

A Disease Apart:

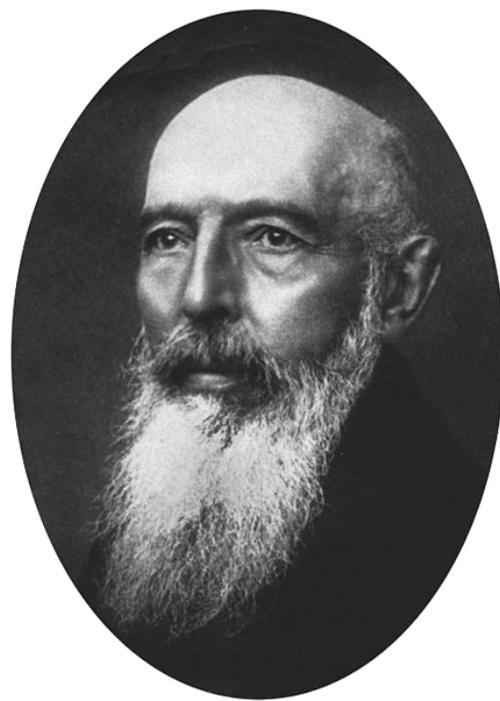
Hansen's Disease, Eugenics and Public Health, in modern Japan

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Room 10-301



Gerhard Henrik Armauer Hansen

Spread across Japan is a national system of thirteen leprosaria which house more than 2,000 people, most of whom are elderly and infirm.

Some residents have spent more than five decades within these institutions, the largest of which once housed more than 1,900 patients. The trajectory of their lives was determined by the passage in 1931 of the 'lifetime confinement' law that required the forcible segregation until death of all those diagnosed with leprosy. It was not until 1996 that this law was finally repealed, but only after a lengthy debate that focused on a single question; whether leprosy *still* constituted a threat to public health. Although public awareness of leprosy and the leprosaria system remains limited, the issue has been transferred to the courts, where hundreds of patients who had been forcibly confined have filed suit against the state seeking compensation on the grounds that decades of incarceration violated their human rights.

The objective of this paper is to generate a preliminary analysis of the transformative impact of 'modernity' in the treatment of leprosy in Japan. In so doing, I seek to establish how the pseudo-science of eugenics, combined with advances in the science of genetics and international relations more generally, influenced social policies in the areas of medicine, health care, and the isolation of those deemed congenitally unfit (dysgenic) during and since the Meiji Period.

[Michael Weiner](#) currently holds the positions of Professor of East Asian History and International Studies at Soka University of America., and emeritus Professor of Asian Studies at San Diego State University, where he previously served as Chair of the Department of Asian Studies and Director of the Japan Studies Institute. Professor Weiner serves on the advisory board of numerous journals, and as an external assessor for Research Councils in the UK, Canada, and the Netherlands. Among his major publications are: *The Origins of Korean Community in Japan*; *The Internationalization of Japan*; *Race and Migration in Imperial Japan*; *Japan's Minorities: The Illusion of Homogeneity*; *Race, Ethnicity and Migration in Modern Japan*; *Japan's Minorities: The Illusion of Homogeneity* [second edition].

No registration necessary / Lecture in English

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