Eugenics in Japan in the 1990s: a turning point?

In 1996, the 1948 Eugenic Protection Law was replaced by a new one, the so-called Law for the Protection of the Maternal Body. Therefore the word “eugenics” disappeared from the name of the law, so did the idea of “preventing births of bad descent”. In 2001, the government was accused of having forced – genetically or not – handicapped people to sterilization surgery, which was even practiced in the 1980s (16500 in all, 140 in the 1980s).

It was only in the 1990s that debates on the meaning of the 1948 law were born, about the word “eugenics” and about what the victims of that forced surgery may become. After the impeachment of the Swedish government for similar facts in 1999, the Japanese victims also gathered to institute a lawsuit against the government. It was in 2001 that the responsibility of the state was confirmed. This work may try to situate the 1948 law according to its western origins and it may focus on the issues which prevailed in the reversal of the 1990s.

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