

**Japan**

# *Ethnicity in Japan*

## *Group selection*

Japan claims to be a monoethnic state and pretended particularly in the past to be homogeneous by not acknowledging the ethnic groups within the country or forcing ethnic minorities, to assimilate into Japanese culture. However, potentially five politically relevant ethnic groups in Japan can be identified: **Japanese, Ainu, Burakumin, Okinawans and Koreans** (<sup>2672</sup>, <sup>2673</sup>).

<sup>2672</sup> [Murphy-Shigematsu 1993]

<sup>2673</sup> [Minority Rights Group International, 2018a]

## *Power relations*

### *1946-52*

After World War II Japan is occupied by the US and is run by the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP). Nevertheless, Japan had its own government and adopted in 1947 a constitution with a liberal democratic governing model (<sup>2674</sup>, 45, 73, <sup>2675</sup>). Ethnicity is not politicized in this period.

<sup>2674</sup> [Dower 2000]

<sup>2675</sup> [Encyclopaedia Britannica 2018]

Following this, some ethnic groups like the Ainu started to organize themselves and demanded acceptance of their cultural rights against the majoritarian Japanese, but without much success (<sup>2676</sup>). However, discrimination against such ethnic groups by the Japanese usually remained within social realms and not in the context of executive power.

<sup>2676</sup> [Minority Rights Group International, 2018b]

### *1953-1972*

With the San Francisco Peace Treaty in 1952 the US occupation of Japan ends, although Okinawa remains under American control. With the treaty, the Koreans' right to Japanese citizenship ends as well since the Japanese government demands from now on the renouncement of the Korean citizenship. The goal is to naturalize the Koreans' to the Japanese culture. Many Koreans' refuse this and remain "foreigners" despite being born in Japan. Consequently, Koreans' access to executive power and their right to vote is blocked due to non-Japanese citizen status. Discriminatory actions in social life like the illegal pressure to adopt Japanese names or with regards to employment target also the other non-Japanese ethnic groups. However, such non-political discrimination is not coded according to EPR rules (<sup>2677</sup>, 63-65, <sup>2678</sup>). Only the Koreans are considered discriminated.

<sup>2677</sup> [Murphy-Shigematsu 1993]

<sup>2678</sup> [Minority Rights Group International, 2018c]

*1973-1984*

In 1972, Okinawa becomes part of Japan again. During this period there is a rise in ethnicity-based political organizations of Ainu, Koreans, and Burakumin that make claims mainly for social and economic rights (and some local voting rights) rather than control of the executive.

*1985-1996*

In 1984, the Hokkaido Utari Association demands recognition of Ainu claims to Hokkaido. Increase in labor migration from China as well as Korea. However, in the case of Koreans, naturalization keeps the total population fairly constant. Overall numbers of Chinese rise. By this time, most Koreans and Chinese residents are second or third-generation, and therefore were not stripped of national voting rights and access to executive power (as were the former colonial subjects).

*1997-2009*

Former colonial subjects, such as the Koreans and the Taiwanese, are either naturalized Japanese citizens or hold “special permanent resident” status (Tokubetsu Eijyu Sha). According to statistics from Japan’s national Immigration Bureau, the special permanent residents consist of 0.3 % of total national population (2007). The official legal interpretation of the Japanese national government until 2009 on the Nationality Act, particularly the status of the special permanent residents, is that special permanent residents do not hold voting rights or have the right to serve in public administration. The term “special” is a marker to identify their difference from other permanent residents as subjects of former colonies. However, this discursive marker did not provide them with any legally equal status as Japanese citizens. Once the special permanent residents decide to be naturalized, they become legally invisible and are absorbed into the dominant “Japanese” category.

The Okinawans stayed dominant in the Okinawa prefecture but no evidence was found for de facto regional autonomy in the prefecture. On the contrary, when in 1996 the governor of Okinawa refused to sign a follow-up lease agreement for the US military bases hosted there, Japan’s Supreme Court proceeded to overrule the governor’s decision which demonstrates the national institutions’ power. Extensive US military presence in Okinawa has long been a matter of discontent for the local population and most current political initiatives by locals revolve around the issue (<sup>2679</sup>). Therefore, the Okinawans lose regional autonomy status in this period.

On June 6, 2008, the national Diet passed a bill to demand the national administrative branch officially recognize the Ainus’ indigenous status in Hokkaido and in northern Japan. The Burakumin are considered in Japan as Japanese. Burakumin-related discrimination

<sup>2679</sup> [Minority Rights Group International, 2018c]

is seen primarily as class/occupation based discrimination (those who engaged in “blood” relation occupations such as butchers, shoe makers (leather), armor makers, etc.) than as a racial issue.

### *2010-2012*

There has been a decline in the total population of the Japanese and the Korean nationals with the “special permanent resident” status (Tokubetsu Eijyuu Sha). There has not been any official population statistics on Burakumin since 1993 and on Ainu since 2006.

### *2013-2021*

The Koreans are at the verge of being discriminated as they continuously “complain about excessive bureaucratic hurdles that complicated the naturalization process and a lack of transparent criteria for approval. Ethnic Koreans who chose not to naturalize faced difficulties in terms of civil and political rights and regularly encountered discrimination in job promotions as well as access to housing, education, and other benefits” <sup>2680</sup>. Since their status did not deteriorate from previous coding periods, their coding remains powerless (cf. previous reports including <sup>2681</sup>, <sup>2682</sup>).

<sup>2680</sup> [US Department of State, 2019]

<sup>2681</sup> [US Department of State, 2013]

<sup>2682</sup> [US Department of State, 2016]

The Ainu, officially recognized by the Japanese government as indigenous people in 2008, received support from the Japanese government in a recent xenophobic incident. An official Ainu party has been established in 2012 with the aim of electing Ainu individuals to the Diet <sup>2683</sup>, thus the Ainu are coded as powerless starting in 2013. In 2019, the law to officially recognize Ainu as indigenous people was enacted, prohibiting discrimination against them and the violation of their rights as well as protecting and promoting their culture <sup>2684</sup>.

<sup>2683</sup> [Global Security, 2013]

<sup>2684</sup> [US Department of State, 2019]

Okinawans still lack official recognition by the Japanese government as an indigenous people, but the government does officially acknowledge their specific culture and traditional practices and has made efforts to preserve Okinawan history <sup>2685</sup>; <sup>2686</sup>; <sup>2687</sup>. Thus, this ethnic minority is still coded as powerless.

<sup>2685</sup> [US Department of State, 2016]

<sup>2686</sup> [US Department of State, 2019]

<sup>2687</sup> [International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs]

A new period starting in 2016 reflects updated group sizes with regards to the 2015 National Census of Japan. The Japanese census records nationality rather than ethnicity, and thus, population sizes of its indigenous peoples such as the Ainu, Okinawans, and Burakumin are estimates.

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Political status of ethnic groups in Japan

From 1946 until 1952

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Japanese	0.973	IRRELEVANT

From 1953 until 1972

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Japanese	0.973	MONOPOLY
Koreans	0.006	DISCRIMINATED

From 1973 until 1984

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Japanese	0.973	MONOPOLY
Burakumin	0.008	POWERLESS
Okinawans	0.008	POWERLESS
Koreans	0.006	POWERLESS

From 1985 until 1996

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Japanese	0.973	MONOPOLY
Okinawans	0.008	POWERLESS
Burakumin	0.008	IRRELEVANT
Koreans	0.006	POWERLESS
Ainu	$2.0 \times 10^{-4}$	DISCRIMINATED

From 1997 until 2009

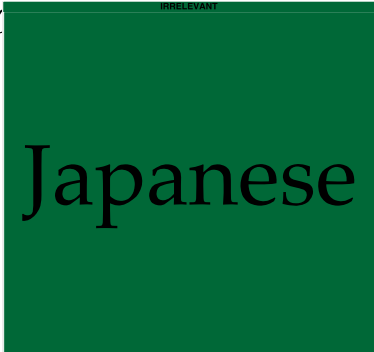


Figure 537: Political status of ethnic groups in Japan during 1946-1952.

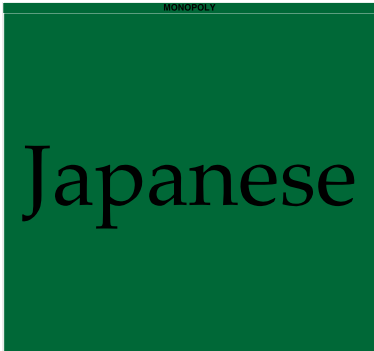


Figure 538: Political status of ethnic groups in Japan during 1953-1972.

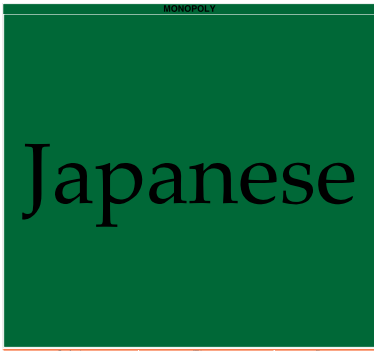


Figure 539: Political status of ethnic groups in Japan during 1973-1984.

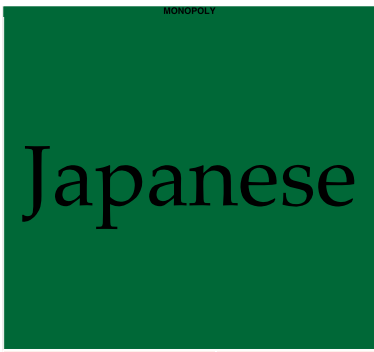


Figure 540: Political status of ethnic groups in Japan during 1985-1996.



Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Japanese	0.9798	MONOPOLY
Okinawans	0.01	POWERLESS
Burakumin	0.007	IRRELEVANT
Koreans	0.003	POWERLESS
Ainu	$2.0 \times 10^{-4}$	IRRELEVANT

*From 2010 until 2012*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Japanese	0.9808	MONOPOLY
Okinawans	0.01	POWERLESS
Burakumin	0.007	IRRELEVANT
Koreans	0.002	POWERLESS
Ainu	$2.0 \times 10^{-4}$	IRRELEVANT

*From 2013 until 2015*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Japanese	0.9808	MONOPOLY
Okinawans	0.01	POWERLESS
Burakumin	0.007	IRRELEVANT
Koreans	0.002	POWERLESS
Ainu	$2.0 \times 10^{-4}$	POWERLESS

*From 2016 until 2021*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Japanese	0.979	MONOPOLY
Okinawans	0.01	POWERLESS
Burakumin	0.007	IRRELEVANT
Koreans	0.002	POWERLESS
Ainu	$2.0 \times 10^{-4}$	POWERLESS

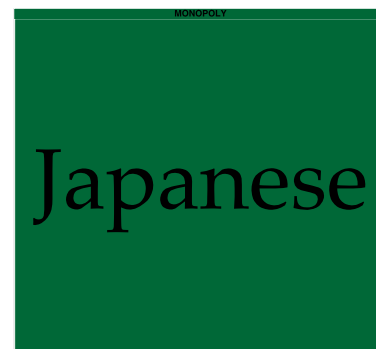


Figure 542: Political status of ethnic groups in Japan during 2010-2012.

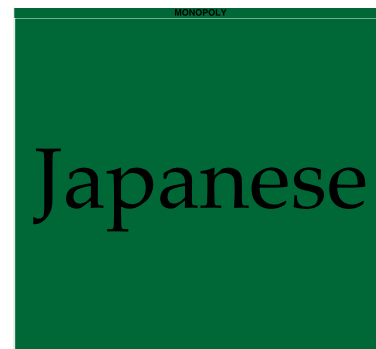


Figure 543: Political status of ethnic groups in Japan during 2013-2015.

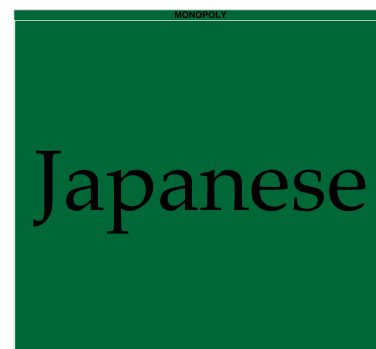


Figure 544: Political status of ethnic groups in Japan during 2016-2021.



# Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Japan

From 1953 until 1972

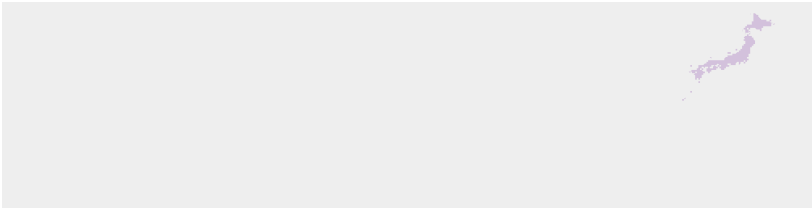


Figure 545: Map of ethnic groups in Japan during 1953-1972.

	Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
■	Japanese	370 951	Statewide
■	Koreans	0	Urban

Table 196: List of ethnic groups in Japan during 1953-1972.

From 1973 until 1984

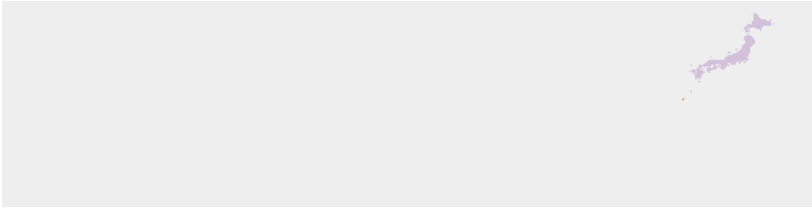


Figure 546: Map of ethnic groups in Japan during 1973-1984.

	Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
■	Japanese	370 951	Statewide
■	Okinawans	913	Regionally based
■	Burakumin	0	Dispersed
■	Koreans	0	Urban

Table 197: List of ethnic groups in Japan during 1973-1984.

From 1985 until 1996

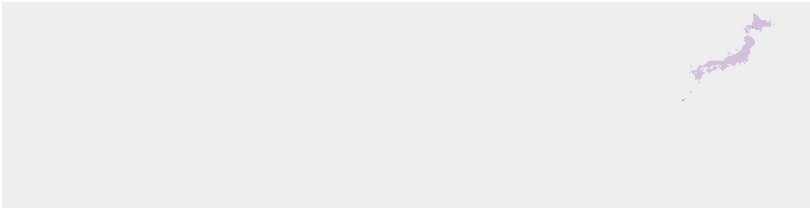


Figure 547: Map of ethnic groups in Japan during 1985-1996.

Group name		Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
<div><div></div></div>	Japanese	370 951	Statewide
<div><div></div></div>	Ainu	1582	Regionally based
<div><div></div></div>	Okinawans	913	Regionally based
<div><div></div></div>	Koreans	0	Urban

Table 198: List of ethnic groups in Japan during 1985-1996.

From 1997 until 2012

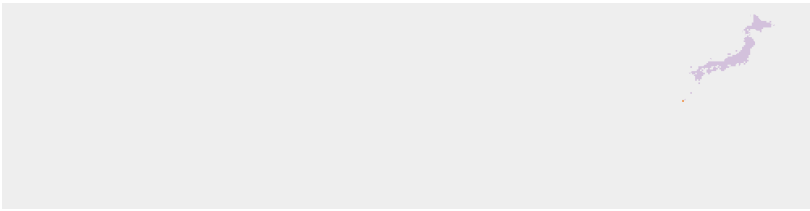


Figure 548: Map of ethnic groups in Japan during 1997-2012.

Group name		Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
<div><div></div></div>	Japanese	370 951	Statewide
<div><div></div></div>	Okinawans	913	Regionally based
<div><div></div></div>	Koreans	0	Urban

Table 199: List of ethnic groups in Japan during 1997-2012.

From 2013 until 2021

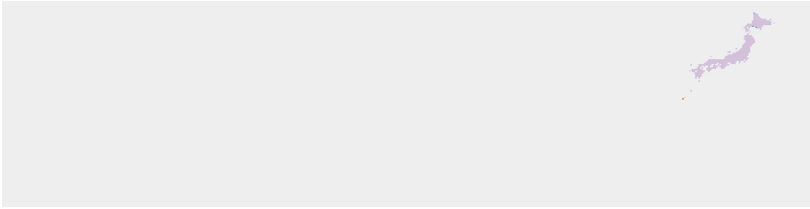


Figure 549: Map of ethnic groups in Japan during 2013-2021.





	Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
	Japanese	370 951	Statewide
	Ainu	1582	Regionally based
	Okinawans	913	Regionally based
	Koreans	0	Urban

Table 200: List of ethnic groups in Japan during 2013-2021.