual disabilities as well as serve as a model to society of their support of the country. Whether or not it was part of Honma's original organizational plan, his move in 1943 to expand the facility with a new building proved to have been made at just the right time for success.

Honma and his library workers created opportunities for the general public to contribute to the library services for people with visual disabilities. Equally important, they created opportunities for blind people themselves to participate in developing the library's services. The library also provided a social place for blind people to mingle and establish connections among themselves; the formation of a library support group helped these efforts along. These gatherings motivated blind people to work together for a better future.

**Changing Stereotypes through Education.** Many common misconceptions remained about students with disabilities, and Honma sought to change such attitudes. By the 1930s schools for students with special needs were in operation throughout the country, and the majority of school facilities were under the management of the government. Laws guaranteeing compulsory education were on the books but were not enforced for students with disabilities. Thus, people with visual disabilities were under no obligation to attend schools regularly. This state of affairs seemed to confirm the society's conventional wisdom that it was a waste of time to educate people with disabilities. This attitude was still the norm that continued even after the enforcement of compulsory education for children with disabilities in April 1948.

Honma's efforts to organize social gatherings for blind library patrons were instrumental in dispelling such attitudes that also existed among blind people. A braille reading and writing contest was one of the library's most popular events. Library patrons in the Kanto area came to participate in the event. Contestants competed according to how many braille characters they

were able to write and read within a limited amount of time. This contest motivated blind people to develop their braille writing and reading skills as well as their reading comprehension skills and writing techniques. Besides improving these skills through formal study at schools for the blind, these contests, typically accompanied by social gatherings, provided effective ways to obtain these skills in the shortest possible time.

Blind people's attention was drawn to the fact that Honma, like Iwahashi before him, was a graduate of Kwansei Gakuin University. Though Honma did not emphasize it, this factor was another source of inspiration for blind people. Efforts increased in the postwar period to promote the development of braille writing and reading skills and to inspire blind people to obtain a better education. The braille writing and reading contest became a nationwide event to commemorate the invention of Japanese braille by Ishikawa Kuraji. Schools for the blind throughout Japan participated in these contests, continuing even up to the present day.

Students with visual disabilities were further inspired to seek higher education by a movement that grew to lobby the government during the early postwar era for university entrance for students with visual disabilities. A law issued by the Ministry of Education which guaranteed compulsory secondary education to all students including students with disabilities in April 1948 provided concrete support for the movement. Soon university graduates with visual disabilities, university attendees, and examination candidates with the same disability formed an association of blind college students known as Welfare Research Association for the Blind (*Mojin Fukushi Kenkyukai*), also known as The July Association (*Fumidukikai*) in July 1961.<sup>168</sup> That association urged universities and colleges throughout Japan to permit students with visual

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<sup>168</sup> Honma, Kazuo. *Yubi to Mimi de Yomu: Tenji Toshokan to Watashi (Reading with fingers and ears: Japan National Braille Library for the Blind and I).* (Audio edition) p. 175.

disabilities to take their entrance examinations in either braille or in large print or make any other accommodations necessary for the students to participate as fully as their sighted colleagues.

Honma served as president of this association from 1961 until 1964 and continued as one of the executive members until 2003. The association also supported bind students who were already attending universities. This association continued to grow and develop, steadily increasing its membership down to the present time.

### **Volunteer Program's Residual Benefits**

Honma understood the critical need for braille transcribing for the advancement of educational and employment opportunities on all levels for the blind and visually disabled members of society. With leadership from Honma and his colleagues, training seminars for volunteer braille transcribers also expanded, starting first from just the Tokyo area in the fall of 1941 and eventually spreading nationwide after the war. Recruiting volunteers for braille transcribing started from just Honma's library, then expanded to local schools and school libraries for the blind throughout Japan that were also badly in need of increasing the number of braille books in their institutions. Braille transcribing became a well-known specialty for volunteer work in the late 1960s to the early 1970s. Some secondary schools even began offering a braille writing class as an elective outside of the regular school curriculum.

Those after-school clubs produced quite a number of young braille transcribers. Importantly, braille transcribing produced an opportunity for people with visual disabilities and people without disabilities to work together on projects. As Honma recounts, in order for braille books to become part of an official library collection, it has to be proofread after it has been transcribed. If braille transcribing was the work of sighted people, proofreading was the work of blind people. They together made a coordinated, efficient team that produced numerous books.

The library which Honma founded to provide services for blind people not only accomplished that goal but it also motivated and inspired blind people to pursue secondary and higher education. Through these initiatives blind people created a strong network that allowed them vehicles to contribute financially or otherwise to the facility that had provided them with services. The existence of the library, like Iwahashi's Lighthouse facility for the blind, produced residual benefits for society in creating a functional network between visually disabled and nondisabled people.

Honma's Japan National Braille Library for the Blind was the first to introduce a volunteer service that had been neither widely known nor well-established in Japanese society. As Goto Seiko stated to Honma, in the West volunteer services such as braille transcribing were common.<sup>169</sup> Japan's diplomatic relations with Western nations including the United States for the most part had soured from the latter part of the 1930s into the early 1940s till the end of the war. Despite that political atmosphere, things that society in general had learned from Western nations continued to be regarded as the models for Japan to follow, as was the case with the Japan National Braille Library for the Blind.

Cooperation between sighted people and people with visual disabilities became well established, and it developed and expanded into the postwar period. Honma, like Iwahashi of the Nippon Lighthouse Welfare Center for the Blind, took the lead and worked to promote better welfare services as well as employment and educational opportunities and services for both blind adults and young students. Honma was determined that his work would continue. He was fortunate to be able to work through wartime to support blind war veterans by providing library services to them. That caught the attention and subsequently some financial support from both

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<sup>169</sup> Furusawa, Toshio. Honma: Ko no Hito So no Jidai (Honma: His Life and History). (Audio edition) p.126.

the government and private sectors. The media also provided a place to advertise these facilities to let their services be more widely known to the public.

### **Government Recognition**

By May 1942 Honma's library was officially recognized by the government as a nonprofit organization which provided vital services for people with visual disabilities, especially services for blind war veterans. The library continued as a privately operated facility, and Honma took the responsibility of securing funding and material resources mainly through asking for donations from the private sector. The mission of the facility was to support and provide necessary training and services to improve the quality of life and working conditions for people with visual disabilities.

Then in 1954 the government officially declared the Japan National Braille Library for the Blind a library facility for the blind which was entrusted by the government to both publish and lend books to blind patrons. Through this recognition the library was able to obtain some financial support from the government for upkeep of the building and for improving library services for patrons. But Honma continued to organize a regular fundraising program asking for donations from the private sector.

In 1961 through revision of the Japanese Postal Service Act (*Yubin Ho*) braille books and books on tape could be mailed free of charge to patrons. He commented, "Without costing a single yen per kilogram, it was a great saving for our facility and other facilities that provided library services for blind people." [author's translation]<sup>170</sup> In 1970 the waiver of copyright for transcribing printed books into braille and to audio technology made it possible for the library to make more literature accessible to more blind people. As Honma said, "Preparatory books for

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<sup>170</sup>Honma, Kazuo. *Yubi to Mimi de Yomu: Tenji Toshokan to Watashi (Reading with fingers and ears: Japan National Braille Library for the Blind and I)*. (Audio edition) p. 204.

college entrance examinations, for instance, could be transcribed into braille freely for the use of blind students because of this waiver. This also helped our library because we could transcribe books into braille or make audio books without worrying about violating copyright law.”[author’s translation]<sup>171</sup>

Besides assistance from the revision of laws and governmental recognition, recruiting visually disabled supporters remained important for the library. They assisted in running the facilities and maintaining the high quality of services through their financial and material contributions. Honma’s library project began at first on a very small scale, as had the Training Center for Blind Women. But, unlike the Training Center for Blind Women which ultimately failed, Honma was able to expand his library service from a small local operation to a national level. Honma’s networking skills and the assistance he had early on from people with resources and ideas such as Goto Seiko made it possible for Honma’s project to succeed.

### **The Keys to the Success of Honma’s Library**

Honma’s ability to adapt to current (changing) situations also became helpful for the expansion of his library services. Promotion of braille literacy to blind people through braille reading and writing contests and book lending services by mail increased the number of library users, spread braille literacy to blind people, and educated them in the value of literature.

What made Honma’s facility different from other facilities for the blind (such as Saito Yuri’s Yokokai) was the fact that Honma, since the library’s opening, actively advertised the existence of the library, and he continued to appeal and reach out to others. He also actively sought out opportunities to work with other organizations and facilities as well as with the government and private sector. He was not hesitant to create new networks and promote his work

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<sup>171</sup> Honma, *Yubi to Mimi de Yomu*, audio ed, 204.

to others. He was tenacious in his dedication to his life's work. His ability to interact with people worked well in his efforts to expand the library's services.

Honma was a keen observer of the times and needs of blind people and made his decisions and actions based on their needs. He believed creating networks was important to serving these needs. He actively made connections with both blind and sighted people during his college years, and he continued to develop strong networks after he established the library. As a result, he met many people. His demonstrated honesty and passion for his library work earned him the respect of others. Many people became volunteer braille transcribers as much because of their support for blind people as out of their respect for Honma. Personal communication was something Honma always emphasized, and this ability to connect appealed to patrons as well as to his employees and volunteers. Unlike Saito Yuri and her husband, Honma did not isolate himself. He worked with the private sector, individuals, and the government. Honma received with open arms any individuals who were willing to support the library.

Learning from others was also an important factor that facilitated the expansion of Honma's library service. Honma was not afraid or hesitant to learn from other facilities for the blind such as Iwahashi's Nippon Lighthouse Center for the Blind and to share what he learned. He believed anything which could further improve welfare services for blind people should be openly shared with others. Honma's outgoing attitude together with his sincerity and respect for others made an indelible mark on the improvement of welfare services for blind people in Japan which inspired younger generations of blind people who desired to advance their education and thus their quality of life.

## Working for Equality: Activism and Advocacy by Blind Intellectuals in Japan, 1912-1995

### Chapter 4: Welfare Laws for Disabled and Blind People in Japan, 1950-1995

#### **Introduction**

The end of the war in 1945 brought Japan yet another change. But as the general public was going through the very hard times of Japan's defeat and economic struggle, they were also embracing it as the beginning of recovery and a new transformation. Iwahashi Takeo, the founder of the Nippon Lighthouse Welfare Center for the Blind, saw the war as "the father of destruction, yet it is the mother of invention." He could hold his own anti-war views even as he also accepted the current situation and decided to take on a positive outlook during the hardest of times.<sup>172</sup> He regarded the beginning of the postwar era as the time for positive change and progress for the good of the blind communities in Japan, instead of viewing it as a time of long struggle and endless suffering. Through his efforts to embrace change and to support blind war veterans by providing them with work, he foresaw great opportunities for the expansion of new employment options for both blind and sighted people.

In June of 1946 Helen Keller sent a letter to Iwahashi through the General Headquarters of the Allied Powers (GHQ) that ultimately revived their earlier correspondence. It also created a connection between Iwahashi and GHQ that worked to his advantage later on when Iwahashi sought to persuade the government authorities of the importance of enacting laws guaranteeing

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<sup>172</sup> Seki, Hiroyuki. Iwahashi Takeo: Gimu Yue no Michiyuki (Iwahashi Takeo: the duty and Sacrifice). Tokyo: Japan. Nihon Mojin Fukushi Kenkyukai. 1983, (braille edition vol. 2) p. 55.

the rights of people with disabilities. Through Keller's support of the connection between Iwahashi and GHQ, Iwahashi realized one immediate success in being able to gain GHQ-Osaka approval to maintain his metal factory that was then a part of the Lighthouse facility. However, like other industries, Iwahashi's factory struggled to continue to pay workers their wages. Iwahashi was concerned that it was vital for blind people to have the means to earn a living.

Soon after GHQ occupied Japan it began to eliminate Japan's links to the war including the statutes of the Japanese constitution enacted in 1890 and the military defense system set up by the imperial government. The constitution enacted during the Meiji period was replaced with a new constitution stating that Japan was to become a neutral country and would not initiate any military action. The new constitution also stressed Japan as a country would not keep any of its national military defenses as it had had from the Meiji to the early Showa periods of 1868 through August of 1945. Defense forces would be replaced with military force but would not have authority to carry out any military actions except in self-defense against military attacks on Japan initiated by other countries. Exclusive privileges and rights that had been allowed for war veterans were completely eliminated. Veterans became regular citizens, and they lost any preferential rights to holding any governmental position working for the Japanese government.

Iwahashi notes that toward the end of the war he and a group of blind war veterans were supported by people in the community who frequently provided them with extra food supplies. However, as soon as the war ended food supplies were cut off, and they no longer received any support, by order of the Japanese government under the supervision of the GHQ.<sup>173</sup> This action had an enormous impact on the disabled communities in Japan. The mind-set of the occupational forces toward the disabled was a negative and uninformed one. GHQ regarded the majority of

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<sup>173</sup> Iwahashi, Hideyuki. Aoi Tori no Uta: Helen Keller to Nippon (The song of the Bluebird: Helen Keller and Japan). Tokyo: Nihon Hoso shuppan Kyokai. 1980, (braille edition vol. 2) p. 3.

people with disabilities as former war veterans. Because of the violent military actions Japan had taken against the allied nations, the attitude of GHQ toward people with disabilities was generally cold and unsupportive.<sup>174</sup>

As part of governmental reform, in 1947 the government under the guidance of GHQ proposed a law for licensing the profession of acupuncture. According to the proposal, such a profession like acupuncture which uses needles for treating patients should not be accessible for people with visual disabilities; this meant that blind people would be prohibited from working as acupuncturists. This proposal came from the idea that the use of needles by people with visual disabilities to treat patients might cause danger to patients; thus, people with visual disabilities should be prohibited from pursuing any medical profession including acupuncture. They were to be prohibited from obtaining a professional acupuncture license, and those who were already in the profession must stop their practice.<sup>175</sup>

This shocked many blind people who were already professional acupuncturists, and their only means of income had been the practice of acupuncture before and throughout the war. Furthermore, acupuncture and massage therapy (along with moxibustion) were generally still regarded as conventional occupations for blind people, and without those professions blind people would lose all their ways of earning a living. If the proposal were to be enforced as a law, then the only people who could obtain an official license to practice acupuncture were sighted people. That would open this particular profession to people other than the visually disabled and that blind people would lose this conventional profession that they had practiced continually since the early Tokugawa period.

This sudden incident brought blind people in Japan together to fight against the proposal

<sup>174</sup> Nihon Hoso Kyokai (NHK). “Sono Toki Rekishi Wa Ugoita (Days of Historical Moments)”. Tokyo: Japan. Nihon Hoso Kyokai (NHK). April 1, 2000 dedicated to Iwahashi Archive (broadcasted edition).

<sup>175</sup> IBID.

that the GHQ had made with their intent of legalizing. Iwahashi instantly took the leadership to protest these proposals and began communicating with GHQ. In the fall of 1947 Iwahashi met personally with General Douglas MacArthur. In that meeting Iwahashi stressed that since there was no alternative profession at which people with visual disabilities could earn their living, GHQ's proposal would destroy the primary, centuries-old profession for people with visual disabilities and eliminate the source of their income.<sup>176</sup> This act of opposition unified blind people with Iwahashi Takeo as their leader. Iwahashi did not hold the professions of acupuncture or massage therapy as ways of widening employment opportunities for blind people in Japan. But he was realistic and realized that acupuncture and massage therapy were traditional professions for blind people and many relied on the occupation as their source of income, even though the earning potential was low. He also understood that, unlike sighted people, blind people had very few if any other employment options. An opportunity to be employed by a university as were Iwahashi or Honma was a rare occurrence. So, without these conventional professions blind people would literally lose the means to support themselves independently.

People with visual disabilities steadily opposed the GHQ proposal and made the same argument that Iwahashi made to MacArthur that limited employment opportunities for blind people necessitated their having a profession that allows them to earn a stable living. They also stated that prohibiting the use of acupuncture needles by people with visual disabilities, after centuries of successful practice, constituted an act of discrimination against the visually disabled. Lastly, Iwahashi and others argued that GHQ did not have any alternative proposal of employment options other than acupuncture for people with visual disabilities by which they could support themselves. Many blind people were angered by the proposal and interpreted it as

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<sup>176</sup> Iwahashi, Hideyuki, Unno Yoshio Editor. *Lighthouse 40nenn shi (Nippon Lighthouse Welfare Center for the Blind the 40 Years of History)*. Osaka: Japan. Nippon Lighthouse Welfare Center for the Blind. 1962, dedicated to Iwahashi Archive (scanned edition) p. 89.

a direct attack by GHQ against the visually disabled. This further encouraged them to fight to protect their conventional profession, and this fight symbolized their independence. This incident made them realize two important factors: the necessity of forming a national organization organized by blind people to take unified actions on their behalf and the importance of promulgating laws guaranteeing the rights and welfare of people with visual disabilities.

This chapter focuses on people and organizations that provided support for the welfare of people with visual disabilities and the impact new welfare laws for the disabled had on their education and employment opportunities. Self-advocacy carried out by blind people was the vehicle that moved society toward the enactment of welfare laws for the disabled. They used the welfare laws as tools to expand services for blind people and involved the government in their operation. As a result, a cooperative team was formed between institutions supporting the blind and the government to improve welfare services for blind people in Japan.

### **The Disabled Unify: the Right-to-Work Demonstration of 1947**

As discussed briefly in chapter 2 networks of blind people had been created on a local level such as occurred in Osaka, but no network organization of the blind existed on a national level till August 1948. Therefore, it was not until 1947 that any collective activity was undertaken that involved informational or demonstration rallies to appeal to the government and general public to support the improvement of the welfare system. While the disabled understood that further reform to improve living standards, employment opportunities, and education was important, they did not have a clear and unified cause for people to rally around in order to take purposeful action nationwide. In the summer of 1947 the one means the visually disabled had of earning income was literally threatened by the government and GHQ. This serious situation galvanized them to act; things needed to change.

Helen Keller's previous visit to Japan in 1937 was a significant incident that inspired all the blind communities in Japan. Her overriding message had been that blind people could be independent if they put out their best efforts and worked hard for reform. The incident that occurred in the summer of 1947 that threatened to eliminate their employment opportunity made them realize the real truth in Keller's words of unifying to win their independence and rights that they had heard during her first visit in 1937. The memory of Keller's inspiring message moved them to demonstrate as a unified, cohesive group to fight for their right to work to earn money to support themselves independently. This unified effort illustrated to them the importance of organized actions to accomplish their goal. One participant of the lobbying action against the prohibition of blind acupuncturists and moxibustionists remembers that summer:

“The summer to fall of 1947 I remembered that we all focused on fighting for our traditional profession, acupuncture. We had a demonstration protest in front of the National Diet building; we went to offices of local government officials to protest. We did this willingly to win our independence and to win our right to work to earn our living. I could recall that the year was hard; at the same time we all felt motivated and productive because we had a goal that we focused on accomplishing. We were a team.”[author's translation]<sup>177</sup>

### **Formation of the United Association of the Blind**

This unified action worked in Iwahashi's favor, as he had been hoping to establish a national organization of the blind. In August of 1948 under the leadership of Iwahashi blind people established an organization known as the United Association of the Blind. (The organization later changed its name to the Japan Federation of the Blind in the 1980s.) The members had their first meeting to celebrate their victory of officially achieving their right to

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<sup>177</sup> Higuchi, Shiro. *Maketara Akan Kaena Akan: Shougaisha Fukushi wo Kiri Hiraki 60nen Higuchi Shiro ga Mizukara Kataru Hansei* (*The Road to Welfare System: Blind People Prewar through the Early Postwar of 60 Years*). Osaka: Japan. Shogaisha Fukushi Shuppan. 1995, (Braille edition vol. 2) p. 26. The demonstration and rally organized by blind people to protest the proposal to prohibit blind people from working as acupuncturists were considered as a significant, organized expressive action against the authorities made by people with visual disabilities.

hold the occupation of acupuncture and to secure an official license. The organization also celebrated its success in persuading the government to enforce a law guaranteeing compulsory education for all children including children with physical disabilities. Keller had urged this goal during her first visit to Japan in the spring of 1937. The Welfare Laws for Children enacted in April 1948 clearly stated that compulsory education now applied as well to children with physical disabilities. During the first annual meeting, members stated their intention to work toward the promulgation and enforcement of laws guaranteeing rights for people with physical disabilities and confirmed their decision to appeal to and work with the government. One member of the organization wrote,

“We were ready and willing to work with Iwahashi to establish a new national organization of the blind. Although we did have locally organized associations, somewhere in the back of our minds we felt that something was missing. When Iwahashi-Sensei proposed organizing our United Association of the Blind, we realized that this is the organization which could become the backbone of all blind people in Japan to work together to improve our future education and employment opportunities.”[author’s translation]<sup>178</sup>

At the first meeting of the organization, members agreed on a purpose and mission for the organization and discussed which issues they would focus on for the immediate future. They discussed the creation of laws that could guarantee protection of the rights of blind people to receive education, to work, and to improve their living conditions. The first goal that they decided to work on was to convince the government to acknowledge that the occupation of acupuncture was a legitimate occupation that blind people should have the right to practice. If the government were to insist on issuing an official license for sighted people to practice this particular profession, then members of the United Association of the Blind would demand that

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<sup>178</sup> Nihon Mojin Rengokai. Nihon Mojin Rengokai 50nen no Ayumi (the History of Japan Federation of the Blind: 50 years of Progress. Tokyo: Nihon Mojin Rengo Kai. 1998, (braille edition vol. 1) p. 2.

blind people should have an equal right to obtain the same license. A law should be enacted to guarantee and support this right.

Many blind people, including those who were skeptical of Iwahashi's leadership and regarded the purpose of the newly created organization as too idealistic, could not deny the contribution Iwahashi and his supporters had made to creating a national organization for the blind and to achieving the withdrawal of the GHQ proposal prohibiting blind people from practicing the occupation of acupuncture. They recognized them as significant accomplishments made by blind people themselves. They also understood that much work lay ahead of them to improve the immediate and future welfare of blind people.

### **Defining Goals**

The new organization also brought in a breath of fresh air. The majority of the members of any local level organization for blind people was usually male during the prewar years and through the wartime period. The new United Association of the Blind attracted female members who were eager to contribute to building an improved future for blind people in Japan. Female members of the organizations were quite outspoken and did not hesitate to express their opinions regarding the rights of blind people, including the right to receive equal education and undertake employment opportunities equal to those of sighted people.

One female member, Nakamura Utako, from Shizuoka prefecture wrote a letter of appeal to the government explaining that blind women citizens of Japan were equally as willing as blind male citizens to contribute to the recovery of the country and the advancement of society; yet compared to men generally, women were considered inferior and in many cases did not have

equal access to education and employment.<sup>179</sup> She went on to say that since blind people were now officially able to obtain a license to work in acupuncture, blind women would like the government to make sure that equal employment opportunities and equal access to the obtaining of the license for acupuncture would be guaranteed for blind women as it was for blind men. Members of the organization, especially female members, regarded this formal appeal as a significant move and a clear demonstration of equality for men and women as was emphasized in the newly written Japanese constitution.

During the meeting members agreed with Iwahashi that obtaining secure employment was just as important for blind people as it was for people with no disabilities. Thus, it was essential for blind people to have a secure venue to employment, because, unlike people with no disabilities who were likely to have more options for employment, people with visual disabilities still had very limited employment possibilities. With this in mind, Iwahashi and other members of the United Association of the Blind decided to try to get the government to accept their argument that massage therapy and acupuncture, having been generally regarded historically as conventional occupations for blind people, should therefore be available exclusively to blind people.<sup>180</sup> In order to gain an official guarantee and government support, a law was needed mandating massage therapy and acupuncture as occupations guaranteed exclusively for blind people until more employment opportunities had been created for them.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> IBID, (braille edition vol. 1) p. 25.

<sup>180</sup> Japan United Association of the blind. *Nihon Mojin Rengokai dai 1 kaishi* (*The First Meeting Minutes of Japan United Association of the Blind*). Tokyo: Japan. Japan foundation of the blind. Dedicated to Iwahashi Archive. August 17 1948, (electronic edition) p. 4.

<sup>181</sup> Seki, Hiroyuki. Iwahashi Takeo: Gimu Yue no Michiyuki (Iwahashi Takeo: the duty and Sacrifice). (Braille edition vol. 2) p. 88.

## **Vocational Training, Apprenticeship, and Licensure**

Vocational training for massage therapy and acupuncture was another important issue that members discussed. From the Tokugawa period (when blind people formed guilds) through the wartime period apprenticeship had been the main way to learn the techniques of massage therapy and acupuncture. Although there were schools that trained blind people in these skills during the Tokugawa period, those schools did not survive when the Meiji government was established in 1868. Schools that were established by the kengyō of guilds became a part of schools for the blind established in the 1870s, and they offered training courses in massage therapy and acupuncture. Besides the courses offered by schools for the blind, however, apprenticeship remained the main method of training blind people in these professions. No system of official licensing was yet established by the government.

When compulsory education came to officially include students with disabilities, schools for the blind began considering re-designing their training courses so that their students could learn sufficient skills to become licensed to practice the occupation. Blind people supported Iwahashi's argument that training through apprenticeship with its uneven results should be disqualified as a means to obtain licensure. They felt that the quality of training and level of skills of each blind person achieved through apprenticeship was insufficient to obtain an official license. They also argued that apprenticeship prevents a blind person who was new to the occupation from building up a group of clients. The number who could be apprenticed to veteran acupuncturists was limited. Those who were unlucky and were unable to obtain an apprenticeship were left without any way to obtain an official license and would most likely not be included into the circle of acupuncturists practicing in a particular community. Neither clients

nor prosperity would be well distributed among all blind acupuncturists. On top of that, if sighted people were to join the profession, a system of licensure was an even greater necessity.

Therefore, the government and the United Association of the Blind should work together to come up with an effective training program that schools for the blind could offer to students. They also needed to design an examination that would define a certain professional standard of acupuncture and massage therapy training that would define the level of qualifications for the license. Iwahashi and others frequently went to Tōkyō to talk with members of the national Diet and government officials to lobby for the necessity of laws that would guarantee the rights of blind people to work as acupuncturists and massage therapists. They also repeatedly explained to the government that employment opportunities for blind people were limited compared to employment opportunities for sighted people. This situation made it necessary for a law to be promulgated that could mandate assistance from the local and national governments to open up more employment opportunities for blind people so that they would have other job options besides massage therapy and acupuncture.

### **Lobbying for a General Welfare Law for the Disabled**

As Seki Hiroyuki, author of a biography of Iwahashi Takeo and a staff member at the Nippon Lighthouse Welfare Center for the Blind depicts, Iwahashi literally commuted from Osaka to Tōkyō every day after the first meeting of the United Association of the Blind took place. He talked with government officials to convince them of the importance of enacting welfare laws for the disabled. In the beginning of the negotiations Iwahashi and others pressed the government to draft welfare laws exclusively for blind people.<sup>182</sup> If welfare laws for blind

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<sup>182</sup> IBID.

and visually impaired people were enacted, then Iwahashi and his supporters believed that the equal access to employment opportunities and improvement of the living standards for blind people would definitely be forthcoming. Occupations such as massage therapy and acupuncture would then be protected, and blind people could claim them as occupations reserved exclusively for blind people. The government along with GHQ, however, opposed Iwahashi's request to enact welfare laws exclusively for blind people. Their side of the argument was that if welfare laws were enacted for the blind and visually impaired, then they would need to enact other similar laws for people with other types of disabilities. If the government made laws targeting people with only one specific type of physical disability, they could be accused of discriminating against people with other types of disabilities not mentioned in the law. Thus, the government proposed to Iwahashi that they would create welfare laws that would cover all types of physical disabilities. Iwahashi agreed with the government's suggestion and began working with them to draw up the welfare laws for the disabled.

The government showed only a lukewarm response to the newly established national organization of the blind and the organization's decision to appeal to the government for the creation and enforcement of welfare laws for people with visual disabilities. When Iwahashi Takeo and others first contacted the government and GHQ regarding GHQ's proposal to prohibit people with visual disabilities from working as acupuncturists because of safety concerns, the government had been reluctant to aid them in any way. The attitude of GHQ was that aiding people with disabilities meant aiding Japanese war veterans who were main players in the war. Lobbying efforts organized and carried out by many blind massage therapists and acupuncturists in Japan against prohibiting them from practicing their profession stressed continually that Japanese war veterans were not the only group of people with visual disabilities. As Higuchi

Shiro recounts in his book, there were many who had practiced the profession of acupuncture and supported their families before and throughout the war.<sup>183</sup>

The strong resistance carried out by these blind people surprised GHQ and the Japanese government, and led them to withdraw their proposal by the late fall of 1947. In December of the same year the government issued an act formally establishing the professions of acupuncture, massage therapy, and moxibustion.<sup>184</sup> The act states, “Anyone who acquires appropriate training is able to practice the professions of acupuncture, massage therapy, and moxibustion. These professions, however, cannot be performed by a person or people who do not receive sufficient training and are unable to guarantee the safety of clients.”[author’s translation]<sup>185</sup>

Creating general welfare laws for the disabled, however, was not on the government’s priority list at first. What moved GHQ, whose initial mind-set had been against supporting people with disabilities, was Iwahashi’s tireless and multifaceted campaign to change their minds. He repeatedly explained the necessity of creating welfare laws for people with visual disabilities. He organized a fundraising campaign to garner public support for institutions and facilities providing services for people with disabilities as well as direct support for disabled individuals.

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<sup>183</sup> Higuchi, Shiro. *Maketara Akan Kaena Akan: Shougaisha Fukushi wo Kiri Hiraki 60nen Higuchi Shiro ga Mizukara Kataru Hansei* (*The Road to Welfare System: Blind People Prewar through the Early Postwar of 60 Years*). Osaka: Japan. (Braille edition vol. 1) p. 108.

<sup>184</sup> Iwahashi, Hideyuki. *Aoi Tori no Uta: Helen Keller to Nippon* (*The song of the Bluebird: Helen Keller and Japan*). (Braille edition vol. 2) p. 16.

<sup>185</sup> GHQ Kobunsho. “Document NO 775011 Act of Acupuncture, Massage Therapy, and Moxibustion”. December 1948, (audio edition) dedicate to National Diet Library.

## The Helen Keller Campaign

Iwahashi used the occasion of Helen Keller's visit to Japan from August through October 1948 as an opportunity to appeal to the public by organizing a national level fundraising event. Through his Lighthouse facility, Iwahashi called for support to improve the quality of life and employment opportunities for people with visual disabilities.

The national campaign, generally portrayed as honoring Helen Keller's second visit to Japan, soon became a major fundraising event to support all people with all types of physical disabilities. Local social groups got actively involved. The waitresses union, artists groups, and women's groups all organized local activities to raise funds and show their solidarity with Iwahashi's initiatives and goals.<sup>186</sup> In Nagoya prefecture the women's association got together and organized a bazaar to raise funds for people with disabilities.<sup>187</sup> They distributed posters and brochures to people and talked about the importance of supporting facilities and institutions for people with disabilities. They emphasized that these efforts to improve the quality of life for the disabled would improve as well the overall quality of Japanese society. The major Japanese newspapers such as the Yomiuri Newspaper Publishing Company (*Yomiuri Shinbun*), Asahi Newspaper Publishing Company (*Asahi Shinbun*), and Mainichi Newspaper Publishing Company (*Mainichi Shinbun*) published newspaper columns and articles about the fundraising campaign.

Iwahashi named the campaign, "Helen Keller Campaign" to honor her and to appeal to the public to support the welfare and independence of people with disabilities in society.

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<sup>186</sup> Mainichi Shinbun (Mainichi Newspaper). Issue September 10, 1948. (Electronic edition) p. 1.

<sup>187</sup> Nihon Hoso Kyokai (NHK). "Sono Toki Rekishi Wa Ugoita (Days of Historical Moments)". Dedicated to Iwahashi Archive (Broadcasting edition).

Throughout the Helen Keller Campaign Iwahashi talked about the necessity of creating welfare laws for the disabled. He emphasized the importance for Japanese society to recognize and embrace people with disabilities as regular members of society who were working just like the nondisabled to become active contributors to improving society as a whole. He also stressed that welfare laws for the disabled needed to clearly guarantee the equality of access for the disabled to education and employment.

The government could not ignore the media attention paid to the nationwide fundraising campaign and the consequent widespread interest and public support for the cause. The lecture Helen Keller delivered to the Japanese public emphasized that including people with disabilities in the society at large as active contributors would help to improve the country as well as help the country's recovery process from the damage of the war. She also emphasized that the spirit of a true democracy is to build a society in which everybody works together for the sake of improving the country's welfare.<sup>188</sup> Through her lectures Keller showed her support for Iwahashi's argument to the government and GHQ, and her lectures assisted in convincing people that welfare laws for the disabled were laws that would be essential for the growth of the country.

The public awards presented during the campaign also caught the attention of the public. These awards served as official recognition of the contributions made by people with disabilities who had dedicated themselves to improving the welfare of the disabled. Iwahashi who once again was the main interpreter for Keller and her secretary, Polly Thompson, selected people with disabilities as award recipients whose outstanding work had inspired society. He introduced the awardees to Helen Keller. Honma Kazuo and Matsui Shinjiro were both introduced to Keller

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<sup>188</sup> Iwahashi, Hideyuki. Aoi Tori no Uta: Helen Keller to Nippon (The song of the Bluebird: Helen Keller and Japan). (Braille edition vol. 2) p. 48.

as inspirational people. This recognition was a signal that Japanese people with disabilities through their work had begun to take an active place in society. (Moreover, by 1955 when Keller made her last visit to Japan, the number of people with disabilities who were working to improve the welfare of society had increased significantly.)

### **Welfare Laws for the Disabled Promulgated**

The response of the public to the Helen Keller Campaign and the enthusiasm displayed by the members of the United Association of the Blind to push for the improvement of the welfare services for the disabled made a strong impact on the government and GHQ. In December 1948, members of the national Diet began to discuss enacting welfare laws for the disabled. This particular topic was being discussed during the first session of the national Diet and continued through the second and third sessions. By the end of December the discussion was progressing toward promulgation of the law. By the Diet session of December 1949, the promulgation of laws was carried out and the laws were officially enacted in April of 1950.<sup>189</sup> The laws cover basically all types of physical disabilities; however, mental disabilities were not included. Issues concerning mental disabilities were not yet being considered by either the national government or by GHQ.

The Laws also promoted efforts of local governments to provide vocational training and job recruitment for people with disabilities. This was encouraging news for facilities supporting people with visual disabilities such as the Nippon Lighthouse Welfare Center for the Blind and the National Library for the Blind. Under the Welfare Laws for the Disabled, these institutions, including schools for the blind, were officially recognized by both the local and national

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<sup>189</sup> Nihon Hoso Kyokai (NHK). “Sono Toki Rekishi Wa Ugoita (Days of Historical Moments)”. Dedicated to Iwahashi Archive (Broadcasting edition).

government as institutions whose purpose was to aid people with visual disabilities. They were also assured the right to ask for necessary support from the government. During the prewar years through the Second World War most schools for the blind had already been placed under the management of local governments; however, any kind of support, financial or otherwise, was not officially guaranteed by law. Therefore, quite frequently schools had to come up with their own financial resources. Honma Kazuo in his autobiography wrote that as he was attending Hakodate School for the Blind, he frequently observed that teachers at the school went out and collected donations from people to obtain the necessary funds to run the school.<sup>190</sup> When Honma attended the school from the mid-1920s through the early 1930s, the school was already operating as a state school. Honma's account shows that educational and training facilities for people with disabilities that were operated by the local and national governments could not rely entirely on them for financial and resource support, as they did not have enough finances to provide strong support for these facilities.

### **Financial Support for Facilities Serving the Disabled**

After the enactment of the Welfare Laws for the Disabled, institutions founded for the purpose of supporting people with disabilities were entitled to resource and financial support from both the local and national governments. At the same time, these institutions were entrusted by the government to provide the necessary services to support the welfare of disabled people. They were also obligated to follow the guidelines and regulations set by the government. If they decided to provide services that were not listed in the guidelines or outside the official regulations, they had to ask for government approval, and the responsibility of securing funds or

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<sup>190</sup> Honma, Kazuo. *Yubi to Mimi de Yomu: Tenji Toshokan to Watashi (Reading with fingers and ears: Japan National Library for the Blind and I)*. (Audio edition) p. 26.

resources had to be borne by the institution.

Iwahashi Takeo's Lighthouse facility earned official recognition as a supportive facility for the welfare of people with visual disabilities. Its training facility was considered a nonprofit training center and the factory an employment facility for people with visual disabilities. As he decided to run a metal factory with his brother right after the war to provide employment opportunities for blind people, he had personally to ask for assistance from other private citizens in raising funds. A Lighthouse staff member recalled:

“When Iwahashi Takeo was alive, he did his very best to manage and run the facility as a private institution for the blind and maintained as such that there was very little involvement of the government. Iwahashi did have connections with the government, but he believed that positive outcomes for [the] welfare of people with visual disabilities would happen through the work of people, tireless advocacy, and [an] equal amount of cooperation with [the] private sector and the government. Iwahashi did not want the government to dominate services that our Lighthouse Center could provide for blind people. He also expected very little aid, especially financial aid from the government for this facility. As we began to publish and distribute braille and large print textbooks to schools for the blind entrusted by the government in 1960 from the point we pretty much have operated this facility under the supervision of the government; we do receive financial support from the government though.”[author's translation]<sup>191</sup>

Taking on the publication of braille textbooks for all schools for the blind throughout Japan by the Nippon Lighthouse Welfare Center for the Blind in Osaka was one of the results of the enactment of the Welfare Laws for the Disabled. As briefly discussed in previous chapters, the opening of the Kyoto School for the Blind and the Tōkyō School for the Blind were followed by the opening of more schools for the blind throughout the country. Obtaining a sufficient number of school materials including textbooks for students had been a big problem for these schools. Although the problem was well known to educators and the government, the necessary financial support was not provided by either the government or the private sector to pay for these

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<sup>191</sup> Hayase, Makiko. “Oral Interview by Mochizuki Chikako”. Osaka: Japan. Nippon Lighthouse Welfare Center for the Blind. July 16, 2008.

braille publications. The Osaka Mainichi Newspaper Publishing Company took on the task of publishing and distributing textbooks, but that did not solve the problem of the shortage of textbooks in the schools. Lack of funds prevented Osaka Mainichi Newspaper Publishing Company from being able to produce a sufficient number of braille textbooks and distributing them to schools.<sup>192</sup>

Things began to change in the spring of 1948 as compulsory education for children with disabilities was officially enforced. Since the government recognized the importance of secondary education for all children including those who were disabled, educators in turn looked to the government for help in providing the necessary support for disabled students as required by law. Enforcement of the new laws also made it possible for schools for the disabled to make improvements to the secondary education for students with disabilities. As the law stated that both local and the national agent belonging to government offices should work with institutions and facilities support welfare of people with disabilities and provide services for them for the enhancement and advancement of welfare services for disabled. In 1960 the law also added that financial aid should be provided to disabled students so that they could complete their secondary education. These funds gave blind students equal access to the same informational materials as other school children and provided the funds to advance the quality of classroom teaching that was much behind that of the regular public schools. Distribution of free braille textbooks also extended to the high school level, and like textbooks for other pre-high school grade levels, the cost of those braille textbooks was covered by the Ministry of Education.

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<sup>192</sup> Iwahashi, Hideyuki, Unno Yoshio Editor. *Lighthouse 40nenn shi (Nippon Lighthouse Welfare Center for the Blind the 40 Years of History)*. Dedicated to Iwahashi Archive (scanned edition) p. 189.

## **Issues of Equal Employment Opportunities**

When the welfare laws for the disabled were enforced, there was no clear statement regarding the rights of equality for people with disabilities. The laws only indicated that both local and national government agencies should generally cooperate with institutions providing support to the disabled to ensure they received necessary training. The new laws did not press the issue or mandate any hiring practices requiring private corporations or government agencies to hire the disabled. Although the law required the local governments to provide education and vocational training for people with disabilities and that they should encourage corporations to hire people with disabilities, the laws did not specifically mention that private sector or government offices were required to hire the disabled. The only employment issue indicated in the law was that the occupations of massage therapy and acupuncture could be undertaken by people who completed the required training and obtained an official license issued by the government. It further stated that people with visual disabilities could also obtain such a license by completing a government-issued exam as did others interested in practicing the profession.

This part of the law produced a significant result. The system of apprenticeship that had existed among acupuncturists, massage therapists, and trainees since the Tokugawa period when they were under the guild system became no longer the main method of learning these skills. The standard examination system needed to be created and set up by the government to determine what the qualifications would be for official license holders for these occupations as medical professionals. This situation made people with visual disabilities aware of the necessity for a more efficient and better quality training system so that they could compete equally with sighted people who wished to enter the profession. In other words, acupuncture, massage therapy, and

moxibustion were no longer exclusive professions for blind people.

In 1950 the government officially implemented the licensing system for the occupation of acupuncture, massage therapy, and moxibustion. This had both negative and positive effects for blind people. Many sighted people had already begun, after the government officially implemented the system of licensing, to enter the profession. This made the profession more competitive for blind people. At the same time, however, this newly implemented system led schools for the blind throughout Japan to re-organize their training courses for acupuncture, massage therapy, and moxibustion. The contents of the training courses became more difficult and challenging, giving trainees an opportunity to advance the level of their skills. Well-known prestigious schools for the blind such as the Tōkyō School for the Blind and the Kyoto School for the Blind decided to offer new courses to produce well-trained and -qualified blind instructors who could then work at schools for the blind. This plan created a new profession for those blind people who already had advanced skills in the occupation.

Although the percentage of blind people who obtained a license to practice acupuncture and massage therapy remained at 55 percent from the 1950s through the 1980s, the number of blind instructors hired by schools for the blind increased compared to the prewar period.<sup>193</sup> During the prewar period only 2 to 3 percent of blind teachers were being hired by schools for the blind. After the welfare laws for the disabled had been enacted and the government's official licensing system was in place, the number of blind people who were hired by schools for the blind increased by 20 to 30 percent after 1950.<sup>194</sup> This increase was due to the fact that schools for the blind now had many vacancies to fill for acupuncture, massage therapy, and moxibustion

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<sup>193</sup> Nihon Mojin Rengokai. Nihon Mojin Rengokai 50nen no Ayumi (the History of Japan Federation of the Blind: 50 years of Progress. Tokyo: Japan.Nihon Mojin Rengo Kai. 1998, (braille edition vol. 5) p. 74.

<sup>194</sup> IBID, 74.

instructors. Furthermore, many local schools for the blind provided treatment services for neighboring communities at discounted prices so that students under the supervision of instructors could practice acupuncture and massage therapy to advance their skills. Any profits realized through these services went toward funds to support the school.<sup>195</sup>

Regular school courses such as Japanese, algebra, and history were in the majority of cases taught by sighted instructors at schools for the blind. It was unusual and rare that a blind instructor would teach regular school courses as Matsui Shinjiro did. Matsui taught at the Yamanashi School for the Blind (Yamanashi Mōgakkō) from 1946 through 1950. There were also a few cases in which a blind person would be hired by a mainstream school. One of these rare instances was the case of Sarutani Keiko who was a graduate of the privately run Yokohama School for the Blind. According to the *90-Year-History of Yokohama School for the Blind* (*Yokohama Kunmoin 90nen no Ayumi*), two female students went to the United States to study at the Perkins Institute for the Blind in 1931. They continued their study at the Perkins Institute until 1934. Upon their return both worked as teachers at the Yokohama School for the Blind. In 1950 Sarutani became a teacher at another school founded by one of the board members of the Yokohama School. This was a Christian school for girls and later on became a coed school. Sarutani continued to teach English at the school until she retired in early 1980.<sup>196</sup>

Generally, cases like Matsui Shinjiro and Sarutani Keiko were considered the exception, and those instructors were considered extremely lucky for being at the right place at the right time. Blind advocates, however, considered these two cases as the most natural and “should-be-

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<sup>195</sup> Shizuoka Kenritsu Mogakko (Shizuoka School for the Blind). *Shizuoka Kenritsu Mogakko 100nen shi (The 100-Year-History of Shizuoka School for the Blind)*. Shizuoka: Japan. Shizuoka Kenritsu Mogakko. 1996, (braille edition vol. 3) p. 67.

<sup>196</sup> Takei, Ine. *Kamiga Kakaseto Omoide (My memory of Perkins)*. Tokyo: Japan. Nihon Kirisuto Shinbunsha. 1972, (audio edition) p. 156.

this-way” cases. Whether a person has eyesight or not, the individual should be considered a qualified candidate for a teaching position if he possesses the required credentials.

By 1989 blind students were officially allowed to take examinations in braille for governmental positions, including for a teaching license. This new regulation enabled people with visual disabilities to take examinations given by the government, apply for government positions, and have a route to obtaining a teaching license. However, since the actual hiring decision was entrusted to each individual school, it remained a problem that in many cases more sighted people were and are being hired than people with visual disabilities. The principal of the Hamamatsu School for the Blind (*Hamamatsu Mōgakō*) stated in 2009:

“We still have a long way to go until an individual with visual disabilities can be hired by schools, government offices, and private corporations and for such a case to be absolutely ordinary. Welfare laws for the disabled need to be revised as the American Disabilities Act and press government agencies, schools, and private corporations to hire more people with visual disabilities. A prejudiced idea such as people who do not have their eyesight are unable to carry out tasks other people can needs to be discarded.”[author’s translation]<sup>197</sup>

A blind college student who was applying for a teaching position at the Tōkyō public schools recounts: “During the interview they asked me things like what do you do if one of your students is suddenly missing? How could you locate the student without being able to see? Honestly, it was to me like being told that I cannot do this job because I am blind.”[author’s translation]<sup>198</sup>

Blind advocates considered the lack of employment opportunities for people with visual disabilities a serious problem. The 1970 revision of the welfare laws allowed the establishment of workshop-type factories for the disabled. Those facilities could hire people with disabilities

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<sup>197</sup> Ito, Tomoharu at Hamamatsu School for the Blind. “Oral Interview by Chikako Mochizuki”. September 30, 2009.

<sup>198</sup> Personal Communication. “Oral Interview by Chikako Mochizuki”. September 30, 2009.

and at the same time be recognized as vocational training facilities eligible for financial aid from the government. Under the law, the government partially supported the operation and management of these workshop facilities. These workshop factories have been mainly operated as industrial manufacturers producing office and home goods such as paper, cups, and kitchen appliances. They also offer training services such as computer operations, typing, and clerical skills. This set-up gave people with disabilities a place to work and earn a living. Working for a workshop/factory meant that they had a new employment option besides massage therapy and acupuncture.

The purpose of workshops, however, was not just for the hiring of disabled workers. The main purpose of these workshops was to train people with disabilities to become workers with sufficient skills to work outside of special workshops for the disabled. The goal of both Iwahashi and Matsui was that blind people would have equal employment opportunities the same as sighted people and would be able to work under the same working condition as sighted people. Workshops were to be a temporary place of employment until one found a permanent position with a corporate office or a manufacturing company. This constituted a very positive outlook; however, for this goal to become reality, the cooperation of others was required, such as the private sector or government agencies.

It was usual for representatives from these workshops for the disabled to visit corporations and government offices to advocate for employing people with disabilities. One such representative at the Japan Japan Vocational Development Center for the Blind remarked

“I go to factories and company offices to convince them that people with physical disabilities are just as efficient as any other sighted or non-disabled people who apply to work for the company. It seems so simple to point this out, but it is the hardest thing to convince them that people with disabilities could have as high as or higher potential of being good workers for the company or offices. Even after I explain the training and skills that they have, private corporations and even government offices are still reluctant

to hire people with disabilities.”[author’s translation]<sup>199</sup>

According to the Japan Vocational Development Center for the Blind, about seven to ten people come annually to the facility to receive vocational training. One staff member said, “We usually have roughly 40 to 45 percent of those seven to ten clients replaced annually. In our workshop we have roughly 20 to 30 workers yearly, and they are either totally blind or partially sighted.”<sup>200</sup> Those who tried to go through vocational training were in many cases college graduates.

### **Increasing Educational and Professional Options**

Since 1948, although there were obstacles, students with visual disabilities began to pursue higher education. Doshisha University (*Doshisha Daigaku*) as well as Kwansei Gakuin University (*Kwansei Gakuin*) were two unique and rare higher educational institutions that accept students with visual disabilities. Obtaining a degree provided many challenges to those blind students; however, the most challenging obstacle was the fact that they could not find any employment despite their having earned degrees. Going back to a school for the blind to obtain a license in acupuncture and massage therapy became a common case scenario from the 1950s through the 1970s for these college graduates.

This state of affairs created questions and criticisms among blind educators and students. Leading advocates for the blind along with teachers at schools for the blind repeatedly met with local and national government authorities on educational issues. They sought to persuade them to design courses to give students, starting with adolescents, training in independent living skills as

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<sup>199</sup> Personal Communication, Japan Vocational Development Center for the Blind. “Oral Interview by Chikako Mochizuki”. June 30, 2007.

<sup>200</sup> IBID.

well as vocational training. Advocates argued that welfare laws for the disabled allow schools for the blind to offer massage therapy and acupuncture training courses at the high school level and above. Therefore, schools for the blind should be able to offer new courses to elementary school students in various independent living skills (such as orientation and mobility, crafting, typing, and abacus) that could help them in obtaining some advanced skills to qualify them later on for occupations other than massage therapy and acupuncture.

In the early 1960s the government, through the Ministry of Education, amended regulations so that schools for the blind and workshop facilities that support people with disabilities could organize training sessions to teach independent living skills. They could also offer training that was commonly considered vocational training. They could offer this training as a part of regular school courses or as part of after-school club activities. Matsui Shinjiro working as a counselor/instructor at the National Tōkyō Training Facility for the Blind (*Kokuritsu Tōkyō Komeiryo*, later *Kokuritsu Tōkyō Mojin Iryo Center*), used this opportunity to promote training in typing to elementary-level students and above in all schools for the blind. He and other advocates also promoted teaching of the abacus to prepare blind students and adults to be able to take proficiency tests and receive certification as experts in different levels of abacus. Many sighted people took such training as part of their vocational skills.

By 1975 schools for the blind throughout Japan offered proficiency tests for the use of abacus and certificates of the level of accomplishment achieved were issued by the government. Because of the training course, many blind students were able to become proficient in using the abacus without attending after-school private tutoring school generally known as *Soroban Juku*.<sup>201</sup> This program was promoted by a small number of blind people who became the first

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<sup>201</sup> Ito, Tomoharu at Hamamatsu School for the Blind. “Oral Interview by Chikako Mochizuki”. September 30, 2009.

teachers to teach abacus in Japan. One of these teachers was Shimizu Fumio (b. 1908).<sup>202</sup> He said, “If you pass the third level of abacus exam, then you can work for a bank and other small financial corporations.”[author’s translation]<sup>203</sup>

Katakana typewriter (generally known as Kana Type in Japan) training, which Matsui also promoted in schools for the blind throughout Japan, was generally used in offices of the government agencies, private corporations, and in some cases in both civil and criminal courts.<sup>204</sup> The use of the katakana typewriter by blind people was not new in the 1960s. For instance, Honma Kazuo who entered the Kwansei Gakuin University in 1938 used the katakana typewriter for taking exams and communicating with professors in writing.<sup>205</sup> Matsui Shinjiro also learned to use the typewriter while he was recovering from his injury at the Imperial Army Hospital in 1939. Then as Honma had done, Matsui used the typewriter in his psychology studies at Japan University (*Nihon Daigaku*) in 1943.<sup>206</sup> Although blind people could not read what they typed, they saw this typewriter as a useful writing tool, particularly when it was necessary for them to communicate with sighted people who did not read braille.

Until the 1960s, however, no one thought of a blind person becoming a typist. Matsui, through his experience using the katakana typewriter, realized that with efficient typing skills a blind person would be fully capable of becoming an excellent typist. He came up with a training strategy to combine typing training with the use of a Dictaphone so that even a blind person could type out whatever materials had been recorded by dictation. Matsui drafted training

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<sup>202</sup> NHK Ed, *Hataraku Mojintachi* (*Blind people Who Achieved Independence and Career*), Osaka: Nihon Mojin Fukushi Kenkyukai, 1975, (audio edition) 107.

<sup>203</sup> *Blind people Who Achieved Independence and Career*, (audio edition) 120.

<sup>204</sup> Matsui, Shinjiro. “Public Lecture at Iwate School for the Blind”. Iwate: Japan. Iwate School for the Blind. July, 1972.

<sup>205</sup> Furusawa, Toshio. Honma Kazuo: Ko no Hito So no Jidai (Honma Kazuo: His Life and History). (Audio edition) p. 76.

<sup>206</sup> Matsui, “Public Lecture at Iwate School for the Blind,” audio recording, July, 1972.

manuals according to the level of typing speed which were based on attaining a standard speed of 80 characters per minute as the lowest acceptable level of typing speed. Matsui's training manuals and methods became useful as schools for the blind trained typing instructors from among their teachers.<sup>207</sup> Matsui himself organized a series of workshops to train skilled typing instructors to teach typing to blind students. As young blind students went through the training program, they became skilled typists. By 1980 three blind people held typist positions in corporate offices and the civil courthouse in Tōkyō.

The Japan Vocational Development Center for the Blind began recruiting from around the country people with visual disabilities to come to the facility to receive various vocational training in areas such as handicrafts, manufacturing, typing, and computer operations. Unlike the Nippon Lighthouse Welfare Center for the Blind, the National Vocational Training Center for the Blind had difficulties in providing follow-up services for those who came into the facility for training and went back to the area where they were from upon completion of the training. As one staff member commented,

“The ideal situation for our facility is to be able to provide nationwide follow-up services for those who have completed their vocational training in our facility so that they could succeed in finding employment opportunities throughout the area, or build facilities such as the Japan Vocational Development Center for the Blind in other areas of the country so that services we provide would be distributed evenly throughout. That is our next goal.”[author’s translation]<sup>208</sup>

### **Fundraising to Expand Library and Training Services**

The Japan National Braille Library for the Blind (*Nihon Tenji Toshokan*) that Honma Kazuo founded in 1940 continued its operations throughout the war. Despite facing challenges

<sup>207</sup> IBID.

<sup>208</sup> Personal Communication, an employee at Japan vocational Development Center for the blind. “Oral Interview by Chikako Mochizuki”. June 30, 2007.

such as a shortage of money, materials (such as paper), and volunteer braille transcribers to acquire more braille books, Honma's library continued its operations of lending books to patrons all over Japan. Soon after the establishment of Honma's library, the Japanese government in 1941 recognized it as a nonprofit facility providing library services for people with visual disabilities. However, the government could not provide any financial assistance. Thus, Honma relied on support from his family in Hokkaido and donations from prominent people in the country.

As discussed in the third chapter the library's support of blind veterans by offering them its services drew the attention of the local and national newspapers. Through the media prominent people began to notice the work of the library for the blind. When the war ended in 1945, however, Honma faced difficulty in obtaining both financial and material resources. Iwahashi Takeo launched the Helen Keller Campaign in the beginning of 1948 to honor Keller's second visit to Japan (in late August through mid-October 1948) and to promote more public awareness for the disabled. Honma saw this as an opportunity to fund expansion of his library's services. He requested that part of the funds raised be used for that purpose. However, his request was not granted by the organizer of the campaign.

Honma then turned to raising donations from the private sector. Honma's collaboration with the private sector resulted in familiarizing those with government connections with the library's operations and need to expand. They appealed to the government to provide some financial support. Honma's library was already recognized as a nonprofit facility that was providing blind people with library services. Therefore, soon after the enforcement of the new Welfare Laws for the Disabled, the National Library for the Blind began to receive some financial support from the government. This support was given with the understanding the

National Library would provide library services to the disabled by lending them braille books free of charge and by increasing the library's collection and variety of braille books that could be lent out to all ages of patrons throughout Japan.

One of Honma's concerns was the fairly substantial cost of mailing braille books. When he first established his library, he himself paid for all postage costs so that patrons would be able to return books with no charge. When the war escalated, he negotiated with the local post office to receive a discount on postage charges. Donations from prominent people helped him meet the postage costs. As Japan was recovering from damage from the war, it was a very hard task for Honma to secure adequate funds to cover these costs. Since mailing out library books to patrons all over the country had not generally been part of the regular library task load, Honma and his colleagues appealed for governmental support in particular to cover high mailing costs.

It took over a decade for the government to allow braille books and other literary materials to be mailed anywhere in the country free of charge as "free matters for the blind." The government defined "literary materials" for the blind as essential information materials in support of education, living, health, and employment matters relevant to the daily life of people. The services that Honma's library provided to patrons helped the government come to realize that the importance of reading for blind people was as great as it was for sighted people. This realization allowed Honma to further expand his library services.

Throughout the 1950s and since the library had begun operations, lending braille books had been the primary library service for patrons. In 1960 Honma decided to launch a recorded reading project. Instead of transcribing printed books into braille, books would be read and recorded onto cassette tapes. Honma and his library staff recruited a number of volunteers who could read and record books onto cassettes. The recorded books became an instant hit among

patrons. These books on cassette could be made much faster than a braille book. Thus, in a shorter amount of time more books of greater variety could be produced, better serving the needs and interests of patrons. Recording books of all types allowed patrons to have access to many different types of books, particularly school textbooks and preparatory workbooks for college entrance examinations.

By 1995 the library began to offer a “Personal Face-to-Face Reading Service” mainly for young patrons aiming to enter colleges and universities who needed to have textbooks and entrance examination preparatory books read to them by volunteers.<sup>209</sup> This service required that Honma to recruit many volunteers who could meet with patrons and read to them for a certain period of time. The government supported this service and provided financial support for volunteers. Through the support of the government and the rising popularity of this service, Honma worked to spread it to local public libraries throughout the Tōkyō area.<sup>210</sup> This made it possible for blind people residing in the Tōkyō area to use public libraries close to where they lived. The expansion of the “Personal Face-to-Face Reading Service” started at the National Library for the Blind but soon spread to facilities other than the National Library to provide a more convenient service to people with visual disabilities.

Welfare laws for the disabled were enforced not only because people with disabilities, including people with visual disabilities, pushed the promulgation and enforcement of laws. The strength of self-advocacy demonstrated by people with visual disabilities got the government to recognize that supporting people with disabilities in society was important and laws that could assist such actions were a necessary element for the advancement of Japanese society. But other

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<sup>209</sup> Honma, Kazuo. *Waga Jinsei: Nippon Tenji Toshokan* (*My life: Japan Library for the blind*). Tokyo: Japan. Kabushikigaisha Nihon tosho Center. 2001, (Audio edition) p. 158.

<sup>210</sup> *Waga Jinsei: Nippon Tenji Toshokan* (*My life: Japan Library for the blind*), (Audio edition) 158.

activist advocates for the blind joined in the effort. The new laws encouraged blind advocates to join together to get both national and local governments involved in the operation of facilities.

The Japan Vocational Development Center for the Blind for instance hired a former government official as a co-executive director to work with Matsui Shinjiro, the director of the facility. The National Library for the Blind also had its connection to the government. One of the board members of the library was a retired government official. Whenever the library needed to communicate with the government, Honma and the board member became the primary links between the library and the government. Although both Honma's library and Matsui's vocational Development center were technically privately run, the facilities had former government officials who had held important and influential supervisory positions involved in their work. Facilities considered this type of connection with the government favorable. A staff member at the National Vocational Training Center for the Blind emphasized:

"It is good to have someone who used to work for the government associating with us as either a board of director or an executive director. Our co-executive director is a former government official who worked for Ministry of Welfare. When our executive director , Matsui Shinjiro, was still alive we used to put the name of co-executive director with Matsui whenever we submitted reports or some types of proposals to the government, hoping that the name of the former government official would have a certain impact and it usually did." [author's translation]<sup>211</sup>

Having association with a person who had had a close connection with the government also provided an institution supporting the disabled a certain aura of prestige and professional authority. This situation is quite different when compared to facilities and organizations in the United States that support people with disabilities. Privately run facilities (such as Lion's World Services for the Blind in Little Rock, Arkansas, or the Colorado Center for the Blind) that

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<sup>211</sup>Personal Communication an employee at Japan vocational Development Center for the blind. "Oral Interview by Chikako Mochizuki". June 30, 2007.

provide training in independent living skills, orientation and mobility, and vocations were managed and maintained by a group of educators and trainers, but in usual case did not have a staff or board person with strong ties to either state or national governments.

“We need the support of the government both prefectural and national. Without the support facilities support for people with disabilities would have hard time operating. When we organize fundraising programs to collect donations from people in the private sector, it absolutely helps if we make it clear that our facility has a good association with the government and is well-thought of by them.”[author’s translation]<sup>212</sup>

Welfare laws for the disabled opened the way for facilities that dedicate their organizations to serving the disabled to expand their welfare services and to create new programs to further help support the disabled. The law also gave them venues of support from the government and from the general public. For instance, library services for people with visual disabilities have expanded from lending braille books to patrons to transcribing printed books into braille, making audio books, lending books on cassette tapes, publishing and selling braille books, and selling assistive tools for people with disabilities such as braille watches, alarm clocks, scales, and various home appliances, including braille writing tools.<sup>213</sup> Services spread around the Tōkyō area as well as throughout Japan so that each prefecture could have a local library for the blind that made it easier for people to sign up for library services.<sup>214</sup>

What the leading blind advocates (Iwahashi Takeo, Honma Kazuo, and Matsui Shinjiro) envisioned was that the welfare laws for the disabled would be the tool with which to reform society into a place where people with visual disabilities could become actively involved in all the regular social activities of society. They recognized that education and employment

<sup>212</sup> IBID.

<sup>213</sup> Honma, Kazuo. *Yubi to Mimi de Yomu: Tenji Toshokan to Watashi (Reading with fingers and ears: Japan National Library for the Blind and I)*. Tokyo: Japan. Kabushikigaisha Iwanami Shoten; 1980, (audio edition) p. 146

<sup>214</sup> Honma, Kazuo. *Waga Jinsei: Nippon Tenji Toshokan (My life: Japan Library for the blind)*. (Audio edition) p. 100.

opportunities were two of the most essential elements for participating in social activities. Social equality for blind people meant to them that blind people should be empowered so that they have available to them the same opportunities as those available to others. They believed that these opportunities needed to be guaranteed by laws.

Convincing society of the importance of equality for people with visual disabilities, not to mention defining what that equality was exactly, was an extremely difficult task for those blind activist-advocates. Although they foresaw certain challenges and obstacles, they did not expect how misinformed society was about people with disabilities. Helen Keller's three visits to Japan temporarily drew the attention of the Japanese public to the disabled. Yet, when the issue came to education and employment, blind advocates faced challenges in educating the public and the government of the realities of the road blocks to opportunity in the daily lives of the disabled.

Establishing workshops where blind people worked while being trained in typing, computer operation, and use of other assistive tools helped to open new options for employment for them. It took almost 20 to 25 years before equal employment opportunity for blind people was actively promoted and new paths to new employment opportunities gradually began to become reality rather than merely an ideal. Promotion of katakana typewriter training for young blind students starting in the mid-1960s, computing operation/programming training that began in the late 1970s, and, more recently, the use of word processor and database software all contributed to the opening of new employment opportunities for blind people.

## **Working for Equality: Activism and Advocacy by Blind**

### **Intellectuals in Japan, 1912-1995**

#### **Chapter 5: Matsui Shinjiro: Working toward Equal Access to Education and Employment**

#### **Introduction**

Iwahashi Takeo's work to improve welfare services for blind people was taken up by other blind intellectuals who supported his advocacy work. Their concept of improving access to all levels of education, increasing employment options for blind people, and providing them with sufficient services to support these goals and their general welfare rested mainly on the goals of pushing for compulsory secondary education for students with disabilities, equal access to higher education for students with visual disabilities, and efficient and productive vocational training.

But advocates for the blind were increasingly looking to the accomplishments of the West for new methods already tested and used there that could be adapted to Japan to allow overall welfare services for the blind to advance more rapidly. These methods included technological advances, inter-cultural exchanges and study abroad programs, partnerships between schools for the blind in Japan and abroad, strategies for negotiating with governmental and educational agencies, fighting for administrative flexibility to accommodate blind employees and students, and training innovations at vocational schools. All had a role to play in bettering the lives of the blind and increasing their education and employment opportunities

This chapter focuses on another prominent advocate for the blind, Matsui Shinjiro (1914-1995), a blind war veteran who went on to found in 1976 the Japan Vocational Development

Center for the Blind (*Nihon Mojin Shokuno Kaihatsu Center*). It was because of the tireless efforts and enthusiastic, resourceful leadership displayed by Matsui, his long innovative career in advocating for the blind, and the programs of his vocational training center that more employment options and greater educational access gradually began to open up.

Matsui was born in 1914 in the small town of Kofu City (*Kofu shi*) in Yamanashi prefecture. He had a “normal childhood” [author’s translation], and he was known early on as a boy who had good leadership ability and was well-liked by his fellow students.<sup>215</sup> After completing elementary school, he entered Kofu City Business School (*Kofu shiritsu shogyo gakko*), and after graduating in 1932 he began working for a private corporation.<sup>216</sup> In 1937 he was drafted into the Japanese army and stationed in Manchuria. He was injured in the war and subsequently lost his sight in 1938 at the age of twenty-four.

Having experienced in his own life the same obstacles to learning and employment choices as his students and other blind people faced, Matsui was conscious of the great need to “level the playing field” in order to achieve some measure of equality between sighted and non-sighted individuals. From the postwar era beginning in 1945 until his death in 1995, Matsui was an enthusiastic and aggressive advocate for equal educational access and employment opportunities for the blind. He was always awake to any new avenue that would serve or could be adapted to improve the general welfare for the disabled.

He introduced new technologies such as the Optacon, the katakana typewriter, and later the word processor and computer into mainstream use by blind individuals. In particular,

<sup>215</sup> Matsui Shinjiro den Kenkyukai Ed. *The Welfare Systems for the Blind in Japan in the New Era: A Record of Matsui Shinjiro During the 50 Years of Postwar Japan (Mojin Fukushi no Atarashii Jidai: Matsui Shinjiro no Sengo 50nen)*, braille ed., vol. 1 (Tokyo: Fuzanbo Press, 2005), 15.

<sup>216</sup> Matsui, *The Welfare Systems for the Blind*, braille ed., vol. 1, 16.

Matsui's success in negotiating with the U.S. inventors and developers of the Optacon to bring it to Japan was of great benefit to the blind for it allowed them to gain access to college course materials (such as textbooks) and other reading materials that were not in an accessible format. These efforts increased the communication tools available to blind people and consequently new job options, access to published materials, and ease in reading and writing. He approached responsible agencies, universities, schools, and others to promote and negotiate accommodations for the blind such as extra time for completing exams for braille user-examinees, university entrance exams and exams for jobs in governmental agencies in braille, equal participation as full-time college students, and equal employment opportunities for the blind for jobs in higher educational institutions and national and prefectural government offices in Japan.

Although entering into the regular workforce or educational mainstream and competing with sighted people was and is still quite challenging for blind people, it is thanks to Matsui's advocacy work and his vocational training center that more employment options became available for the blind. Matsui, however, had to first face his own struggle for rehabilitation that helped him arrive at his personal philosophy and life's work as a well-known and respected teacher, mentor, leader, and passionate advocate for the blind.

### **A Blind War Veteran's Struggle for Rehabilitation**

Matsui became an inspiring and one of the leading advocates for blind people during the postwar era from 1945 till his death in 1995. He shared the same hopeful view for postwar Japan as did other leading advocates for the blind such as Iwahashi and Honma. Unlike Iwahashi and Honma, however, Matsui had become blind later in life. It was perhaps a bigger blow to his spirit than for those who became blind in childhood, as he had spent his life up to that point without

any physical limitations to be accommodated for. But he was inspired by the proactive efforts of the imperial government to rehabilitate injured war veterans so that they could continue their contributions to the country. This chance for rehabilitation was a turning point in Matsui's life. Looking back in his autobiography, he says about his active childhood:

"I grew up as a normal child. Playing baseball with my school friends was my main hobby during my childhood and photography was another hobby which I had in my adulthood. Losing my eyesight never came into my mind; therefore, it took quite a while for me to be able to face reality after my injury." [author's translation]<sup>217</sup>

Matsui faced considerable challenges during his rehabilitation years, but he never failed to proclaim how fortunate he was compared to blind civilians to be able to go through rehabilitation training supported by the imperial government. According to Matsui, the rehabilitation training consisted of both educational and vocational training and included daily medical treatment. In his judgment, the rehabilitation training for wounded and disabled veterans in Japan at that time was the best training program in the world, even exceeding the rehabilitation program available to disabled veterans in Germany.<sup>218</sup>

Rehabilitation programs like Matsui's were typically designed jointly by medical personnel, counseling staff, and military officials to fit the needs of each individual wounded or disabled veteran, as Matsui he acknowledged: "The program was designed to fit the needs of an individual instead of making participants fit into a rigid program." [author's translation]<sup>219</sup> He describes how counselors and medical doctors communicated with each war veteran so that they

<sup>217</sup> Matsui Shinjiro, *The Face in My Hand: The Autobiography of a Blind Man Dedicated to the Independence of Blind People in Japan* (*Te no naka no kao: shikaku shogaisha no jiritsu no yume wo oitsuzuketa shitsumeisha no kiroku*), audio ed. (Tokyo: Tachibana Shuppan, 1990), 1.

<sup>218</sup> Matsui, *The Face in My Hand*, audio ed., 36.

<sup>219</sup> Matsui, *The Face in My Hand*, audio ed., 18.

could design a vocational training program suitable to the interests and abilities of each individual participant.

### **The Challenge of University Education**

Matsui received vocational training for his initial interests in music and acupuncture. However, neither training course worked out very well for Matsui, as he came to realize he had no interest in pursuing either as a profession. As for music, he felt that he simply did not possess any special talent enough to make a career out of it. He says in his autobiography,

“I also received some training in massage therapy and acupuncture, but I was not particularly interested in those professions and did not want to pursue the training further, even though I was told that these were the conventional occupations for blind people.”[author’s translation]<sup>220</sup>

Instead, Matsui looked into other possibilities that would involve more advanced study and lead to better employment opportunities. His counselors understood his intentions and were enthusiastic about his ambitions to complete his college degree; the imperial government as well agreed to support him. That support made it possible for Matsui to enter Nihon University (*Nihon daigaku*) and began his studies under the psychology professor, Watanabe Toru.<sup>221</sup>

In his autobiography Matsui frequently praises Japan’s rehabilitation program for wounded war veterans, and he had good reason for his praise of this program. Prior to Matsui’s entrance to Nihon University, the imperial government made certain that he would complete the necessary training to prepare him and give him the tools to meet the challenges of his coming

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<sup>220</sup> Matsui, *The Face in My Hand*, audio ed., 18.

<sup>221</sup> Matsui, *The Welfare Systems for the Blind*, braille ed., vol. 1, 53.

college years. The comprehensive preparatory training which he received was a well-structured and -coordinated program that consisted of living skills, literacy, and academic training.

Although he was respected and given certain privileges as a wounded war veteran, Matsui was no stranger to stiff challenges during his college years. Unlike Honma Kazuo who was able to have his textbooks and course materials transcribed into braille by others, according to Matsui's autobiography, he transcribed all his course materials, including textbooks, on his own. It took him quite some time to transcribe all these materials. He had to balance and coordinate his time between transcribing and studying, but despite the challenge, he completed his undergraduate degree by 1944 when he was thirty.<sup>222</sup> He later continued his studies in the same field as a part-time graduate student commuting between his hometown of Kofu in Yamanashi prefecture and Nihon University in Tōkyō.<sup>223</sup>

In chapters 2 and 3 two other leading blind advocates are discussed who also successfully pursued college degrees. Therefore, Matsui was not the first blind full-time student to obtain a college degree. Despite the success of Iwahashi Takeo, Honma Kazuo, and then Matsui, receiving a higher education was still a significant obstacle for the average blind person.

### **Braille and the Katakana Typewriter**

One of the first things Matsui learned during his rehabilitation was to read and write braille and to type. Given these powerful new means to communicate, learn, and interact with others provided hope and incentive to Matsui as he progressed in his rehabilitation adjustment program and prepared himself to enter higher education. It made him realize the importance of

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<sup>222</sup> Matsui, *The Face in My Hand*, audio ed., 66.

<sup>223</sup> Matsui, *The Face in My Hand*, audio ed., 67.

facing reality and moving forward rather than sorrowfully looking back to the time when he had perfect eyesight. The phrase, “Braille is the window of future learning,” became Matsui’s own slogan as he worked to overcome each obstacle he encountered.<sup>224</sup>

From the accomplishments of Louis Braille, the inventor of braille letters, and Ishikawa Kuraji, the inventor of Japanese braille, Matsui developed a renewed hope and belief in the power of the individual to invent and foster change. Thanks to schools for the blind, braille had become a common tool by the time Matsui lost his eyesight in 1938 to enable blind people to read and write.<sup>225</sup> Matsui recognized braille as an efficient literacy tool for blind people, but it was not enough for him to become merely an efficient reader and writer of braille. The more efficient he became in using braille, the more he realized that those who did not know braille still had no useful communication tool. “Knowing braille worked well while communicating with people who knew how to read and write in braille, but when I tried to communicate with people who did not know any braille I realized that I needed to learn other means of communication.”[author’s translation]<sup>226</sup> In order to have a better means of communicating with people who did not use braille he decided to learn how to use the katakana typewriter. He says,

“I learned to type before the war by using an English typewriter, so when I began to learn to use a katakana typewriter it was not really hard since I knew the basics. Learning to use a katakana typewriter helped me to have better and smoother communication with others.”[author’s translation]<sup>227</sup>

The katakana typewriter was invented by Tanaka Taro in 1920 to type out katakana characters, which represent syllables (rather than pictographs). Katakana characters were mainly

<sup>224</sup> Matsui, *The Welfare Systems for the Blind*, braille ed., 25.

<sup>225</sup> Okawara Kingo, *A History of Braille (Tenji Hatatsu shi)*, braille ed., vol. 5 (Tokyo: Tenji Hatatsu shi Fukan Iinkai, 1987), 45.

<sup>226</sup> Matsui, *The Face in My Hand*, audio ed., 50.

<sup>227</sup> Matsui, *The Welfare Systems for the Blind*, braille ed., vol. 1, 44.

used to write words from foreign languages, and katakana had been most commonly used in governmental and military offices. By the mid-1930s blind people began to use this device as a general communication tool. Honma Kazuo, the founder of the National Library for the Blind (see chapter 3), also learned to use the typewriter to take exams and draft his papers during his college years (1936-1939).

Matsui used the typewriter from the beginning for corresponding purposes. Like Honma, Matsui used it to complete his college writing assignments and course exams. “All term papers and course exams were drafted on my katakana typewriter.”[author’s translation]<sup>228</sup> His use of the typewriter gave Matsui exposure to a new technology that would in his later years spark the idea of seeking new possibilities for education and employment of blind people in areas that could utilize the typewriter as an accommodating technology.

The experiences of his college years inspired him to advocate for young blind students who wished to pursue a college degree. He describes the absence of any accommodation for disabilities thus:

“The policy of the college was quite strict, and I was not allowed any time extension during the course examination. No reduction in any type of course assignments, either reading or writing, was allowed. I was treated the same as other sighted students. [The fact that I received] no special treatment as a student with visual disability trained me to persevere.”[author’s translation]<sup>229</sup>

Similar to the time of Honma Kazuo, a system of accommodation based on a student’s physical disability did not exist when Matsui entered Nihon University in 1940. Although this kind of treatment tested Matsui’s strength and motivation in a harsh way, it made him study seriously the meaning of equality for people with physical disabilities. The struggle of Matsui’s

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<sup>228</sup> Matsui, *The Face in My Hand*, audio ed., 52.

<sup>229</sup> Matsui, *The Face in My Hand*, audio ed., 57.

college years influenced his own teaching and helped form his philosophy of equal opportunity and access for blind people.

### **The Beginnings of a Network of Advocates and Supporters**

A key factor in Matsui's success as a teacher and advocate for the blind was the network of friends and supporters he began to build during the years of his rehabilitation program: he became acquainted with people who were willing to assist him. One of the people who assisted him was Soma Yasuo who was the CEO of a prominent department store in Tōkyō. He not only supplied Matsui with a katakana typewriter, but he also gave Matsui a guide dog imported from Germany to increase his mobility independence. The Japanese army, with the support of the Imperial Army Hospital where Matsui's rehabilitation training program was being conducted, began a testing program of breeding and training German shepherds as guide dogs for blind war veterans. Soma, being a prominent member of the Japan German Shepherds Association, was one of the people who were involved in coordinating this program. He was the first person to propose the importation of four German shepherd guide dogs to Japan in 1939. Matsui, through his association with Soma, became one of the first four guide dog users in Japan. His increased independence in mobility allowed him to leave the hospital frequently, and he gradually built friendships and a network among the public.

In his autobiography Matsui emphasizes how privileged he was to be able to enroll in the rehabilitation program as a blind wounded war veteran, even though the onset of his blindness due to his war injuries. At the same time he felt it was unfair to those who were excluded from the training program despite having the same visual disability as he had.<sup>230</sup> This appreciation of

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<sup>230</sup> Matsui, *The Face in My Hand*, audio ed., 85.

the unfairness of the system to most blind people drove him to pursue his teaching career and find platforms from which to become a strong advocate for increasing the opportunities for higher education and employment among blind people.

In early 1945 his hometown of Kofu was bombed, and Matsui lost his house and all his college course materials, including all his books, papers, and exams that he considered some of his most cherished possessions.<sup>231</sup> Having lost everything, Matsui and his wife were forced during mid 1945 through early 1946 to earn their living by selling vegetables on the black market in Tōkyō. He also did volunteer work running a small private tutoring school for neighborhood children. A biographer of Matsui writes, “Matsui taught kids from [his] neighborhood. Knowing that the parents of these kids were in economic hardship, Matsui and his wife did not charge them a penny.”[author’s translation]<sup>232</sup> Matsui’s generous nature would later attract many people with visual disabilities who regarded him as their trusted advisor.

### **Beginning a Teaching Career: Matsui and the Yamanashi School for the Blind**

In 1946 after the war, an opportunity opened for him to teach at a small teaching college in Yamanashi. About six months after he began his teaching career he was offered another opportunity to teach at the Yamanashi School for the Blind. There, he taught deaf and blind students, the first experiment in Japan of teaching children with both visual and hearing disabilities. In the United States training of deaf and blind students had already begun in the 1830s,<sup>233</sup> followed by the most famous and successful case of Helen Keller during the 1890s into

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<sup>231</sup> Matsui, *The Face in My Hand*, audio ed., 70.

<sup>232</sup> Matsui, *The Welfare Systems for the Blind*, braille ed., vol. 1, 58.

<sup>233</sup> Joseph P. Lash, *Helen and Teacher: The Story of Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan Macy* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1980), 18.

the early 1900s. In Japan, however, up until 1946 there had been no attempt to teach a student with both visual and hearing disabilities.<sup>234</sup> Matsui became the first teacher in Japan to tackle this challenge.

Matsui had worked hard to promote education for children with disabilities. Recruiting children with visual disabilities was often an uphill battle and meant that teachers at schools for the blind had to convince parents of these children that schooling is possible and it is valuable and necessary for these children and their future. He was always struck by the ignorance displayed by society regarding the education of children with physical disabilities. So, in 1947 when Matsui undertook the first case of teaching a deaf-blind child, it was a challenging one for Matsui and other staff members at the school. The only resources they could draw on were the developments made in the education of deaf-blind children in the United States. Since there had been no such cases in Japan, Matsui had to create his own education plan and tactics to teach the child. Matsui describes him thus:

“The deaf and blind child named Akiyama Tadao was about seven or eight years of age according to his mother. It was apparent that family members had not taught anything to the child not to mention any discipline. Thus, when I took the child to our school with a colleague of mine, his behavior was almost similar to that of a wild animal.”[author’s translation]<sup>235</sup>

Akiyama Tadao officially enrolled in the Yamanashi School in April of 1950. Matsui started in 1947 to prepare him to enroll in the school. By the time Akiyama entered the school, his wild animal-like behavior had been corrected, thanks to Matsui’s tireless work. Not only was the child’s behavior significantly improved, but he also readily learned to write braille soon after entering the school. Learning braille would be a critical bridge to communication and literacy.

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<sup>234</sup> Matsui, *The Welfare Systems for the Blind*, braille ed., vol. 1, 64.

<sup>235</sup> Matsui, *The Welfare Systems for the Blind*, braille ed. vol.1, 65.

Akiyama could not speak, but he surprised his parents by writing them a thank-you letter under Matsui's guidance.<sup>236</sup> Akiyama was not able to obtain full independence as he grew to adulthood, but he was able to handle most daily activities to take care of himself.<sup>237</sup> The success in teaching such a challenging child garnered many praises for Matsui, and in 1948 when Helen Keller made her second visit to Japan, Matsui received the Helen Keller Prize for his teaching work with Akiyama.<sup>238</sup> The prize had been established in 1948 to honor Keller's second visit to Japan, and was given to publically recognize an individual who was devoted to the welfare of people with disabilities and to improving the welfare services of the disabled in Japan.

### **Integrating the Blind into the Mainstream World**

Matsui, however, was not satisfied. His goal for his teaching career was to elevate the quality of education of blind students so that they could study with sighted students in an integrated educational atmosphere. His philosophy was that in order for people with disabilities to become as equally active contributors to society as the nondisabled, they should interact with as many people as possible instead of isolating themselves. Although Matsui understood the importance and value of schools for the blind, he hoped to achieve a more integrated educational system in the not-too-distant future. This was the overriding purpose of all his work.

“As soon as I began teaching at the Yamanashi School for the Blind I realized that students were simply starving for information such as what it meant to run a river, or what clouds in the sky looked like, or what was the ocean.”[author’s translation]<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Matsui, *The Welfare Systems for the Blind*, braille ed., vol. 1, 66.

<sup>237</sup> Matsui, *The Welfare Systems for the Blind*, braille ed., vol. 1, 65.

<sup>238</sup> Matsui *The Welfare Systems for the Blind*, braille ed., vol. 1, 63.

<sup>239</sup> Matsui, *The Face in My Hand*, audio ed., 90.

It was a common rule at the school that students were not allowed to leave the school property during the time classes were in session. For the safety of blind students, field trips were never considered appropriate ways of teaching them. Matsui, however, hearing all sorts of questions about the world from his students, recognized how few opportunities had been given to these students to explore the world beyond their familiar surroundings and to learn from their own personal experience of exploration. He said, “That made me decide to break the rule of the school and frequently take them out of the classroom.”[author’s translation]<sup>240</sup>

Matsui’s autobiography vividly describes one particular trip he took with his students to Miho Beach in Shimizu city in Shizuoka prefecture.

“My students felt waves, tasted sea water . . . and learned it was salty. They explored the beach and climbed on trees. It was obvious to me that it was their very first time to experience the feel of the sea and what was around the beach.”[author’s translation]<sup>241</sup>

The more field trips his students took, the more they became active, cheerful, and outgoing. The changes in students gave Matsui confidence and convinced him that learning outside the classroom was just as important a learning experience for blind students as textbook learning. As they became more active and cheerful, they made even more rapid progress in their school work. These very positive developments drew the attention of other teachers in the school as well as the school principal, and Matsui’s teaching practices earned respect and credibility.

Another new teaching experiment Matsui tried was to create an opportunity for blind students to interact with sighted students from a nearby school.<sup>242</sup> He describes his plan thus:

<sup>240</sup> Matsui, *The Face in My Hand*, audio ed., 90.

<sup>241</sup> Matsui, *The Face in My Hand*, audio ed., 91.

<sup>242</sup> Matsui, *The Face in My Hand*, audio ed., 91.

“There was a school for girls near the school for the blind. I asked for help from one of the teachers at the school and arranged that students from the school could go home at the same time as blind students would leave school for their home so that they could have a chance to chat. I deliberately chose female sighted students over male students because I felt that female sighted students might be more approachable than male students for blind students.”<sup>243</sup> [author’s translation]

This scheme turned out to be half successful. Female sighted students became shy and did not want to have casual conversations with blind students. When teachers from the nearby school began to approach blind students and casually talked with them, one by one the female students from the nearby school started to talk with blind students as well.<sup>244</sup> Although this particular experiment did not develop into a major project at that time, it gave Matsui and other teachers at the Yamanashi School for the Blind an idea for a way to increase and normalize communication through school work between blind students and sighted students.

This experiment begun by this fairly remote rural teacher at the Yamanashi School for the Blind would eventually develop from the mid 1970s into one of the major projects that schools for the blind throughout Japan tested and used routinely known as “*koryu*” (communicative studying). Matsui was no longer teaching by the time the project became officially a part of the educational strategy for educating blind children, but Matsui continued to support the project and encouraged it to go on. Matsui’s idea was driven by his attitude toward blindness. Once he overcame his own grief and frustration at losing his eyesight, he was able to sustain a determination not to allow his loss of sight to detract from his desire to lead a high quality of life, to be an active participant in the community, and to reach a high level of educational and employment success.

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<sup>243</sup> Matsui, *The Face in My Hand*, audio ed., 92.

<sup>244</sup> Matsui, *The Face in My Hand*, audio ed., 92.

Matsui's idea of integration and the value of individual accomplishments for blind people was in direct opposition to the group-oriented mentality practiced in the Japanese pre-modern era by blind people through tōdōza (guilds). However, Matsui realized the importance of networking among blind people. He also promoted the idea of inclusion of sighted people and people with other physical disabilities within the network. What Matsui did was to demonstrate on a small scale in the classroom his ideas of collaboration and interaction between blind and sighted students, the basis of his lifelong project of advocacy for equal education and employment opportunities for blind people. He summed it up that "Through teaching blind students, I recognized the fact that equality in educational and employment opportunity for blind people cannot be thought out without understanding the true need to foster the independence of blind people." [author's translation]<sup>245</sup>

Because of his creativity and unique teaching strategies, Matsui was promoted to the temporary position of acting principal to fill in the vacant position of the principal at the Yamanashi School for the Blind from 1949. Matsui accepted the promotion, but the position required more administrative duties than teaching duties which did not fit Matsui's special talents and interests. As he says in his autobiography, he much preferred actual teaching duty, and he enjoyed interacting with students inside and outside the classroom. He enjoyed talking with students and giving them advice when asked.<sup>246</sup>

While Matsui was working as acting principal at the Yamanashi School for the Blind from 1949 through early 1950, he heard that a new facility would be rebuilt in 1948 on a property once belonging to the imperial family and recently donated to the national government to be used

<sup>245</sup> Matsui, *The Face in My Hand*, audio ed., 100.

<sup>246</sup> Matsui, *The Face in My Hand*, audio ed., 94.

for educational and training purposes. The national government decided to rebuild the facility for the education and training of people with physical disabilities known as the National Tōkyō Training Facility for the Blind (*Kokuritsu Tōkyō Komeiryo*), and they were seeking someone who would be willing to become an instructor there.<sup>247</sup> Matsui immediately expressed his interest in the position. Although his current position was quite stable, he wanted to get back into the field of teaching where he could have a closer association with students. He recounted,

“Even though I held a position at a school for the blind, I could not forget those who became blind war veterans. I vowed when I left the army hospital that I would one day be useful to those who lost their eyesight during the war.”[author’s translation]<sup>248</sup>

### **Advocacy for Adult Blind People**

In 1951 Matsui resigned from the Yamanashi School for the Blind and took the instructor’s position at the National Tōkyō Training Facility for the Blind. There he worked as a braille instructor and counselor until 1976. When he began teaching at the facility, he expected to teach former war veterans who needed rehabilitation training. However, by the time Matsui took up his teaching post in 1952, many blind civilians had entered the facility to receive training. That situation made Matsui realize that many civilians who had lost their eyesight in adulthood did not have any way to receive rehabilitation training through either hospitals or educational institutions during the war and were simply abandoned without any academic or vocational training. After the enforcement of the Welfare Laws for the Disabled in 1950, this facility taught braille as well as a five-year course in acupuncture and massage therapy; a shorter two-year

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<sup>247</sup> Matsui, *The Welfare Systems for the Blind*, braille ed., vol. 1, 71. Kokutritsu Tokyo Komeiryo changed its name to Kokuritsu Tokyo Shiryokyu Shogai Center (National Tokyo Visual Disability Rehabilitation Center) in 1964.

<sup>248</sup> Matsui, *The Face in My Hand*, audio ed., 104.

course was offered in the same subjects. The five-year course was limited to 150 students, and the two-year course was limited to 90 students.<sup>249</sup>

When the United States released Japan from occupation status in 1952, the country was still recovering from the devastation of the war. The majority of people were desperately trying to earn a living. It did not take long for Matsui to realize how dedicated and serious his blind trainees were in mastering what they needed to learn to support their families. All the trainees were adult males and had wives and children. He remarked, “It was truly hard to see these trainees coming back to the facility for the night after a day of massage or acupuncture work without having been able to earn any money that day.”[author’s translation]<sup>250</sup> Trainees were required to live at the facility during their training period, and family members were only allowed in the facility on visitation days. Their situation is described by Matsui: “When family members came, children would ask their father for something to eat, but many of them did not have enough money to buy anything for their children. It made them often feel even more discouraged and depressed.”[author’s translation]<sup>251</sup> Matsui frequently counseled trainees who were discouraged with their life:

“I understood their frustration and I wished that I could give them more useful advice, but the only advice I could give them was not to give up and keep on with their training so that they could finish their training course and become more efficient with their skills. Countless times I thought, ‘If only blind people had more occupational options than just massage therapy and acupuncture’.”[author’s translation]<sup>252</sup>

Like Iwahashi Takeo, Matsui recognized that the conventional occupations of massage therapy and acupuncture were still important professions for blind people. Matsui himself, during

<sup>249</sup> Matsui, *The Welfare Systems for the Blind*, braille ed., vol. 1, 75.

<sup>250</sup> Matsui, *The Face in My Hand*, audio ed., 110.

<sup>251</sup> Matsui, *The Face in My Hand*, audio ed., 110.

<sup>252</sup> Matsui, *The Face in My Hand*, audio ed., 112.

the war when he was going through the rehabilitation training program for wounded war veterans, had toyed with the idea of taking up the profession of massage therapy and acupuncture. But he had decided to seek another profession instead. The more occupational options blind people could have, the more opportunities they would have to be able to support themselves. Blind people, like any other members of society, should have the opportunity to choose their own occupation. Their disability should not be an obstacle to their choice of profession. This basic belief that Matsui held, however, was still no more than unrealistic idealism in 1952, even though it was two years after the Welfare Laws for the Disabled had been enacted.

To tackle this issue, Matsui began promoting the idea of higher education for blind people. Schools for the blind throughout Japan provided young blind students places where they could receive secondary education and vocational training in massage therapy and acupuncture. Facilities such as the National Tōkyō Training Facility for the Blind also provided blind adults with places to train in the skills of massage therapy and acupuncture. However, there was no specific regulation enforced by the government to provide young students with disabilities access to the same higher education opportunities as nondisabled students enjoyed. Moreover, blind intellectuals recognized the importance of creating an environment whereby disabled and nondisabled students can compete as well as support each other in pursuit of higher education. But in reality, it was very hard for people with disabilities to undertake higher education, and receiving degrees from prestigious universities and colleges remained a serious and difficult challenge for those with disabilities.

An undergraduate degree was as important for blind students as it was for sighted students. This achievement would almost certainly elevate the social status of the disabled as it

did for the nondisabled. For the nondisabled completing their undergraduate degree had the added advantage of practically guaranteeing placement for a job in their profession.

Unfortunately, the disabled did not face the same positive future. As Matsui said, “If obtaining higher education is important for sighted people to succeed in society, then it should be equally important for blind people.”[author’s translation]<sup>253</sup> Moreover, higher education for all people was seen as an unquestionable right by blind advocates, including Matsui Shinjiro.

Compulsory education for students with visual and hearing disabilities only covered secondary education. No explicit regulations were in place either to authorize or mandate colleges and universities to accept students with physical disabilities. A case in point was the experience of one male blind student (see below) who had requested to take the college evaluation and entrance examinations in braille. Even though this request was supported by the General Headquarters of the Occupation Allied Powers (GHQ), support was not sufficient to create a new law guaranteeing the right of blind students to receive the same higher education as sighted students. Matsui and other advocates for the blind such as Honma Kazuo realized that the issue needed much reform. Since the Meiji period, higher education had held a prestigious position. People who desired to succeed were mostly wealthy enough to obtain advanced education. However, Matsui and other blind leading advocates realized that higher education should be equally accessible to all people regardless of the wealth or physical/mental handicap of an individual.

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<sup>253</sup> Matsui, “Public Lecture at Iwate School for the Blind,” audio recording, July 1972.

## Advocacy for Equal Higher Education for Blind Students

In 1948 under the supervision of the GHQ the Ministry of Education gave all students the opportunity to enter the universities' evaluation examinations for college entrance (*daigaku tekisei shiken*). One blind student (see above) asked permission to take the evaluation examination and to take the exam in braille. The Ministry of Education turned down the request.<sup>254</sup> Receiving an appeal from the student, the GHQ gave the government an order to allow the blind student to take the exam in braille. There were only six blind students who entered three colleges in 1949.<sup>255</sup>

Matsui became involved in the work of transcribing examinations into braille. He conducted an experiment with Dr. Toru Watanabe, Matsui's psychology professor and a former mentor of Matsui, to compare the reading speed of sighted examinees to that of braille readers. The experiment showed that the speed of braille readers was one to two minutes slower than the speed of sighted readers.<sup>256</sup> Because of this positive result, the Ministry of Education decided to accommodate blind examinees by giving them extra time to complete their examinations. This decision contributed to a slight increase in the number of blind students applying for college entrance and the number of schools accepting them. By 1954 the number of blind students entering universities had increased to sixteen, and eleven universities decided to allow blind

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<sup>254</sup> Mojin Fukushi Kenkyukai Mogakusei Joho Center Editor, *Shikaku Shogaisha to Daigaku: Monko Kaiho 40nen no Ayumi (Blind Students and Higher Education: A history of Higher Educational System for Blind Students)*; Tōkyō: Mojin Fukushi Kenkyukai Mogakusei Joho Center Press; 1990, (audio ed.), 10.

<sup>255</sup> Mojin Fukushi Kenkyukai Mogakusei Joho Center Editor, *Blind Students and Higher Education*, audio ed., 11.

<sup>256</sup> Matsui, *The Welfare Systems for the Blind*, braille ed., vol. 1, 80-81.

students to take their entrance examinations in braille and accepted those who passed.<sup>257</sup> The number of schools accepting blind students continued to increase.

The Association of Blind College Students organized in 1951, with Matsui Shinjiro as president and Honma Kazuo as one of the members, began to advocate for those blind students interested in higher education. The association appealed to the Ministry of Education to make the necessary accommodations to provide a fair opportunity for examinees with visual disabilities. Due to the lack of financial resources, however, this association dissolved in 1958. The advocacy work for blind students was succeeded by another student organization known as the July Association of Blind College Students or “*Fumizukikai*,” established three years later in 1961 by a group of blind college graduates.<sup>258</sup> Honma and Matsui were among the prominent members.

This series of events demonstrates that the advocate agitating to make it possible for blind students to take entrance examinations for colleges and universities was not the government but ordinary blind people who were eager to make a difference in the lives of blind college students. They were convinced that given the right opportunities and fair accommodations more blind students could undertake higher education. The July Association (*Fumizukikai*) immediately began advocating for blind students who wanted to enter universities and colleges. By 1952 six colleges had accepted blind students, and in 1954 the number had increased to eleven, but the majority of universities and colleges still did not allow blind students to take their entrance examination. The reason for denying students with visual disabilities their requests was that the schools did not believe they could provide those students with the necessary accommodations,

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<sup>257</sup> Matsui, *The Welfare Systems for the Blind*, braille ed., vol. 1, 80.

<sup>258</sup> Mojin Fukushi Kenkyukai Mogakusei Joho Center Editor, *Blind Students and Higher Education*, audio ed., 30.

such as making materials for college courses accessible to blind students. The July Association continued to appeal to those schools by standing firm that blind students, just as any sighted students, should be given equal rights and opportunities to take the entrance examinations of all universities and colleges which they wished to enter. In January 1967 they wrote letters to approximately 200 universities indicating that the July Association would work with schools to transcribe exam question sheets into braille.<sup>259</sup>

At the same time, blind students at the Tōkyō Tsukuba School for the Blind joined together with the July Association to organize a demonstration in front of the Ikebukuro train station in Tōkyō to campaign for college entrance for blind students.<sup>260</sup> Blind students who were petitioning for the right to pursue higher education and members of the July Association took this action to appeal for the support of the general public. Instead of waiting for the national government or local governmental agencies to act on their behalf, they decided to take the matter into their own hands. During that time other blind advocates and educators began to join the July Association, increasing its membership significantly. In 1972 Matsui wrote:

“Although the number of colleges and universities accepting students with disabilities was increasing, we still were not successful in convincing the government to create a law which would enforce equal acceptance of students with visual disabilities by all universities and colleges in Japan. Actually, we still do not have any legal authority to force universities and colleges to practice equal acceptance for students with visual disabilities. Furthermore, we have lots of work cut out to get to the level of services we need to provide for blind students who are trying to achieve success in employment. Unlike the United States, it is hard for blind people to obtain competitive professions by Competing with sighted people. Even if a student successfully obtains a college degree, it is still hard for that student to secure a good occupation among sighted people. Many of

<sup>259</sup> Mojin Fukushi Kenkyukai Mogakusei Joho Center Editor, *Blind Students and Higher Education*, audio ed., 33.

<sup>260</sup> Mojin Fukushi Kenkyukai Mogakusei Joho Center Editor, Shikaku Shogaisha toDaigaku (*Blind Students and Higher Education*), audio ed., 33.

them have been forced to go back to schools for the blind to obtain training for massage therapy and acupuncture.”[author’s translation]<sup>261</sup>

### **Advocacy for Equal Employment Opportunities for Blind People**

Opening up and expanding more options for employment for blind people became an increasingly serious issue. Matsui and others saw the advancement of assistive technology as a significant way to make possible more employment opportunities for blind people, and he quickly seized this opportunity to explore ways to expand employment possibilities through the private sector and local and national government agencies.

Matsui started off by creating a job for blind people using katakana typewriters. Typists had been a common occupation for sighted people in Japan. Both English typewriters and Japanese typewriters were commonly used in the offices of corporate and governmental organizations. Matsui questioned why a sighted person could be hired as a trained typist, but not a blind person. In 1963 Matsui established the Japan Katakana Typists Association and began aggressively organizing typing courses in schools for the blind throughout Japan.<sup>262</sup> He said:

“Since the first time I learned how to use a katakana typewriter, I understood its usefulness. Blind people should be able to use this tool to open up more employment opportunities. That has been my thought. But I alone cannot do this. So, I asked teachers at schools for the blind throughout Japan for help in promoting workshops and courses for students to learn how to type. I received a very positive response from the schools to my call.”[author’s translation]<sup>263</sup>

He also established an office in Tōkyō that held training sessions for blind people who were seeking a job as an audio typist. By the 1970s there were several trained blind typists who

<sup>261</sup> Matsui, “Public Lecture at Iwate School for the Blind,” audio recording, July, 1972.

<sup>262</sup> Matsui, *The Face in My Hand*, audio ed., 133.

<sup>263</sup> Matsui, “Public Lecture at Iwate School for the Blind,” audio recording, July, 1972.

obtained jobs at civil courts and private corporations in the Tōkyō area.<sup>264</sup> Although only a handful were employed, the success in getting blind people accepted in this profession further inspired Matsui to venture into yet another new area of employment.

### National Vocational Rehabilitation Center for the Blind

In 1976 Matsui established the Japan Vocational Center for the Blind and was granted non-profit status by the national government as an organization to serve people with visual disabilities. The facility was soon expanded in 1980. As the executive director, Matsui organized a factory workshop where blind people could work to earn a living while receiving more advanced vocational training at the facility. As he said, “The idea of creating a workshop has been in my mind. This way we could create jobs for blind people other than massage therapy and acupuncture.”[author's translation]<sup>265</sup>

The use of the katakana typewriter developed into using a word processor with voice to accommodate blind people. The enhanced word processor allowed blind people to write in all three Japanese alphabet systems: katakana, hiragana, and kanji, just as sighted people. Word processing with voice was supported by corporations such as Canon Corporation, Japan IBM, and other companies that manufactured products with assistive technology for blind people.

This technology opened up occupations such as computer programming that became quite popular among blind people. The use of word processors made it possible for blind people to work for corporations and offices alongside sighted people. Working for a Japanese

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<sup>264</sup> Matsui, *The Face in My Hand*, audio ed., 189.

<sup>265</sup> Matsui, *The Face in My Hand*, audio ed., 178.

corporation is still difficult, and blind workers face many obstacles that they have to overcome. However, corporate employment has become increasingly more promising since the 1980s.

During the 1980s Matsui once again saw an employment opportunity in the demanding market of the word processor. What if the word processor could be fully accessible to blind people? With this idea in mind, he began training blind people to use word processors as well as training them to program a computer with assistive technology such as a word processor with a screen-reading voice feature. Starting from the late 1970s through the 1980s the computer programming occupation became popular among blind people. One blind computer programmer related:

“My experience in working as a computer programmer was not an easy path for me. There were many challenges I had to overcome. Reading the outline of a computer program that needed to be written up often came in print which I could not read. Frequently I had to ask one of my sighted co-workers to help me out. When I did write a program for a computer, I would have one other person as my assistant. I always made sure all the information necessary was assembled for my assistant should I need urgent assistance in writing the program. Most of the time I was able to write up a program on my own by using accessible text-to-speech software.”[author’s translation]<sup>266</sup>

Matsui began efforts to enable blind individuals to read printed letters just as sighted individuals did. He began negotiating, through the president of Canon Corporation, Mitarai Takeshi, with a professor, John Linvill, at Stanford University to bring a device known as an Optacon into Japan.<sup>267</sup> An Optacon (optical to tactile converter) is a device that allows a blind person to read printed letters by touch. A small camera is connected to a small tape recorder-

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<sup>266</sup> Mojin Fukushi Kenkyukai Mogakusei Joho Center Editor Shikaku Shogaisha to Shushoku: Monko Kaiho 40nen no Ayumi (*Blind Students and Employment Opportunities: A History of Employment System for Blind Students*) (Tōkyō: Mojin Fukushi Kenkyukai Mogakusei Joho Center Press, 1990) audio ed., 88.

<sup>267</sup> Mojin Fukushi Kenkyukai Mogakusei Joho Center Editor, *Blind Students and Employment Opportunities*, audio ed., 106.

sized device that transfers the electronic image of the printed letter and makes the image tactile for a user. The user would then be able to feel the vibration of hammered electronic pins on his/her fingers whereby the user can identify the character. The manufacture of this device was begun in 1970 in the United States by Telesensory Corporation (up until the company stopped its production in 1996). Matsui thought that by using this machine a blind person could read anything, thus greatly advancing opportunities for blind people. After a series of discussions, Canon Corporation offered to assist Matsui in importing the device into Japan, and by the late 1970s Matsui was able to establish Optacon training classes. He also promoted the idea of offering an Optacon training class in each of Japan's schools for the blind.<sup>268</sup>

Although the use of the Optacon did not lead directly to creating new jobs for blind people, it became a very useful reading tool for young blind college students. By 1990 about 513 Optacons were in use in Japan by blind individuals.<sup>269</sup> In Japan Optacon training ended in 1999 as computer and scanner technology gained ascendancy.

### **Advocacy for Study Abroad Programs**

Learning from other countries was a significant part of Matsui's project of creating equal educational and employment opportunities for blind people. From the 1970s through the 1980s study abroad was generally encouraged by educators and schools in Japan, but this particular educational opportunity was reserved primarily for sighted people. Matsui saw study abroad as a way for blind students to enjoy diverse educational experiences that would in turn open up avenues for new employment opportunities.

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<sup>268</sup> Matsui, *The Face in My Hand*, audio ed., 188.

<sup>269</sup> Matsui, *The Face in My Hand*, audio ed., 189.

The Duskin Corporation and the Mister Donut Corporation, collaborating with facilities offering rehabilitation training in the United States for the disabled as a service to private corporations, launched a project in 1980 to train young people with disabilities to become future leaders. The project began by sending physically and mentally disabled Japanese people (including blind people) to the United States to study for three months to a year. The project began in 1980 inspired by the United Nations and honoring years of equalities for International people with disabilities (*Kokuesai shogaisha nen*). The same project in 1981 promoted the equal access and equal participation in society of people with disabilities all over the world. The United Nations announced that the project would end in 1990. In Japan continued the project by modifying for it to develop into a project to bring people with disabilities from other Asian countries into Japan so that participants of the program could receive vocational and technological training for a year. Every year approximately ten people come to Japan to receive training. They are introduced to facilities in Japan for people with disabilities and get to experience Japanese home and school life during their training period.

The US study abroad program for people with disabilities received wide support from the disabled in Japan as well as the general public. Students with disabilities sent from Japan to the United States received scholarships from the Duskin Corporation and the Mister Donut Corporation. Because the study abroad opportunity had never been offered to students with disabilities in Japan before this project, it attracted many young people with physical disabilities and received many hundreds of applications each year. Approximately ten applicants were chosen for the project each year and sent to the United States to enroll in schools and rehabilitation facilities for the disabled. The main purpose of this project was to provide people

with disabilities new opportunities to learn so that the individual trainee would be equipped to make a contribution to Japanese society.

The majority of scholarship recipients took this opportunity to seek out new educational and employment possibilities. Upon completing their studies and returning to Japan, some obtained jobs at private corporations, some obtained positions at educational facilities for the blind, some started their own businesses, and some continued with more advanced education in Japan or abroad. As the program originally intended, those who embraced the opportunities the program offered took a leading role in pursuing and also, developing the newer employment opportunities, more advanced education, or starting their own businesses.

One person recounts his experience in the study abroad program in the United States:

“After I went through and completed the study abroad program, I felt that I not only learned many new things, but I also felt more confident about myself. My experience in the study abroad program certainly gave me a stronger sense of self-reliance and independence and higher self-esteem and that enhanced my quality of life.”[author’s translation]<sup>270</sup>

Another writes:

“I was a very shy and quiet person before I participated in the study abroad program, but after I finished the program, it became easier for me to be active and more outgoing. I felt good about the fact that if one tries, one could succeed in whatever one puts his mind to. It was very hard while I was doing my study abroad in the United States. Honestly, there were times that I felt I could not make it through the program, but I tried harder instead of quitting; then I began to notice how things began to take more positive turn. When I completed my study, I simply felt from my experience abroad that things would work out in the end if one sticks with it.”[author’s translation]<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Japanese Society for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities, Ed., *Venture to Independence (Jiritsu e no Habataki)*, (Tōkyō: Japan Japanese Society for Rehabilitation of Person with Disabilities, 1986), 20. The author of this dissertation was also one of the participants in this study abroad project in 1985-1986, spending a year in a public high school in Wisconsin.

<sup>271</sup> Japanese Society for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities, ed., *Venture to Independence*, 43.

Most of the people who participated in the study abroad program felt that in Western countries like the United States people with disabilities were more encouraged to be persistent and meet and overcome challenges head on. Many of the participants believed that instead of restricting the activities of the disabled solely because of their physical or mental limitations, society should challenge and charge them with the goal of trying new opportunities and believing in unlimited possibilities. Many found Japanese society to be more protective of people with disabilities, thus shielding them from challenges they could tackle if encouraged. Instead of inspiring them to overcome challenges, society gave the disabled the idea that their activities were limited because of their disabilities. Another participant writes:

“I decided to take a skiing lesson. Being a wheelchair user, I was often told growing up in Japan that learning to ski without being able to walk was difficult and impossible. However, in the United States it was different. Even when I almost gave up, my trainers never did. Instead, they came up with new ideas to enable me to ski. By the time I completed my ski lessons, I was not only able to ski, but I was also confident that I could do many other things without restricting myself. This experience changed my attitude toward my disability. Possibilities should be limitless and I should tackle with determination any challenges that I meet.”[author’s translation]<sup>272</sup>

Through study abroad these participants learned how to deal with challenges. They also learned to ponder about re-identifying themselves as active participants in society who happened to be disabled and could overcome challenges they face with the best of their abilities instead of being passive recipients of protection and sympathy. They also learned how to make full use of the increasing number of assistive technology tools available to help them accomplish their goals in their education and in their chosen profession. This was what Matsui had been advocating since he himself became blind in 1938. He saw his visual disability and that of others as a tool to

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<sup>272</sup> Japanese Society for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities, ed., *Venture to Independence*, 56.

strengthen oneself for positive approaches to the life of the individual. Instead of being discouraged by one's disability, Matsui encouraged others to be inspired by what they are capable of for them to live their own lives to the fullest and to contribute to the well-being and positive advancement of society.

Some study abroad participants devoted themselves to creating new employment opportunities; some tackled the task of improving equal educational opportunities; some ventured to start their own businesses; and some became dedicated to inventing and manufacturing new assistive technological software and hardware for computer users with disabilities. One way or another, they played a leadership role in inventing and developing new paths for the well-being of the disabled in Japan. As Matsui wrote:

“New ideas and inventions often come to life when people meet. Having the chance to study abroad, Japanese young people with disabilities can acquire excellent opportunities and learning experiences by going through the study [abroad] program. This is a win-win situation for everybody I think.”[author’s translation]<sup>273</sup>

Education and employment for people with disabilities in Japan needs improvement and advancement. Japan still has colleges and universities that refuse to accept students with visual disabilities. Many Japanese corporations and agencies, both private and public, choose not to employ blind people regardless of their level of education or capabilities. It is a fact that people with visual disabilities in Japan still have to work to overcome obstacles that are often quite difficult and intransigent. Corporations, especially small private corporations, are not very familiar with the variety of assistive technology blind people could use. They are also unsure of the ability of blind people. “Unable to see” in their mind might equal “unable to do.” This is still a common notion rooted in the general public’s mind. Consequently, they hesitate to hire people

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<sup>273</sup> Matsui, *The Face in My Hand*, audio ed., 195.

with visual disabilities and to then train them to become full-time employees. Instead they believe that hiring people with sufficient eyesight would be a more profitable route to bring more profit to the corporation.

Matsui's work through the Japan Vocational Development Center for the Blind made a significant contribution to demonstrating the educational and employment abilities of blind people. Although a rapid increase in employment of blind people in private corporations and government agency offices was not forthcoming, Matsui's work became a significant first step to opening more employment opportunities and promoting access of blind people to employment equal to that of sighted people.

Matsui's contribution to both higher education and increased employment avenues for blind people resulted in the introduction and development of new assistive technology. The use of the word processor with voice features and an electronic reading device became useful assistive tools for those blind people who pursued college degrees and for those who sought to compete in the general workforce among sighted people. As discussed in this chapter the idea of using the word processor as a communicative writing tool for blind people and the Optacon as a reading device came from assistive technology that was first invented in the United States. It demonstrates that the majority of Matsui's ideas of introducing new assistive technology and promoting tools for equal accessibility for the blind came what he learned about such services available in the United States.

Interaction between blind and sighted students grew from being just a pedagogical experiment to official school-to-school interactions by 1975 carried out throughout Japan. It inspired and motivated blind students to actively interact with others and acquire the skills to

venture out to new environments instead of being isolated among people of like disability. This eventually developed into the mainstreaming of education, whereby blind students could study at public schools with sighted students, something that had been carried out since the 1960s in Western countries such as the United States. What Matsui promoted and advocated came through his attitude of stepping out of and learning from the world outside one's "comfort zone."

Since 1948 the lives of the disabled have been improving. Secondary education for children with disabilities became compulsory in 1948, and colleges and universities have begun slowly to open their doors to students with visual disabilities. As higher education has become gradually more accessible to the disabled, new employment opportunities have likewise opened up for them. The remarkable work to which Honma Kazuo and Matsui Shinjiro dedicated themselves demonstrates that individual blind educators and workers are the ones who made a difference to the educational and employment systems for blind people. It was the persistent voices and focused leadership of those ordinary blind people that has improved the quality of their lives. Because of their work, blind people in Japan, instead of remaining passive recipients of sympathetic charities, can now realistically become active and equal contributors to society.

## Conclusion

“I watched my father being arrested and taken away. “Would he be okay? He is blind; someone has to be there for him.”<sup>274</sup>

This is a quotation from a book written by a daughter of Matsumoto Chizuo (b.1955) known by the name of Asahara Shoko. Matsumoto is well-known to the Japanese public as a cult religious leader who put the lives of many people in danger. What is less well-known to the public is the fact that he is sightless. Yet he controlled the actions of many young and well-educated people through his mind control methods. By promoting himself as a religious leader and a figure with the sustained capability of communicating with gods, Matsumoto effectively repudiated his identity as a blind person. However, one of his daughters recounts that, despite his exalted position and his attempts to cover up his identity, he used his followers as assistive tools. Things were read to him by his followers. He walked with a sighted guide. His blindness was hardly, if at all, noted or emphasized by his followers or by his close family members. But his daughter’s account reveals that no matter how hard he tried to hide his identity as a blind person, for people close to him his disability was obvious. His religious ambition ended when he was arrested in June of 1996.

Matsumoto Chizuo is an extreme example of the denial of identity as an individual with disabilities. His blindness was hardly mentioned by the media, and during the investigation the main focus was naturally not on his visual disabilities but on the series of criminal acts he had committed as the head of a religious cult. Any facilities that provided welfare services to people with visual disabilities refused to mention anything about Matsumoto Chizuo’s visual disability.

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<sup>274</sup> Hayaka Matusmoto; Watashi wa Naze Asahara Shoko no Musume ni Umarete shimatano ka (Asahara Shoko and I). Matsumoto Hayaka; Tokyo; 2009; (audio edition) P. 28

“We do not talk about him. He tried to be different from who he really was and because of that he did not succeed as a human-being and as a leader whom he wanted so much to become”.<sup>275</sup>

From the Taisho period of 1912-1926 through the Showa period of 1926-1989 blind people in Japan, especially those who aimed to improve their intellectual abilities, dedicated them to advocate for the welfare of people with visual disabilities in Japan. Through examining three leading blind advocates, Iwahashi Takeo, Honma Kazuo, and Matsui Shinjiro, this dissertation has discussed their work of advocacy to improve educational and employment opportunities for blind people. Those three leading advocates lost their sight after their birth. They, therefore, remembered for the rest of their lives the time when they still had good eyesight. However, instead of denying their blindness, they embraced it as a part of their identity. They used their blindness as a tool to successfully advocate for the welfare of people with visual disabilities, and that was what made them different from Matsumoto Chizuo. Instead of discarding what they could learn, they fully accepted learning opportunities. They especially regarded Western countries with interest as places where they could learn about improving welfare services and systems for people with visual disabilities.

Since 1868 people with visual disabilities in Japan have worked to find their rightful place in society and to contribute to the making of a modern society. Notable accomplishments such as the creation of new professions and advocating for equal higher education opportunities for blind students were achieved by blind activists themselves. Instead of hiding from the public due to their disabilities as society commonly expected, they used them as tools to seek out and promote new educational and employment opportunities and inventive ideas for improving and expanding welfare services for blind people.

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<sup>275</sup> Hayase, Makiko. “Oral Interview by Mochizuki Chikako”. Osaka: Japan. Nippon Lighthouse Welfare Center for the Blind. July 16, 2008.

By 1995 the employment rate of blind people was quite high including those working in massage therapy, acupuncture, and moxibustion. However, it was still hard for blind people to venture into employment in the private sector or in the government. In the 1970s and '80s computer programming attracted many blind people. Educators and advocates for new professions for blind people regarded the growing popularity of computer programming as a leading occupation in addition to the traditional occupations of blind people. However, the employment rate for blind people in the computer programming field did not increase more than 10% in those years, while the employment of sighted people in the same occupation had an employment rate of 90% percent and above. As one employee of the National Vocational Training Center for the Blind put it, "There will always be challenges and difficulties that we have to face, but we are confident that we could overcome obstacles. That is what we have been doing and that is what we will be doing."<sup>276</sup>

As noted above, blind people used both new and traditional employment opportunities as innovative learning tools. Japanese society has also been involved in the innovation of combining Japanese ways of providing a supportive system for people with visual disabilities with Western welfare services ideas to make modifications to improve social conditions. Working with the private sector and the government, blind people asserted themselves for their rights as observed in their actions protesting the prohibition of blind people working as acupuncturists. They chose to participate in the normal activities of society, including voicing protests, instead of isolating themselves as they had done during the era of the guild system in the Tokugawa period (prior to 1868).

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<sup>276</sup> Noriyuki Mitsuoka; Japan vocational Development Center for the blind; "Oral Interview by Chikako Mochizuki". June 30, 2007.

This dissertation has examined the advocacy work for blind people in Japan that was primarily led by blind people. By examining the lives and accomplishments of three prominent blind advocates, Iwahashi Takeo, Honma Kazuo, and Matsui Shinjiro, this dissertation reveals why such advocacy actions were necessary and the impact they had on the lives of blind people. Focusing on education and employment of blind people, this dissertation analyzes the increasing social equality of blind people and what it meant for them to obtain their place in society. In order for blind people to continue working to further equality in education and employment, they needed to strengthen their network so that their voices could be heard by both the government and the public. Although a national organization of the blind was not formed until 1948, at the local level from the early 1920s blind people began to create small organizational groups to strengthen their network.

As mentioned in the beginning of the second chapter of my dissertation, the end of the Meiji through the Taisho and Showa periods was the time when networking and establishing associations and organizations played an essential role in social reform. The formation and growth of organized labor unions during the Taisho period (1912-1926) under dedicated leaders gave a louder voice to the widespread but localized advocacy of individuals fighting for workers' rights and more humane working conditions. Blind people, likewise, needed activists to come forward who were willing to lead the sincere but disparate advocacy efforts to improve the lives of people with visual disabilities, focusing on specific issues as a group. From the Taisho era onward education and employment emerged as the two key issues necessary for reform that would have the most important, immediate, and residual impact on the overall welfare for the blind. But without organizing as a group under strong and dedicated leadership, progress would stagnate. To work toward these goals, these blind activists had decided great benefits could be

achieved if the blind community looked for innovations and resources in those Western countries that had progressive programs in these areas.

As they had in the 1920s and early 1930s, young blind intellectuals continued to look to the West for a model for reform to guide them in improving their welfare services and trying to create an active organization to represent their interests. As it could be seen in the case of blind intellectuals in Osaka, Japanese society on the whole had begun to focus more intensely on the war in which the country was engaged. Efforts continued to be made in advocating for the welfare of blind people, even though the country was at war and therefore slower progress was made during the prewar period, through wartime, and into the postwar period. Projects for the blind continued to advance, though slowly, during those years.

Self-advocacy carried out by blind people was the vehicle that moved forward the enforcement of welfare laws for the disabled. They used laws as tools to expand welfare services for blind people and involved the government in their operations. These activities resulted in the formation of a network of cooperation between institutions supporting the blind and the government for the purpose of improving welfare services for blind people in Japan.

As the first chapter depicts, the opening of the Kyoto School for the Blind in 1877, the Tōkyō School for the Blind and Deaf in 1880, and the invention of Japanese braille modeled after the six-dot braille alphabet invented by Louis Braille opened the path for literacy for blind people. This, in turn, opened up new possibilities such as learning about foreign countries and peoples to improve the education of blind people.

Discussing the establishment of the Nippon Lighthouse Welfare Center for the Blind, the second chapter illustrates the advocacy work done by Iwahashi Takeo, who founded this first supportive facility to assist blind people to fully participate in society. The work of Western

missionaries in opening a school for the blind (Yokohama Christian School for the Blind) and Helen Keller's visits to Japan further supported Iwahashi's idea that blind people should be regarded as fully active and productive members of society instead of passive recipients of sympathy. Keller's visit to Japan in 1937 increased significantly the public interest in people with visual disabilities.

Honma Kazuo, the founder of the Japan National Braille Library for the Blind, promoted the importance of literacy for the blind. Chapter three describes his advocacy work for braille literacy of blind people and his library project to increase the number and variety of braille books available. The chapter discusses the educational impact his library and literacy work had on blind people in Japan. Honma's successful organization of volunteer braille transcribers' groups not only enabled more books to be transcribed into braille, it also started the first well-organized volunteer group in Japan which helped further develop the library's services into recording audio books, providing a one-to-one reading service, and beyond.

The fourth chapter focuses on the significance of group advocacy and the promulgation of welfare laws for the disabled. Creation of the Japan Federation of the Blind occurred in 1948 and demonstrated the assertiveness of blind people toward the government in appealing for the creation of welfare laws that would guarantee the rights of the blind to access to necessary training, jobs, and to a higher standard and quality of living. Facilities that support blind people through offering them vocational and educational training worked to advance the provision of services by cooperating with both the government and private sector through recommending good and capable workers among trainees or help organize workshops of assistive technology or seminars for the government. The increasing number of young blind people seeking higher education contributed to opening the path, through appropriate accommodations for their

disability, to a college education for blind people. This enthusiastic group of blind young people also made advocates aware of the necessity of working to create more employment opportunities. This led to the creation of a supportive organization by blind college graduates and students. Together they negotiated with universities and colleges already accepting blind students to improve further accommodations for those students and appealing to educational institutions that had not yet accepted blind students.

The final chapter draws a vivid picture of advocacy efforts to increase employment and access to higher education for blind people through the work of another blind advocate, Matsui Shinjiro. Matsui promoted the significance of the interaction between blind and sighted people. This idea was taken seriously by the ministry of education and formed a tie between schools for the blind and public schools for sighted students. By providing vocational training to blind people through his vocational center, Matsui made it possible for blind people to be able to enter professions other than acupuncture and massage therapy. Typist and computer programmer became admired professions among young blind students.

Blind people who actively advocated for blind people encouraged them to embrace their blindness instead of hiding their disability. Although the case of Matsumoto (mentioned at the beginning of this Conclusion section) who tried desperately to hide his disability is an extreme example, it clearly demonstrates how blind people who despite significant challenges succeeded in completing their higher education and obtaining productive employment did so by embracing their visual disabilities as a part of their identity. The lives and work of three advocates who were themselves blind examined throughout these chapters reveals that the course they took coincided with the direction Japanese society took. Since the beginning of the Meiji period, Japanese society looked to the West as a model from which to learn. At the same time, they held on to

their originality and made innovations to what they learned from the West to blend with their traditional culture. The advocacy for a better welfare system for people with visual disabilities carried out by the three advocates, Iwahashi, Honma, and Matsui was based on their applying what they learned from Western countries to expand the possibilities for education and employment opportunities for blind people.

This dissertation in no way suggests that the system of education and employment for people with visual disabilities is perfect. As indicated in chapters four and five, there are higher educational institutions that still hesitate to accept students with visual disabilities due to accommodation issues, despite the success of many secondary educational institutions which accept students with visual disabilities. Conventional occupations for blind people such as massage therapy, acupuncture, and moxibustion are still the much more commonly sought-after professions and approximately 90 percent of blind people obtained the occupation<sup>277</sup> compared to the professions which sighted people hold such as clerical work, public school teaching, or various business professions. However, advocacy for blind people in Japan has advanced since 1912. Those earlier blind intellectuals paved the way and made promising progress in building a variety of programs, laws, and facilities to improve the lives of the blind in Japan. The Japan National Braille Library for the Blind first established by Honma enabled blind people to have access to a wide variety of books and assistive tools. Volunteers organized by the library developed braille transcribing groups and spread this innovation among schools around the country, a service that helped increase the number of books accessible to blind people. The Nippon Lighthouse Welfare Center for the Blind and the Japan Vocational Development Center for the Blind offered basic vocational training and places to work for people with visual disabilities. Those facilities also introduced blind people to new assistive technology and secured

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<sup>277</sup> Noriyuki Mitsuoka; “Oral Interview by Chikako Mochizuki”.

necessary textbooks for secondary school students with visual disabilities. Braille textbooks and large print textbooks enabled the students to have equal access to the same textbooks that other sighted students use. New assistive technology opened up the possibility for new employment opportunities such as computer programming, clerical work, and typing for blind people.

Blind advocates such as Iwahashi, Honma, and Matsui played a significant role in promoting the equal education and equal employment opportunities for blind people. They also made both blind and sighted people aware of the importance of what it means to be equal and empowered blind people to keep moving forward. The advocacy work they began has been succeeded by passing the torch to the younger generations. One only hopes that positive progress toward equal education and employment for blind people will continue at the same momentum and the same innovative dedication shown by these early pioneers.

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