


Comprehensive Historical Research on Eugenic Policies through the Utilization of Digital Archives

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Purpose and Background of the Research

●Outline of the Research

Between 1948 and 1996, Japan’s Eugenic Protection Law allowed forced sterilizations on individuals on the grounds of disability or illness, violating human rights. This raises serious Ethical, Legal, and Social Issues (ELSI), as medical decisions led to lasting harm. This study seeks to highlight the overlooked ELSI of forced sterilization and its underlying eugenic policies, providing insights into their impact on medical technology today and in the future.

While research on forced sterilization continues abroad, Japan faces significant challenges due to the destruction or inaccessibility of official records. This study aims to collect and preserve materials on Japan’s eugenic policies, creating a publicly accessible archive for long-term use. Researchers will investigate the realities and mechanisms of forced sterilization and analyze its social implications. A digital archive will also be developed to facilitate further research. Given the sensitive nature of these records, careful consideration is needed to prevent reinforcing discrimination. The study prioritizes perspectives of those most affected and emphasizes the need for appropriate disclosure rules.

By documenting Japan’s eugenic policies and conducting a comprehensive analysis, this research seeks to promote fair and inclusive historical inquiry, ensuring broader public access to these critical historical materials.

●Research Challenges

This research faces three key challenges. First, archives must establish ethical rules for handling sensitive historical records and data, ensuring careful consideration through collaboration with affected individuals. Second, methods must be developed to analyze medical technology governance from multiple perspectives, considering welfare and stakeholders. Finally, appropriate disclosure rules are needed to promote international collaboration, ensuring alignment with domestic and global contexts and effective archive management.

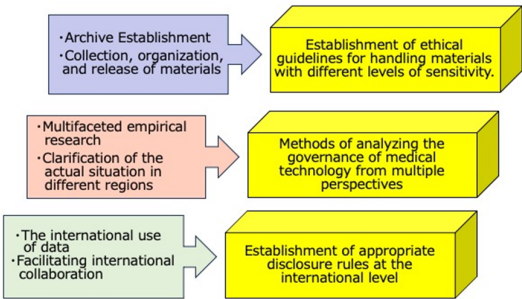


Figure 1. Research Challenges

Expected Research Achievements

Three research groups will be formed for archiving, empirical research, and public dissemination, with an Integrated ELSI Study group synthesizing overall findings.

A. Archive Establishment

Past research has struggled to analyze official documents due to extensive redactions. However, a Supreme Court ruling expanding public access offers new opportunities to recover records of past sterilization procedures. This study will collect and digitize materials, including court records, lawsuit documents related to forced sterilization, national policies on disability, and resources from relevant organizations. This will establish a comprehensive archive covering Japan’s eugenic policies from the 1940s to the present.

B. Empirical Research and Participation of Involved Parties

The enforcement of the Eugenic Protection Act varied regionally. This study will focus on the 1950s–1970s, when sterilizations peaked, analyzing regional policy differences. Research teams will use collected data to reconstruct a complete picture of these procedures. Findings will be publicly accessible through a website, and a system will be created to allow affected individuals to participate in historical research on disease and disability.

C. Public Utilization and Dissemination of Archives and Research

A digital archive will be established as a public resource, making research findings accessible to policymakers, educators, and the public. Best practices from archives in the UK, Germany, North America, and South Korea will guide its development. International conferences will promote discussions on eugenic policies, encouraging global knowledge exchange. Expert guidance on medical data management will ensure ethical disclosure before publication.

Integrated ELSI Study

This group will evaluate the ethical, legal, and social implications (ELSI) of forced sterilization, clarifying its relevance in contemporary society.


Research plan	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	Goals
[A·Archive Establishment]						
Collection of public records						●Construction of a large-scale archive documenting Japan's eugenics policy ●Gathering and sharing interview data from the relevant parties and other interested stakeholders
Research and collection of materials of the parties involved						
Digitization and metadata tagging of the materials						
[B·Empirical Research/Participation of the parties involved]						
ams studies by Prefecture						●Creating brief overviews for the public on the website, available in both English and Japanese ●Publication of papers and books, conference presentations ●Establishing a framework for involving parties in research practice
Individual research						
Interviews with the parties involved and others						
[C·Publication of Archives and Research]						
Selection of publicly accessible data and evaluation of accessibility levels						●Public Access to Digital Archives ●Develop public disclosure rules in collaboration with the parties involved and experts ●Collaborate with related archives abroad and organize an international study group
Publication of a summary of forced sterilization by prefecture						
[Integrated ELSI Study]						
Review of ELSI issues in groups A, B, and C						 Public Use of Digital Archives
Preparation of the archive for long-term preservation						
Guidelines for public access to materials in collaboration with affected individuals.						
Sequential release of different primary data sets						
Re-localization as a contemporary aspect of ELSI						

Figure 2. Research Plan