

Learning About an Identity: Schools and Buraku Youth

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Every individual has a series of identities through which he or she interacts with others: male, female, child, parent, spouse, friend, neighbor, and numerous others. Yet not all identities are created equal. Each identity comes with expectations, from both the individual performing that identity and the people with whom one interacts. These expectations from both sides affect internal and external understandings of how one engages the social world with that identity. That is, there are psychological as well as social aspects to these identities. The approaches taken in this study explore internal and external understandings of what it means to be *burakumin* through an examination of how youth are socialized to engage with a *buraku* identity, through education, social movement organizations and community goals, and how the youth then manage that identity in the broader society.

The creation of an identity is based on numerous interacting elements. For the youth in this paper, I explore identity formation looking at the experiences as shaped primarily by school. This process of creating an identity is an ongoing, complex one. The dynamic process of attempting to create a specific identity and the reaction of the youth themselves to that attempt is not fixed. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it is through performing these identities in organized settings that the youths may gain the knowledge of alternative identities. If the student knows of alternative identities, he or she then has the knowledge and power to interact through that identity. At the same time, if a youth does not know of viable alternative identities, he or she cannot interact through them.

As identities shift over time and space, one of the first times youth will be faced with how to present themselves to outsiders is when the youth move beyond the protective cocoon of

their home, community and school. It is as they move to senior secondary school that they will potentially encounter those who have been socialized differently.

It is through interactions with others that a self-identity is manifested. By maintaining a specific identity in a particular social setting, one will necessarily shift the dynamic of the relationship. Inherent in this understanding is the reflexive nature of identity. Having choice in identity formation by definition means knowing that there are alternatives. These options are ever present, though specific options change over time and space.

The understanding of past experiences is not limited to personal experiences alone. The concept of a collective experience, real or symbolic, also helps to formulate an identity. These collective experiences begin at a young age and are mediated through myths, through symbols and through teachings by elders. Collective experiences are shared at very early stages of

life. From their earliest experiences in school, students are taught about collective experiences and taught collective behaviors. Students are taught of a country's or community's myths and histories. By learning about the past, the students are taught about the connections each person has to a shared past.

Students gain awareness of the social world and of a collective identity through the teachings in school. When the teachers talk of the *burakumin* experience, they are providing the students with an understanding of these experiences, providing the student with a historical foundation and historical connection with other *burakumin*, in short, a collective identity. When they do not talk about them, teachers are directing students toward a collective identity that is not focused on *buraku* identity.

The construction of an identity is part of an ongoing process, one that depends on interactions and preparations for future interactions. The connection between experienced past, both individually and collectively, to an expected future is key in the formation of an identity. The individual is acting with an awareness of past experiences that form a foundation for behavior in future experiences (Giddens, 75).

These preparations for the future are created and maintained in a specific time and place where the preparations can be controlled. In the early period of identity formation, an individual is typically in a protective cocoon where risk is minimized, though not entirely eliminated. For the youth in the communities where this study takes place, the protective cocoon is structured, based on the organization of the education system in Japan. Based on the education structure, interactions with outsiders are kept to a minimum. Once youth leave the protected world of the junior secondary school (the end of compulsory education), the probability of risk, of interacting with their *buraku* identity and the reaction from others, rises dramatically (Giddens, 40).

As we shall see, when the students move from the protective cocoon of their experiences in the community and sense of self at the end of junior secondary school, they face risk, the risk inherent in a new situation for which they must reflexively restructure their identity. How the individual reacts to the risk experience will then reshape the self. The reshaped identity, as part of the biography of the self, is changed for future experiences.

How do people then manage a *buraku* identity? What techniques are used to engage or not engage, with *buraku* issues? One method is to openly embrace being *burakumin*.

Locations

This paper is part of a broader study which examines the quite different values and approaches taken to *buraku* identity in two junior secondary schools in two communities. This paper centers on the experiences of youth in the town of Takagawa, a community with a strong Buraku Liberation League (BLL) presence, which approaches *buraku* issues in a very open and engaging manner. I was always encouraged to talk about *buraku* issues here, and *buraku* concerns always took a central part in town actions.

Interviews

I had decided to focus specifically on junior secondary school students for a number of reasons. To begin with, I wanted to focus on students' experiences in a localized setting within the protective cocoon that the closed, protected world junior secondary school can provide. Further, because junior secondary school is the end of compulsory education, once they graduate, the students will leave this localized setting, moving on to interactions with students and teachers who have vastly dif-

ferent experiences than they have. The reason I focused on third-year students was twofold: I wanted to talk with the students at a particular moment in time, the time where they are looking forward to life outside the community while still being in the community.

School

This section explores the process of the construction and formation of a *buraku* identity as it takes place within the school. Schools have a dual form of legitimacy: they legitimize the power of the nation through laws regulating national curriculum and laws requiring attendance. They also legitimize the power of the local community through how they engage issues important to the community they serve. How do schools engage with issues when the local and national perspectives are different? I argue that the lessons of the school, both direct and indirect, are situated within the protective cocoon and help shape the understanding of identity. Further, I argue that when the interests of the nation and the interests of the local community coincide with how they deal with *buraku* issues, students respond to the teachings in school with little or no internal conflict. Yet, when national and local views on *buraku* issues do not match, the students recognize these differences and learn the first steps toward how the youth engage with their *buraku* identity.

Youth, both *burakumin* and non-*burakumin*, spend the majority of their structured time in school. The manner in which the broader society, community, and subsequently schools, approach *buraku* issues will affect how youth understand *buraku* issues and *buraku* identity. When there is consensus between school lessons and the broader social world, the students find little concern or internal conflict. However, when there is disjuncture between the two, the students learn what is necessary to navigate the social terrain.

Takagawa Town

Takagawa is a town of three thousand people, with the *buraku* and non-*buraku* populations roughly evenly divided, with just over one thousand nine hundred residents of the *buraku* district, and just over one thousand eight hundred in the non-*buraku* district. There is one junior secondary school in Takagawa, and one class per grade.

At the main entrance to Takagawa Junior High School sits a small pond with a stone monument, engraved with the final words of the declaration of the Suiheisha “人の世に熱あれ、人間に光りあれ”(Let there be warmth among humanity and light among people). After entering, the students, just as in thousands of junior secondary schools like this, are required to change shoes to their officially designated indoor school shoes. A fish tank, posters announcing an upcoming national English test and a framed declaration from the town line the walls. The framed declaration is of interest. The declaration calls the reader's attention with the large title 部落解放宣言 (Buraku Liberation Declaration) informing the reader that the community has dedicated itself to *buraku* issues.

On entering, the students will walk past the office, noting any new or important information for the day on the chalkboard. The information posted here also informs students of changes in club activities. Permanent sections on the board include first, second and third year information, club names and information on the Kodomo Kai [Students Club] (a jointly sponsored BLL and school evening program for students). Outside the door to the staff room is a newspaper stand with children's versions of national newspapers and the Kaiho Shinbun, a nation-wide weekly newspaper of the BLL. Posters line the wall opposite the chalkboard, promoting good hygiene, national parks and one that describes the struggles of the Sayama Incident.¹

Classes in Takagawa Junior Secondary School center on *buraku* issues as well. In Janu-

ary, a special guest came to the third year class to talk about marriage discrimination. Mrs. Fujita, a primary school teacher from a neighboring town, came to talk with the students about her personal experiences with marriage discrimination. Not from a *buraku* district herself, Mrs. Fujita married a man from a *buraku* district.

Throughout the presentation by Mrs. Fujita, the students listened intently. A few even passed tissues back and forth, wiping away tears. Mrs. Fujita's presentation clearly had an effect on the students. One student, a non-*burakumin*, noted that by having Mrs. Fujita talk to the students about her own experiences, rather than something historical, it seemed much more real to her. Another girl described her reaction to the presentation,

Whenever we would have class about discrimination, I would think 'oh yuck' again and again. I always felt like no matter how much I would do, discrimination was just there. But, after the talk, I realized that I can do something. My father is *burakumin*, but my mother isn't. They've never talked about it, but if they hadn't overcome it, I wouldn't be here.

In February, six students from the BLL run literacy class (with an average age well over seventy years) came to speak with the first year students. The elderly, when young, had attended *Bunkyojo*, a place of education for *burakumin* students. In attending these schools, the young *burakumin* studied a separate curriculum than those of other Japanese students of the day (This was all under the pre-war educational system).

Though I was not able to attend the classes when the current third-year students were in their first year, I did attend a class with the current first-year students. While the specific questions were different, the stories and experiences the elderly told the junior high students remained the same over the years. All the elderly guests told the first-year students the reasons

they had left school, including poverty, a lack of encouragement from family, and a lack of encouragement from the school. As Mr. Uehara told the students,

I had to leave school when I was seven and went to work in the port... We didn't have our own textbooks. We had to use a book that was somebody else's, if they had one. Of course this made studying very hard.

Mrs. Yoshimi continued, explaining that she had to go to school with her younger sister on her back. Whenever the baby would cry, Mrs. Yoshimi would have to leave the class. It was just a matter of time, she explained, that the teacher told her not to come back. Mrs. Uehara echoed this,

There were six kids in my family, and my mother died when she was 40. I had to stay home and take care of my brothers and sisters. Because of this, I couldn't stay in school. Even when I went, I had to use a slate to practice *kanji* [Chinese writing]. I couldn't afford a notebook.

The relationship between past and present, official national history and the reformulation of local history, is not exclusive to Takagawa (Allen, 2002). By learning of past experiences, the students at Takagawa are presented with an alternate form of legitimacy in learning. By their presentation in textbooks, information and facts take on legitimacy. Yet for the *burakumin*, because their experiences tend to be missing in textbooks, it suggests those experiences lack value or importance for the students. Having adults share their experiences helps the students learn of the collective *buraku* experience and how these experiences are part of who they are, collectively and individually.

Other connections were also made between historical forms of discrimination and local experiences. In one class period, teachers brought in a copy of a pre-war student record

from Takagawa junior secondary school. The social studies teacher stood in the front of the room while the other teachers lined the side of the classroom. The teacher began by opening a folder, showing a list of names, some with red circles around them, others without. He asked the students what they thought this was. After a few minutes of silence, he told them it was a pre-war class list from Takagawa Junior Secondary School. The names circled in red were of the *burakumin* students. This was met with calls of “No way!” and “I don’t believe it!” from around the room. The teachers explained that the school also took part in discrimination.

Presenting actual life experiences to the students provides a greater sense of reality to the students of materials covered in Kaiho (Liberation) classes. It is the “living” history, the living experiences that give it importance to the students.

The goal of such approaches, according to one teacher, was “to show the students the value, past and present, of being *burakumin*.” As one student commented in response to such classes in school,

When the teachers taught us about their being embarrassed about being *burakumin*, I thought they were just telling us not to be like that. But now [through classes] I was able to learn about *buraku* history and culture, and watch it unfold before my eyes. If I hadn’t learned about the good points in *buraku* history, I’d probably be ashamed that I was born in a district.

Virtually all the students I interviewed from Takagawa emphasized the importance of education in overcoming discrimination. “Through education we can overcome discrimination” was repeated so often, it was clear that this idea was one that was constantly emphasized in the school. When I pressed them, there was an awareness that not all took these issues as seriously as others. One student, a girl who did

not attend the Kodomo Kai commented,

I think that with discrimination, no matter how much *burakumin* study, it’s never going to end. I’m *burakumin*, but in my heart I think much of this studying of *buraku* stuff is just stupid. No matter how much we study, there are still lots of people out there who will discriminate. I think *burakumin* are wasting all this time studying, when it’s those outside the *buraku* areas who need to study.

Yet other students view education not simply as learning about *burakumin* history and experiences, but as providing the students with the tools necessary to combat discrimination when they face it. A third year girl commented, “We learn that when we see discrimination, we know how to say something, to say ‘That’s wrong!’” Not all the students felt this way, however. A number of students appeared bored and uninterested in the Kaiho classes as well (it is important to note that in Takagawa, what were known nationally as Dowa Education, were known as Kaiho Education). During the Kaiho classes I attended, there were a number of students who were sleeping or passing notes to one another. This was something that took place in all three grade levels. *Burakumin* and non-*burakumin* alike were among those who were openly disinterested in the materials covered in the Kaiho classes. This lack of interest, lack of engagement, greatly troubled those who attended the Kodomo Kai. Indeed, as Ikeda (2000) found, “If the non-*burakumin* students do not take Dowa classes seriously, it has meaning to the *burakumin* students that they themselves are not being taken seriously (Ikeda, 29).”

The truest test of the effectiveness of Kaiho education comes once the students leave Takagawa Junior High. How the students react to discrimination or a lack of awareness from other students once they leave the confines of Takagawa is perhaps the most telling symbol of the effectiveness of the Kaiho education. The

school's embracing of *buraku* issues as it does is exceptional, for the broader society does not embrace nor engage in the concern of *buraku-min* at anywhere near the level of Takagawa and Takagawa Junior Secondary School.

The approach of Takagawa is telling. The transmission of knowledge of *buraku* issues is strong in Takagawa – materials covered in and out of class clearly demonstrate this. The socialization aspect of education is important in both schools, as is the case in junior secondary schools throughout Japan. The students in Takagawa are socialized to be aware of *buraku* issues and to take a very pro-active stance in combating discrimination. Finally, in approaching *buraku* issues as it did, Takagawa Junior Secondary School clearly legitimized open discussion and confronted *buraku* discrimination directly. *Buraku* discrimination will happen to the students, the school warned, and the school felt it was necessary to prepare the students accordingly.

Discussion of *buraku* issues is important in how a *buraku* identity is formed. For the students, the approaches taken by the school will act to shape an individual identity, both in the present and when preparing for the future. The manner in which the youth of each community deal with *buraku* issues in the future will be formed through the lens of their experiences in their past. The past experience of the students from Takagawa is a past that embraces *buraku* issues.

This section has shown that the students from both schools are being taught, either directly or indirectly, the lessons of identity. Let us now turn to see how the youth maintained this identity outside the protective cocoon of their localized experience.

Beyond the Cocoon

The third year of junior secondary school is one of the most important times in the life

of the youth in Japan. This year is the end of compulsory education and marks the culmination of an intense period of preparations for senior secondary school entrance exams. The question of most importance to virtually all third-year students throughout Japan regarding these exams is, "Will I pass?" for passing the entrance exam to a specific senior secondary school is of great importance in where a person will end up in society. The question was often asked by students in Takagawa, and by students throughout the country. This was, however, not the only concern about the future that the youth from Takagawa would face. As the youth moved on to senior secondary school, they would now be interacting with people who have different socialization experiences broadly, and different ways of engaging with *buraku* issues more specifically. When faced with competing identities, youth will mask, deflect or deny the potentially damaging identity, the one that would mark them as the most different. For the *buraku* youth of Takagawa, this means being open with one's *buraku* identity or choosing not to. The exception to this is if, and only if, one feels secure enough to expose oneself as being different, something most teenagers are unwilling to do.

Moving on to Senior Secondary School

As the new school year begins in April, students entering senior secondary school throughout Japan begin a new stage in life. They are no longer attending the closest school with students from their neighborhoods. While some students still attend school in the same town, others may attend school as far away as another prefecture. The new students with whom they interact come to senior secondary school from various communities, with various experiences and understandings of numerous social issues. This is especially important in dealing with experiences related to students'

understanding of *buraku* issues. As the students prepare to move from their protective cocoon, from their past, and move to a different social realm, risk is inherent. The students, who up until this time may have given little thought to their experiences and their background, are now confronted with having to deal with risk such as this for the first time.

Passing on to a New Social Setting

One method often used to prevent or minimize risk is through passing. In this section, following a discussion of passing as a tool for managing identity, we will see that the youth are managing their identity through a selective openness of their *buraku* identity. The risks that the students face are not always there, or not always apparent. The students are able to go through their normal routines without any real concern over the potential of risk. It is, however, at “fateful moments” that risk becomes apparent, where the protective cocoon is burst. It is at these moments that the youth must determine how to interact with others, choosing to share their *buraku* identity, as they have been socialized to do, or to decide not to share this background. This decision is not an easy one, as there are repercussions for both (Giddens, 114).

This tension surrounding openly sharing ones’ identity is constantly present for all the youth who have not yet shared their background, so long as they know what the alternative entails. Despite this, even if a person chooses not to share his or her background, there is always the possibility that at any given time, suddenly, someone else will break the protective cocoon. This tension is always present even if a person does not think of it consciously. There is always the possibility that one’s protective cocoon will burst, with potentially life-changing consequences.

Finally, the youth are not only learning how

to engage with *buraku* issues in school, but as a matter of course, they are also learning how to behave in a number of social situations from those around them.

The Future

Having gone through the educational and social settings in Takagawa, the students from Takagawa Junior Secondary School have the knowledge to make a choice in how they present themselves. They have learned from community leaders, from teachers and from peers what this will mean; they are aware of the potential outcome of exposing oneself and one’s background, or of being exposed by others. What might be simple comments from strangers or new friends could elicit feelings of anxiety and confusion. Questions as mundane as “Where are you from?” or “Where did you go to school?” are not as simple as they might first appear; for each time such a question is asked, there is an awareness and internal anxiety as to how the person may respond upon hearing the answer. This is not just the case for the youth; adults from Takagawa also undergo this tension each time a question is asked.

I observed adults from Takagawa shifting how they presented themselves while outside the community, selectively sharing their background. This shift, however, runs counter to what the youth in Takagawa are taught. They are taught to be open with their background, yet they see their parents and learn the lessons of passing first hand. They have been taught in school that they will face discrimination outside of their protective cocoon, but in an attempt not to mark themselves as any different from their new classmates, the youth learn that there are alternatives to sharing their background. By not interacting with an open *buraku* identity, they learn, no one will know their background, and they will be able to put off openly dealing with discrimination until they are ready.

The students from Takagawa Junior Secondary School may be facing moments such as this for the first time as they move on to senior secondary school. The Takagawa students were repeatedly told in junior secondary school that they would meet people who did not have the same level of *buraku* awareness or who held prejudicial attitudes towards *burakumin*. All of the Takagawa youth I interviewed noted that this was the case; none of their new classmates had anywhere near the same level of awareness of *buraku* issues. This means that they will, in essence, have to face this new social situation without the strength of others with them. As Tetsuya, a popular boy who was active in the Kodomo Kai noted,

In junior high, we learned how to have the strength to challenge discrimination in high school and beyond... but now...I don't know... I don't really have the strength.

Because the students are aware of the meaning of their answers, they have the power either to explain their background or to maintain a silence on the issue. Moments such as this, explaining one's background, are inherently filled with anxiety. Midori, a girl who did not attend junior secondary school Kodomo Kai, but began to attend once she moved to senior secondary school commented,

One time I was talking with some friends from high school, the conversation turned to scholarships. It used to be that scholarships were just for *burakumin* [this was one of the parts of the Dowa law² that Takagawa unilaterally continued after the expiration of the final Dowa law], and I said that I had a scholarship to attend high school. My friends looked at me with an 'Oh?' expression on their faces. It was the chance for me to tell them I am *burakumin*, but I just couldn't. The pain, the hurt inside me was terrible that I couldn't tell them. I just wanted to say 'I am *burakumin*,' but I just couldn't do it.

While some students choose to prolong the protective cocoon, others take the opportunity to share further. This opening of oneself – coming out – is not a decision that is reached lightly. Once open, there is no turning back for the youth. Other opportunities will arise for further reinvention, as they move on to other life stages, but as long as they remain in the same social setting, they will be labeled. Thus, a sense of deep trust in the person or persons to whom one is opening oneself up is necessary. The awareness of who one is, the reflexively constructed self-identity, will undergo a dramatic shift at such moments. By introducing a new element, one must then interact through this reorganized identity. Not all of the consequences for the youth of Takagawa were negative. Junko's case provides an alternative example of engaging in such a fateful moment.

Junko

Junko was a class leader, both in school and in the Kodomo Kai. Students, both peers and those in the lower grades, turned to her and always listened to her when she spoke. On occasion, she would take charge of the Kodomo Kai meetings, chiding those she felt were not doing enough or were not serious enough in dealing with *buraku* issues. She was one of the emcees for the Open Space, a school-wide discussion of *buraku* issues, and she had a long family history of involvement in the local BLL branch, from her parents through her older siblings. When she went to senior secondary school, she chose a school nearly an hour train ride away that was well known for its English language program. Because her school was so far away, none of her new classmates seemed to have any idea where Takagawa was, let alone the connection to *buraku* issues.

With her background, her role in the movement and the engagement her family had with *buraku* issues, Junko was one of those, if not

perhaps the most likely, to openly maintain and interact through a *buraku* identity. Yet Junko initially refrained from interacting using this *buraku* identity, at least with her new friends. Despite having numerous friends and a boyfriend, she did not share her background with anyone. It was not until ten months after she began dating her boyfriend that she finally had the courage to tell him about her background.

She was filled with anxiety about telling him. She had spoken at length with her parents, and they encouraged her to do what she felt comfortable with. This was something that Junko would have to deal with on her own. She did not know how he would react. Would this be the end of their relationship? Junko said she did not want this at all, but did not want to go on with such a big part of herself hidden from the one she cared about. She explained that the anxiety was almost overwhelming in knowing that sharing a part of who she was could mean the end of their relationship. At the same time, she did not feel that she could continue on with him without telling him about all of herself.

She made her decision. She explained to him that she grew up in a *buraku* district, that she was *burakumin*. His reaction to this confession was one of the last things that Junko expected: “*Burakumin*? What’s that?” Though he was from the same prefecture, her boyfriend did not have any idea what this meant. She found herself explaining what it meant to her to be *burakumin*. For him, this meant little in how they related to one another. He did not fully know what being *burakumin* meant, but he knew that he wanted to be with her.

As Junko’s story tells us, even for those who do take this step to share their background, it does not come without a large amount of trepidation. Junko’s family had always taken an active role in movement activities, and Junko herself was one of the *Kodomo Kai* and class leaders. As such, she was one of the students most prepared to take this challenge of open-

ing up to another. The response of Junko’s boyfriend is telling. Though he was from the same prefecture, his educational and socialization experiences were vastly different. For him, *buraku* issues, if talked about at all, centered on historical events. For him not even to know of *buraku* issues does not suggest that he was not smart or showed no interest. Simply put, he was a product of a school system that had put little, if any, effort into engaging *buraku* issues.

Teachers in Takagawa repeatedly told the students from Takagawa that their experiences were unique. The senior secondary schools that they were to attend would not engage with *buraku* issues at the level of their own experience or knowledge, if they were to discuss it at all. This was the case. As Junko noted, “when we talk about human rights issues in high school, it’s almost always about gender issues or handicapped issues. Stuff about *burakumin* never comes up.” Miyuki, a girl who did not attend the *Kodomo Kai* in junior high school, and goes to a higher level academic senior secondary school said, “We do talk a bit about *buraku* issues in high school, but nothing in comparison to what we learned in Takagawa.”

Not only are the students from Takagawa facing schools and schoolmates who do not engage with *buraku* issues at the level of their experiences, many of the students are engaging these fateful moments alone. The Takagawa students all spoke of returning to their junior secondary school friends when confronted with times of trouble or conflict surrounding *buraku* issues at their new school. The connection to the protective cocoon remains, even after they have moved on to a new social setting. Mana, a 20 year old from Matsushita Kazuyo’s study (2002) commented “the [district] is the most important place for me. I can feel a sense of security with the social relations there. In a word, ‘safety’” (p. 31). This does not mean that one can go back to the past, however. Michiko, a quiet girl who was active in the *Kodomo Kai*, talked about this.

I can only talk about *buraku* issues with my friends from Takagawa junior high school. I don't feel like I'm close enough to my high school friends.

These sentiments were echoed by Yuji, a boy who periodically attended the Kodomo Kai while in junior secondary school.

In junior high school, I could talk about anything with my friends, but now in high school, there are a lot of things I can't talk about. Now when I go to the high school Kodomo Kai [in Takagawa] I can talk with my friends about how they deal with this at their school.

This is fundamentally about trust and its connection to security (Berger, 1992). For the youth from Takagawa, they are not yet comfortable or satisfied with their senior secondary school support networks. For that reason, they are far more comfortable in returning to the social support at home in Takagawa with which they are comfortable.

Matsushita (2002) also found that in times of conflict, the *burakumin* youth in her study returned to an already established social support network from their district. She poses four reasons for this: a set of common experiences; common feelings; the same position in society; and they learn from adults in the community of social networks (p. 78).

This was not just the case for the students from the *buraku* district, however. For the youth of Takagawa, these patterns hold true and help to shape their broader experiences. The youth share a common set of experiences, through neighborhood ties and through school experiences, the awareness of the social position is important for Takagawa youth. The Takagawa youth find themselves in a similar position based on a common *buraku* background.

Conclusion

The students from Takagawa have been told about what they will face in the future. Through community values and school teachings, they know they will face discrimination at some stage. Indeed, they are aware that their protective cocoon does not provide real security, immunity in this case, from facing the reality of *buraku* discrimination. Previous experiences with discrimination within the district speak to this. The protective cocoon, for the youth of Takagawa, had been pierced even before the students left. Yet there is a fundamental difference between the piercing of the cocoon when the youth are in Takagawa and when they are in senior secondary school, for the initial piercing was confronted collectively.

The unintended consequence of structuring an identity that emphasizes the pride in being a *burakumin* and prepares the youth of Takagawa to face the challenges of prejudice and discrimination means that the youth can, quite simply, opt out of interacting with this open *buraku* identity, they can and many do pass. If students choose not to discuss openly the issue or present their identity as *burakumin*, there are no negative sanctions for so doing. No one from the community or school will be there to challenge them or check to see if they are openly interacting with a *buraku* identity. However, if the students have learned only one lesson regarding *buraku* issues, it is this: they will face discrimination. As we have seen, for some, coming out is not worth the risk.

Endnotes

¹ The Sayama Incident refers to the case of Kazuo Ishikawa, a member of the *buraku* district in Sayama city (Saitama prefecture), who was charged and found guilty of murdering a female secondary school student. Having been given a death penalty, he petitioned for a retrial on the ground that he was forced to confess to the crime, and that there was no other evidence

to prove his guilt. He also argued that the charged was influenced by his *buraku* origin. The court did not acquit him, but his sentence was changed to life imprisonment. He was later released on parole and continued to fight for a retrial to obtain an acquittal. His has filed his third appeal for retrial.

² This refers to the 1969 Law on Special Measures for Dowa Projects that provided support for the improvement of the educational, housing and employment conditions in *buraku* districts, and helped to eliminate *buraku* discrimination.

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