

# History of the Institute

## Prewar Period

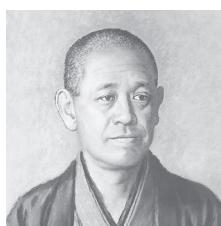
The Ohara Institute for Social Research (*Ōhara shakai mondai kenkyūjo*) was founded on February 9th, 1919 in Osaka by Magosaburo Ohara (1880-1943), a wealthy industrialist from Kurashiki, Okayama Prefecture. Ohara's social impact was prolific. In addition to running the Kurashiki Cotton Spinning Company, among other businesses, Ohara also established the Kurashiki Institute for the Science of Labour, the Ohara Art Museum, and other institutions. Juji Ishii, founder of the Okayama Orphanage, exerted a strong influence on Ohara, with Ohara eventually converting to Christianity and financially supporting Ishii's social initiatives. After Ishii's death in 1914, Ohara established and directed the Ishii Memorial Aizen-en in Osaka, a night school for disadvantaged children. Ohara grew frustrated with the limited results of his individual philanthropy, however, and concluded that a fundamental, systematic research approach was necessary to resolve social problems. The Ohara Institute for Social Research was born to carry out this vision.

Iwasaburo Takano, Professor in the School of Economics at Tokyo Imperial University (now the University of Tokyo), was the Institute's inaugural director. He was joined by a large roster of exceptional researchers, including Tamizo Kushida, Yasunosuke Gonda, Tatsuo Morito, Hyoe Ouchi, Samezo Kuruma, Kozo Uno, and Shintaro Ryu. Together, their pioneering research into labour and social issues, Marxist economics, and other under-explored

fields yielded numerous ground-breaking studies. The Institute disseminated this early research across several publications: *The Journal of the Ohara Institute for Social Research*, *Ohara Institute for Social Research Publication Series*, and *Ohara Institute for Social Research Pamphlets*.

Immediately after its founding, the Institute commenced editing and publishing the *Japan Labour Yearbook*, *Japan Social Work Yearbook*, and *Japan Social Health Yearbook*. Researching and compiling these series necessitated voluminous primary materials. The Institute collected publications and data in Japan, dispatched researchers to Germany and the United Kingdom, and acquired a substantial collection of overseas journals, books, and other materials related to social and labour issues. As a matter of policy, these books and materials were made accessible to the general public.

Financial support from Ohara ceased in 1937. The Institute sold its land, buildings, and about 80,000 items from its collection to the Osaka Prefectural Government and moved its offices to Kashiwagi in Tokyo (currently in Shinjuku Ward). This move limited the Institute's activities to a smaller scale. Wartime conditions were especially difficult. After issuing Volume 21 of the Institute's landmark *Japan Labour Yearbook*, the series was suspended in 1941. The Institute weathered this lean period by focusing its efforts on translating and publishing the twelve volume series *Selected Classics on Statistics*.



Magosaburo Ohara



Iwasaburo Takano



*Japan Labour Yearbook, Volume 1*

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## Postwar Period

By wartime's end, the majority of the Ohara Institute for Social Research's buildings and collected materials at Kashiwagi had been destroyed by firebombing raids. However, an earthen storehouse located there survived the firebombing and saved some collected materials from destruction.

The Institute's bank accounts had been frozen. Problems piled upon problems. Meanwhile, Japan's defeat completely transformed the circumstances surrounding the Ohara Institute for Social Research. Academic freedom was restored, the burgeoning postwar labour movement brought labour issues to the fore, and the Institute resumed scholarly activities.

Staff members who had endured the lean years of the war were recruited into fields beyond the Institute. In late 1945, Hyoe Ouchi returned to Tokyo University and played a major role in revitalizing the School of Economics. In 1946, Iwasaburo Takano became president of the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK). Yasunosuke Gonda assisted him as a member of NHK's board of trustees. Tatsuo Morito became a founding member of the Japan Socialist Party and was elected to the House of Representatives. In 1947, he was appointed Minister of Education in the Katayama Cabinet.

The task of reconstructing the Ohara Institute for Social Research fell to a researcher who had been with the Institute from its founding, Samezo Kuruma. Kuruma recruited new staff, including Sutehiko Uesugi, rented an office for the Institute in the Seikei Building in central Tokyo's Kanda Surugadai neighborhood, and resumed research. The postwar period's rampant inflation quickly undermined the Institute's finances, however. The Institute survived this financial crisis in 1949 by accepting a merger with Hosei University. The Institute was dissolved and joined Hosei as a research institute. This transition made national news, with the *Asahi Shimbun* reporting, "Ohara Institute for Social Research bounces back through merger with Hosei University."

In order to obtain additional outside financial support, the Institute transformed its legal status again in 1951. While maintaining its function as an

academic arm of Hosei University, the Institute was relaunched as the independent Hosei University Ohara Institute for Social Research Foundation. This finally set reconstruction efforts at the Institute back on track. Full-scale research efforts resumed under Director Kuruma. Researchers Seijiro Usami, Kiyoshi Oshima, and Naomichi Funahashi reconvened surveys, studies and other projects, including publication of the *Japan Labour Yearbook*. The Institute prepared two special editions to the *Yearbook* series to fill gaps left by the wartime hiatus: *Conditions of Workers during the Pacific War* in 1964, and *Labour Movements during the Pacific War* in 1965.

In 1968, the Institute undertook the task of editing and publishing the *Marx Lexicon of Political Economy*. This project was based on Director Kuruma's meticulously organized notes and was supported by an internal team headed by Usami with cooperation from external researchers. The project finally saw completion in 1985 with publication of the fifteenth and final volume of the lexicon.

In 1969, the Institute began editing and publishing *Reprint Series: Historical Documents of Japanese Social Movements* to commemorate its fiftieth anniversary. This project reprinted newspapers and other documents produced by prewar social and labour movements, making their contents available to public use for the first time. Over two-hundred volumes of the *Reprint Series* would be published over the following thirty years.

For many years, the books and materials held in the earthen storehouse at Kashiwagi had been left unorganized. Cataloguing began in the late 1950s and culminated in the collection's public opening at the Institute's Azabu Annex in April, 1971. From December of 1973, the Institute managed the holdings of the Harmonization Society Library (*Kyōchōkai bunko*), a collection held by Hosei University. The Institute worked to enhance the collection by acquiring materials related to social and labour movements. The collection received a tremendous boost in both quantity and quality when some 70,000 items from the collection of Itsuro Sakisaka were donated to the Institute by his widow in 1985.



Hosei University Fujimi Campus, Ichigaya



Asahi Shimbun reporting on the merger of the Ohara Institute and Hosei University (August 17, 1949).

## The Move to Tama Campus

In March 1986, the Ohara Institute for Social Research departed Hosei University's Fujimi Campus in the Ichigaya neighborhood of central Tokyo for the University's newly established Tama Campus in Tokyo's western suburbs. The Institute's decision to move was spurred on by the Faculty of Economics and Faculty of Social Sciences. Both departments worked closely with the Institute and had already decided to move to the new Tama campus. They requested that the Institute join them. The move to Tama alleviated the Institute's problems in securing adequate storage and working space. The newly built library and research facilities at Tama Campus provided the Institute with faculty offices, an administrative office, reading rooms, a depository for rare materials, and research space. The third level basement stacks offered ample storage of the Institute's current and future holdings. In total, the Tama Campus offered 1,920 square meters of space, more than the Institute had ever possessed. The move ensured that the Ohara Institute could successfully carry out its mission as a special library and resource center.

The Institute's move to the Tama Campus coincided with a structural reorganization that refocused its operations. It embarked on three new initiatives that would confirm its position as Japan's foremost research center for social and labour issues.

First, the Institute began organizing collective research efforts that paired Institute-affiliated researchers with outside experts. The numerous research project teams that emerged from this effort have gone on to publish more than thirty volumes in the OISR publication series (*Kenkyūjo sōsho*). This effort also helped reform the content and structure of the Institute's bulletin, *The Journal of the Ohara Institute for*

*Social Research*. By introducing a peer review system, this institutional publication now acts as a leading academic journal in the social sciences.

Second, the Institute took advantage of its new space to better function as a special library and resource center for international scholars. Thanks to its long-established reputation as a leader in labour and social research, the Institute welcomed scholars from overseas to explore its large holdings of rare primary materials. In addition to a large user base of researchers from across Japan, the Institute hosted scholars from Korea, the United States and other countries. This included welcoming graduate students of Japanese history from overseas universities as visiting researchers. Their research on primary materials held by the Institute became the backbone for important dissertation research, eventually being published in English from a variety of university presses.

Finally, the Institute bolstered its role as a research information center by establishing a website ([oisr.org](http://oisr.org)) in 1996 and continuously updating its contents. This website provides online access to the database of books, newspapers, periodicals, and other materials owned by the Institute. It also offers a unique bibliographic database, which catalogues articles in the areas of labour and social issues that the Institute has compiled since the 1950s. Online access was also established for the Institute's collection of more than five-thousand posters, in addition to back issues of the Institute's monthly and yearly publications, such as *The Journal of the Ohara Institute for Social Research* and the *Japan Labour Yearbook*. The Institute's internationalization efforts extended to its online presence. Exhibitions of posters and other primary materials were made available online with English translations.



Opening ceremony for the Institute's new Tama Campus facilities, held in the library's basement stacks.



Hosei University Tama Campus

# History of the Institute

## Recent History

The Ohara Institute for Social Research remains active across a wide range of research fields. In April 2013, the Institute acquired the environmental archives of the former Institute of Sustainability Research and Education, Hosei University. In 2015, the Institute released a redesigned and updated website. In 2019, Hosei University marked the Ohara Institute's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Institute's merger. The Institute commemorated this accomplishment with a symposium in March of 2019, "The Current State of Social Issues." In March of the following year, Hosei University Press published the authoritative history of the Institute in Japanese: *A Hundred Years of the Ohara Institute for Social Research (Ōhara shakai mondai kenkyūjo 100 nen shi)*. In June

2023, the Institute received the ILO Collection, an archive of books and other materials across approximately 480 boxes donated by the International Labour Organization's Japan Office. This collection is just one of the recent additions to the Ohara Institute's holdings.

As of 2025, the Ohara Institute staff includes four full-time researchers and eight concurrently appointed researchers whose affiliations stretch across Hosei University's Schools of Economics, Social Sciences, Law, and Social Policy and Administration. These researchers constitute the Ohara Institute's board. In addition, the Institute hosts or employs some twenty research fellows, research assistants and administrative staff members.



*A Hundred Years of the Ohara Institute for Social Research*



Top page of the renewed Ohara Institute for Social Research website.