

**From Subnational to Micronational: Buraku Communities and
Transformations in Identity in Modern and Contemporary Japan**

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Abstract

From the Meiji period on, the social minority group referred to in Japan as *burakumin* was constituted as what might be called a “subnational” group. In other words, it acted as a supplement to the nation and national identity, a group of people attached but not necessarily belonging to what was conceived as the Japanese nation. With various shifts, this pattern remains in place and guides politics into the 1920s and then through the 1960s and in the 1980s. Subsequently, however, the beginning of a potentially major transformation can be observed. This change is linked to Japan’s movement into a globalized nation in the 1980s; it is then that the “subnational” turns into a kind of “micronational”—a repository of minor national-esque practices. The supplement thus becomes a surplus, opening the nation into a variety of little “nation-like” enclaves that are propagated as local communities and encouraged to act on their own and manage themselves. Similarly, the subnational *burakumin*—who were previously construed as subhuman—become micronational local community residents. Simultaneously, because of their historical experience and familiarity with segregation and self-governance, the *burakumin* become potential experts on local *community initiatives*. Only by looking at local histories of *buraku* communities rather than large histories of the nation can one acknowledge such transformations.

Résumé

À partir de la période Meiji, le groupe social minoritaire désigné communément au Japon sous le nom de *burakumin* s'est constitué en ce que l'on pourrait appeler un groupe « sous-national ». En d'autres termes, il représentait un ajout à la nation et à l'identité nationale, et représentait un groupe certes attaché à ce qui était conçu comme étant la nation japonaise mais n'appartenant pas forcément à celle-ci. Après divers changements, ce schéma reste en place et oriente la politique à travers les années 1920 et ensuite les années 1960 et 1980. Cependant par la suite, on peut observer les prémises d'une transformation potentiellement majeure. Ce changement est lié à l'évolution du Japon en une nation globalisée durant les années 1980. C'est alors que le « sous-national » devient en quelque sorte le « micronational », un cadre de pratiques quasi nationales. L'ajout devient un surplus et crée à travers la nation diverses petites enclaves simili-nationales qui s'affichent comme des communautés locales encouragées à agir seules et à s'administrer par elles-mêmes. De la même façon, les *burakumin* sous-nationaux (préalablement compris comme sous-humains) deviennent membres de communautés locales micronationales et simultanément, de par leur expérience historique et leur familiarité avec la ségrégation et l'auto-gouvernance, des experts potentiels en ce qui a trait aux *initiatives communales*. Plutôt que par les grandes histoires de la nation, c'est en regardant les histoires locales des communautés *buraku* que l'on reconnaîtra de telles transformations.

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Introduction

***Burakumin*: A Minority in Flux**

Burakumin, otherwise known as Japan's outcasts or the people of the *buraku*/ghetto, have commonly been labelled a social minority group in Japan. What has rendered this community most fascinating to both local and Western scholars is the mysterious way in which it has been defined, recounted and presented. In many academic accounts, the *burakumin* of today are undeniably described as no different, ethnically, physically or in any other way, from the major segment of Japanese society. It is also claimed, however, that the lingering prejudice against the community is linked to the polluted image and disreputable status of their ancestors' occupations. The present-day *burakumin* are still commonly presented as the descendents of Edo period's *eta* and/or *hinin* (Uesugi, *Burakushi*; Neary, *Buraku Issue*) [1].

During the seventeenth century, the status of those categorised as outcasts was made hereditary and they were forbidden to leave their places of birth. Despite the 1871 emancipation edict of the Meiji government, which abolished the derogatory use of the terms *eta* and *hinin* and stated that "henceforth the people belonging to these estates shall be treated in the same manner both in occupation and social standing as the common people", there was little change in the situation of the community members (Ninomiya 10). On the contrary, they were now officially grouped together into a single category, namely *burakumin*. They were also officially stripped of their monopoly on the meat and leather industries and were thus obliged to seek employment elsewhere. The prejudice they encountered forced them to stick together and seek alternative occupations. The multiplicity of paths *burakumin* have trodden and the struggles they have surpassed ever since their status was delineated is rarely delved into. In contrast, the negative images associated with their past have been a major concern for more than a century now. This is indeed why the people residing in *buraku* areas in contemporary Japan are still immediately

categorized as a class apart. However, it is important to acknowledge that areas labelled *buraku* or outcast ghettos have expanded, shrunk, moved, transformed in space and time as have the people within them. Only after understanding the historical movements of the *buraku* can we begin to think of them in the plural, embracing individuals of diverse social, economic and historical origins. Only then can we recognise the difficulty of claiming to know with certainty the origins of today's *buraku* residents (Uesugi, *Burakushi*).

The people who have in time found themselves residing in areas named *buraku* have in many cases fallen into the outcast category and have been segregated and discriminated against. Others have managed to “pass” or to leave the *buraku* and efface all traces of their previous residence (De Vos and Romanucci-Ross). Many people who have chosen the path of assimilation are struggling with feelings of nostalgia and wish to return either to visit old friends and relatives or to just be able to speak freely about their feelings. Even though the occupations of *buraku* residents have varied historically and their origins remain far from traceable, the notion that they are somehow distinct and somehow anomalous survives in the Japanese popular imagination to this day (Neary, *Burakumin*; M. Noguchi, *Buraku Mondai*). This very paradox constantly triggers various debates and is a key topic of discussion whenever the *buraku* issue is touched upon both within and outside Japan.

This Project

This project began with many questions and even more unsatisfactory answers. It began with a pursuit of solutions and remedies for issues that had been claimed to be irresolvable, always already existent, natural. My initial goal was to tackle these issues and help elucidate them. I was hoping to contribute to the conclusion of a battle fought for more than a century. These aspirations, which I had when first engaging in the study and analysis of the *buraku* issue in Japan, were

merely the dreams of an observer, an onlooker confident of her understandings and judgments. Indeed, I was confident enough to criticize the approaches to activism of the main *buraku* organizations that were fighting for the community's rights and freedoms. I was also bold enough to reproach the methods of scholars seeking to uncover historical "truths" and thus render both the categories of *buraku* and *burakumin* arbitrary.

The sole reason that I could allow myself to indulge in such thoughts was that I had assumed a position of power over the people I was attempting to learn more about. It was power that I wished to wrestle with and it was power that I assumed I needed to employ equally. There was, however, one crucial flaw in my approach to the problematic—the erroneous supposition that authoritative pressure can and must be tackled by means of active and conscious resistance alone. This constrictive understanding of power through resistance limited my perspective and, in turn, the study I was attempting to pursue.

It was only after a great many infuriating debates and a great many more days and nights of struggling with the reasons for my infuriation that I made the decision to listen and participate in conversations. This was the point from which I began thinking about power. It was also then that I began questioning resistance as a solution. From this moment on, the ideas that became prominent in my contemplations on concepts such as minority and nation was that questions do not necessarily require fully fledged answers and that, if posed well and discussed thoroughly, the queries themselves can shake up a construction.

This was therefore a journey in the search for questions, questions that did not call for resistance and uprisings but instead brought an ambiguity to the regulation from which they stemmed. There is no intention in this work to urge for effacement or a retracement of the artificially fabricated structures of the *buraku* and the *burakumin* (Teraki

ix; Uesugi, *Kore*). Nor is there a desire to advocate for an end to *buraku* history (Neary, *Burakumin* 27; Hatanaka, *Burakushi*). It might also be curious that this thesis does not mean to promote or demote the search for *buraku*/minority identity (Bondy, *Becoming* v; Kadooka, *Young*; Davis, *Culture*). The main purpose of this study is to explore the ways those who find themselves in the midst of all these debates live today. Within the constructed categories, within the history of exclusion and within the murky pool of minority identity, there are people. There is very little said and asked about these people. They do, however, live in contemporary Japan and they do have their own stories, thoughts and deliberations about the structures that surround them. The *buraku* community is a massive generalisation for a great number of individuals of highly diverse backgrounds and situations. It would certainly be very difficult to encompass every single one of these people and tell their stories in only a few hundred pages. It would also be quite careless to argue that the particular examinations of a few individuals in a few *buraku* areas are sufficient to draw conclusions on the greater community. Such a claim would only be yet another pointless generalisation. I have no intention of making assertions of this kind.

My work's focus is on difference, movement and transformation. Therefore, the stories told also deal with these three themes and highlight the hesitations, questions and doubts contained in them. I have conversed and listened to the people of more than eight *buraku* areas in Japan and, even though there is the occasional mention of some key interactions and themes touched upon in a number of the communities, I chose to primarily discuss the relations and exchanges I had in three of these communities. These communications are in no way representative of the sentiments and inspirations in the Japanese *buraku* as a whole. I chose to employ these single tales because I hoped to hint at the myriad directions that could be explored should one engage in unfolding personal histories, tribulations and prospects. It is from within such convoluted accounts that the impossibility of

ignoring change and movement in *buraku* areas becomes apparent. It is also from within such accounts that the autonomous voices of individuals can be heard and that the sense of local communities negotiating with larger municipalities can be acknowledged.

Chapter One of this thesis therefore came as a good beginning, a place from which to open up to the ideas that the *buraku* has only very recently become a “community” and that the *buraku* has and continues to be a space of perpetual change. From its conception, the construct of the *buraku* has remained an image, the image of a place containing human beings of difference – people standing apart from mainstream Japanese society. That place, however, because of its imaginary construction, could never be clearly demarcated and defined. Nor could the people who were initially meant to be restricted and linked to it. There was no specificity to the difference intended. There was thus an urgent need to create a physical distinction and restriction, a sort of tangible barrier of containment. In the process of establishing all that, however, both the space and the people remained in flux. There was movement caused both by the architects and supporters of the “minority” configuration and by the individuals who found themselves entwined in the mystifying scheme.

In fact, even when the Tokugawa Shogunate attempted to finally put an end to the havoc by creating clear-cut strategies for capturing and preserving both places and people, it still did not manage to restrain the growth and economic prosperity of some outcast areas. In consequence, shifting and reformulation of spaces was deemed necessary. When the multiplicity of outcast categories clarified in Edo were solidified into the ostensibly easier label *buraku* in the great Meiji Restoration, the situation indeed became truly grave for the individuals covered by the legislation. As much as it proclaimed the freedom of all peoples, the new law made it possible for those of distinct places, trades, statutes and situations to be named one and the same “community”, to be associated with actual land and, in time, to be

considered not just “different” but also strictly “inferior” economically and in all aspects of social life.

Simultaneously, however, Japan was developing as a nation-state, with “national prosperity” on all levels being vigorously pursued. Linguistic and educational standardisation, amalgamation of municipalities, development of a strong military force, the advancement of medicine and medical institutions and the implementation of hygiene as a standardised preventative mechanism—all of these tasks were undertaken in the pursuit of “national prosperity”. In effect, the *buraku* was also a part of this same project—the scapegoat provided for all of those new national subjects who felt somewhat distanced from the centre of action and needed a point of comparison that would bring them closer inwards. The problem, of course, was that in all the hustle and bustle of modernizing Japan, it was simply impossible to solidify and immobilize the *buraku* completely. After all, the task of both propagating the idea that all Japanese citizens were equal and providing an underdog in order for people to buy it was understandably an immense challenge. In the end, the underdogs were also citizens.

This is why the newly formulated *buraku* spaces of the Meiji era continued to stir and in many ways the commotion grew more and more obvious as Japan entered the Taisho era and was drastically amplified after the end of World War Two. By commotion here I simply mean the physical movements and transformations of the outcast spaces and the people inhabiting them. The first chapter of this thesis examines the material shifts of outcast spaces in moments of time through history.

Despite the remarkable motion that these spaces and human beings are observed to sustain in time, the way they are imaged does not necessarily change. On the contrary, as history progresses, the face of the *buraku* becomes more and more inflexible and constricted on the public screen. With very little ornamentation, the image of the *buraku* in contemporary Japan hardly strays from that originally put forward in

Edo. There are very few adjectives that could easily describe this unshaken representation—"taboo", "fearful", "filthy", "bloody", "dangerous", "criminal", "uncultured", "poor". As surprising as it might seem, these characteristics are employed to this day when discussing the *buraku* publicly. The image has truly permeated the public psyche and remains most dangerously pervasive today.

Thus an inquiry into the lives of the people living behind that image came to me as not just appropriate but also necessary. Chapter Two introduces three particular *buraku* communities in the Kansai region of Japan. Similarly to the first section of the study, it sketches out moments in time. Now, however, the emphasis is not so much on the space but rather on the people living in it. The story is now more about the soul of the *buraku*, the ways in which human beings have been and are today relating to each other, the ways in which they have been and are occupying themselves, making a living, suffering and celebrating. Most importantly, this chapter deals with how people have experienced and continue to experience changes in their social surroundings. It is about the ways in which those linked to the *buraku* have in time consciously or unconsciously responded to the inconsistencies between the actuality of their lives and the representations imposed upon them.

The most recent political events have affected the *buraku* community greatly and, once again, much has changed in the way people live, work, go about their daily activities, see their future and choose their life paths. As of the start of 2007, all funds in support of the development and economic aid of *buraku* areas, social projects and education have been terminated with the justification that discrimination has already been tackled and is no longer an issue. Concurrently, the party in power, the Liberal Democratic Party, has come up with a proposal for an independent local community organisation, which allows for the state's departure from local social economy and offers localities simultaneously the autonomy and responsibility to administer themselves as a part of the larger national community. These

circumstances have been so profoundly transformative that the responses to them, or rather the ways in which people have adapted to them, are fundamental. The contemporary “machi-zukuri” projects or local *community initiatives* taken up by the three communities discussed are indeed worthy of attention. This time, the focus on local history and “culture”, the emphasis on local autonomy and on negotiation, the emergence of *buraku* areas as potential role models for other localities in Japan, inevitably provides the appropriate setting for the sprouting of uncertainty and questions in regards to the meaning of concepts such as *buraku*, *minority* and *nation*.

The concept of “machi-zukuri” is, in fact, quite old. It was first conceived as an ideological counterpart to the conservative “city planning” mechanism back in the 1960s. “Machi-zukuri” literally means “the creation of a town” and was intended not so much as yet another legally implemented regulation but rather as a social contribution to the making of municipalities. It was predicated upon the idea that there is a need for the people who live in a village, town, or city to participate in its creation. People were thus deemed crucial in the decision-making process related to the planning and construction of the place where they reside. “Machi-zukuri”, however, was a movement, a community-based and propagated ideological trend that was only very slowly integrated into the state’s city planning institution. “Integrated” might even be an exaggeration because it was hardly viable for the ruling Liberal Democrats to simultaneously engage in campaigning for economic and political expansion and in responding to such locally centred requests.

It was only in the mid 1990s, shortly after the Great Hanshin Earthquake, that the government saw itself unable to cope with the crisis as efficiently as the local and regional Non-Profit (NPO) and volunteer organisations engaged in “machi-zukuri”. This was the beginning of a more serious consideration of the social aspects of community building on the part of the LDP. The most recent use of both the term and the concept by the government in power strikes one as

truly intriguing. The Liberal Democratic Party has not only adopted “machi-zukuri” as a part of its platform; it also appears to push it as a crucial element for the revival of the essence of the Japanese nation (Abe; Jiyu Minshi Tou). This swing towards local community development has been perceived by the Japanese population with mixed feelings. It is, however, evident that the term has proliferated almost everywhere in Japan and that much more attention is placed on the aspects of local “history” and “culture” within “machi-zukuri”. Whether this increasing focus on locality development and respectively on “machi-zukuri” is the result of the influential campaigning of the LDP is hard to say. Nevertheless, between 2002 and 2007 and particularly in the last two years of that period, “machi-zukuri” has become a term that is impossible to miss.

Indeed, the *buraku* communities in which I was involved were utilising the term and engaging in activities entitled “machi-zukuri” initiatives just as eagerly as LDP activists in their campaigns. It was peculiar to me to see the interplay between the conservative nationalist propaganda and the local community acts, particularly when these were the acts of minority communities such as the *buraku*. Chapter Four therefore became a space for the analysis of local discussions on *community initiative* with individuals and groups of people from the three *buraku* areas I studied. The emphasis here is on the ways in which these exchanges open up possibilities and go beyond reification of the local or of difference in general. There is autonomy in the voices of these people. While speaking of their goals and interests, they negotiate their identities both within and outside their communities.

The following and final section was intended to address the negotiations performed by way of *community initiative*. It is an account of the progressions and complications of the cultural activities named a part of “machi-zukuri” in the three *buraku* areas examined. At first glance, the setting, the stage, the acts, the offerings, the reactions of the public—everything that superficially was handed out as “culture”—struck me as conforming strictly to the tracks followed by almost any

other local village or neighbourhood in Japan. The numerous instructions listed on the website of the recently resigned Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and consequently on the current website of the Liberal Democratic Party appeared to have been followed very closely. What proved unsettling was the strong presence of the locality—the historical allusions, the local language, the dances, the themes of the plays all that really concerned *buraku* residents. This is how individual *buraku* communities simultaneously partake of and challenge contemporary neo-liberal projects; they act as micro-nations with micro-histories and micro-cultures within the larger national community. This is indeed how the “larger national community” becomes more and more difficult to understand.

The *buraku* I saw in the Japan of today has indeed become a “community”. The space of the *buraku* is still shifting and the people are still moving about. But that history of movement is now rendered “cultural” or “traditional” to Japan with the encouragement of the avid promoters of the nationalist cause. Even if this is not the case in other *buraku* areas, even if I was lucky to experience and observe such developments in the fewer than ten communities in which I spent time, these few villages, boroughs, neighbourhoods could still begin to transform the idea of difference and possibly contribute performatively to the questioning of concepts such as “culture”, “tradition” and “nation”. Through the consideration of local histories and through the local interpretation of national regulation procedures it might just become possible to shake up the concept of power and attach a sense of wariness to the notion of identity, be it minority or national.

In conclusion, this thesis seeks to offer a way of understanding the concept of community in its relation to categories such as minority and nation in light of the contemporary era of globalization. Through the study of particular *buraku* communities in Japan, it emphasises the importance of engaging with local histories rather than larger and all-encompassing histories of the nation. By paying attention to the spaces and the people within them, it becomes impossible to ignore the

movements and transformations in history. Only by acknowledging such shifts can we begin to question the fixity of categories such as minority and nation and can we begin to think of identity in terms of performance. In other words, we need to understand *burakumin* in the context of Japan but not necessarily in the context of a macro-historical Japan. The problem thus becomes less about whether or not *burakumin* are Japanese and more about what being “Japanese” means today.

NOTES

1. One example of such a presentation can be found in McClain, where he describes the former as “families that knew how to strip hides from animals and then tan and fashion them into saddles, harnesses, bindings for armour” (100) and the latter as “a heterogeneous collection of beggars, street performers and other economically marginal ‘nonhumans’” (101).

Chapter 1

Moments in the History of Constructing Outcast Spaces

This chapter was brought to life after quite some deliberation upon the way an historical account could be incorporated into this study most relevantly. The purpose of this thesis is to examine and analyze present day life and events in *buraku* communities, the ways in which people who, whether willingly or unwillingly, feel a connection to the *buraku* are being situated and in turn situate themselves as a part of both a minority and a majority. The main focus is therefore on the Japan of today. Indeed, many would argue—and with good reason—that in order to understand the present, it is essential to look back into the past (Uesugi, *Burakushi*). However, it is also very important to consider the fact that the majority of academic and non-academic studies on the *buraku* and/or *burakumin* have already presented extensive and highly detailed historical analyses. These works have provided many, including myself, with extremely valuable information and have inspired new perspectives and ways of tackling the problematic of minority vs. majority relations in Japan. Many such analyses have nevertheless also posed a different issue, acting as the basis and tool for approaching *buraku* discrimination as completely arbitrary. Such works have sought to illuminate the reality of *burakumin* as no different from the rest of the Japanese population and to thus render discrimination meaningless. It is this type of historical approach that the present chapter seeks to challenge.

This study aims to approach the problematic utilizing the tools of historicist argument once again, but in a manner quite different from the methods described above. There will be no attempt here to trace and expose the origins of *burakumin* in order to prove that they cannot and should not be distinguished from the majority population. From the very start, it is essential to clarify that this thesis begins where other studies and surveys have ended. There are three main and persistent conclusions. First, discrimination against *buraku* communities and

individuals is still present and thus recognising and discussing it are still crucial. Second, *buraku* communities have been and are situated within a long history of oppression that lives in their language, customs and what they have come to themselves label as “culture”. Third, the analyses of both the history and culture of the *buraku* are always already linked to space. What this thesis offers, then, is a history of the spatial formations and transformations that underlie the contemporary *buraku*.

In this first chapter, the spaces and images of the *buraku* will be mapped out through history. The ways in which the communities have moved, transformed and positioned themselves will also be examined. Moments within three vast historical periods, namely pre-modern Japan, modern Japan and post-modern Japan, will be used as settings. Outcast settlements within today’s Kansai region will be the frame of reference. The points of examination will be the outcast spaces and the images of these spaces. This exercise aims to reveal the strangeness of the contrast between space and image. While space is a physical entity with a material tangibility and precise notions of limits, image is a concept with boundless definitions and metamorphic capacities. Yet outcast spaces have been in motion and in change all through time while images encompassing both the spaces and the people within them have hardly budged, as if inscribed in stone. This discrepancy between the positioning of the physical and its representation is in fact what renders the *buraku* of today “complicated” and “somehow different” (Kadooka, *Young*). That very “complication” and that “somehow difference” carry with them a sense of insecurity and uncertainty (M. Noguchi, *Buraku Mondai*). Therefore, even within this first section of this larger study, the theme which is called upon and accentuated is the contingency, the instability and possibility infusing the categories of *buraku* and *burakumin* in relation to broader historical material conditions. In further chapters, the ways in which this historically constructed difference opens up to transformation today will be pursued in more detail.

1. *Internalizing the Outcast*

Removed Communities

When the term “Pre-Modern Japan” is used, what immediately comes to mind is the period preceding the Meiji Restoration or the times of “enclosure” and feudal rule. Many, if not most, textbook chapters or paragraphs on the *buraku* community would indeed begin with a tale of the Edo Period when, as the authors claim, “the shogunate and regional daimyos categorized outcasts as *eta* (‘pollution in abundance’) or as *hinin* (‘nonhumans’)” (McClain). The *burakumin* of today are, these accounts insist, “the descendents of Tokugawa-era outcasts” (Lie), possibly traceable to the period of Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s rule but certainly linked to the rigidity of the feudal status system and the so frequently referred to top-to-bottom, four-class-plus-an-underclass vertical structure.

There are contemporary academics who wish to distinguish themselves from this commonly employed model and present an alternative to understanding the *buraku* community today. These scholars do not necessarily challenge the connection between the *eta/hinin* villages and today’s *buraku* community. They still root their analyses in “Pre-Modern Japan” but exchange the status pyramid with a horizontal pie-chart scheme and draw the timeline of when accounts of outcast communities can be found to the late Muromachi era. Satoshi Uesugi and Akira Fujisato argue that the terminology and tools used to depict and describe the community are in fact misleading and incorrect (Uesugi, *Burakushi*; Fujisato). They insist on the importance of understanding the “true” origins and position of the *burakumin* today by correctly tracing the roots of the people categorized as *eta/hinin* in Pre-Modern Japan. They consider the pyramidal schematic as a false representation of the actual lifestyle and social position of the *eta* and *hinin* during the Edo period and argue that the status terminology so

often used (i.e. 士農工商 *shinoukoushou* — the commonly employed hierarchy of samurai, farmers, artisans, and merchants said to have originated in Edo society) cannot possibly be found in Edo-period historical accounts but rather in the writings of Chinese thinker Kanchi (Kanchu) in 650BC. Uesugi goes as far as to retrieve the roots of the term 四民 or “the four classes” within *The Book of History* (書經 *shokyo*), one of the *Five Chinese Classics* written in 1000BC. According to Uesugi and his followers, then, the vertical hierarchical model is not applicable or representative of Japan during the Tokugawa era and the *eta/hinin* grouping into an “underclass” is thus, he claims, equally irrelevant.

The link between Edo-period *eta/hinin* and the hierarchical four-class-plus-an-underclass model, both Uesugi and Fujisato claim, was first made during the sixth year of the Meiji period, when the *eta* and *hinin* were bulked together and referred to as the Edo-era “underclass” (Uesugi, *Burakushi*; Fujisato). Uesugi’s main argument, which has in fact been taken up and seriously considered in textbook revisions today, is that there have been crucial misrepresentations in regards to the categorization of *buraku* communities. Starting from the Meiji period, when the various outcasts of Edo were first placed under the common denominator “*burakumin*” or “people of the *buraku*”, the outcast community has been portrayed, discussed and traced back to an “underclass”, although it has always been an “*outclass*”. The *eta* and *hinin* of Edo Japan were “free individuals” who were located outside of societal limits and not below them, claims Uesugi (*Burakushi*). The difference, he insists, is very important and is primarily a spatial difference, one that continues to influence the social position and lifestyle of the discriminated but rather to a position and a reality of inaccessibility.

There are two main points made by Uesugi, Fujisato and many of their successors that require a thorough observation—first, the spatial positioning and second, the image of the *buraku* before the Meiji

Restoration. Outcast communities referred to as *eta*, *kawata*, *kawara*, *kawaramono*, or *hinin* [1] were literally segregated in terms of space [2]. They were not necessarily grouped together, for maps can be found indicating communities as specifically *eta*, *kawata* or *hinin (yado)* [3]. However, it should be noted that in many cases these terms were also used interchangeably. What all of these settlements had in common was the impracticality and distance of the location from the main centre town, the actual displacement of the community from societal doings and goings-on as well as from main transportation and access arteries.

The schematic below presents the pattern of segregation and grouping of *hinin* and *kawaramono* during the Muromachi period in the case of Kyoto. It also indicates that this grouping varied from area to area.

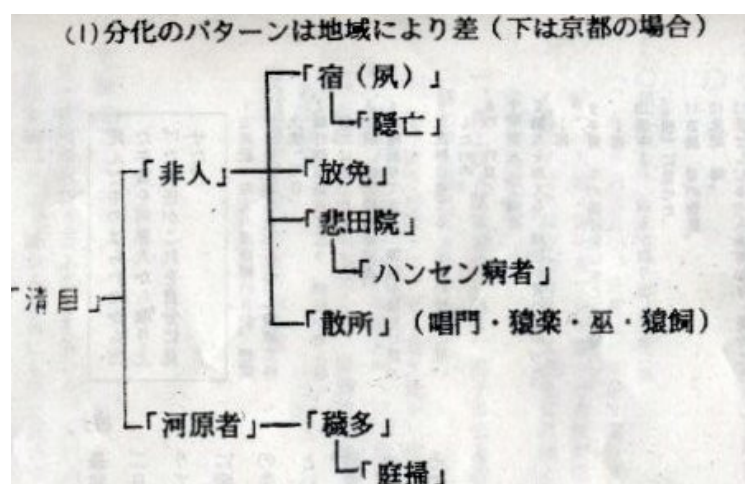


Fig.1

*Example of
categorisation of hinin
and kawaramono in
Muromachi period.
The case of Kyoto.*

(Uesugi, Bunka)

The 非人(*hinin*) category is split into four sub-categories, two of which are further split into two further sub-categories. The first category is 宿 (*yado*) or lodgings. If this term is examined in greater detail its meaning appears to be linked to a most basic and very small dwelling that consists of four corners and a roof. Outcast dwellings were indeed very confined spaces with no amenities and only basic shelter. This category branches out into a subcategory entitled 隠房(*onbo*) or “cemetery guards”. The second category is 放免 (*houmen*) or “the released”, referring to criminals who were acquitted and let free. The third category 悲田院(*hidenin*) consisted of those who were poor and

those who were orphaned. It is further split out into ハンセン病者 (*hansen byousha*) or people who had contracted the Hansen disease.

Finally, 散所(*sansho*) can be translated as “scattered places”, but the term was also used to signify places designated for litter. This category is further explained in brackets as encompassing the living quarters of the 唱門(*shoumon*) referring to Buddhist disciples, 猿楽(*sarugaku*) or entertainers/comedians who sometimes employed monkeys in their act, 巫(*kannagi, kaminaki*) or diviners, mediums and shrine maidens and finally, 猿飼(*sarukai*), referring to the people who kept monkeys.

The 河原者(*kawaramono*) or “the people of the river bed” category includes the 穢多(*eta*), translatable as “the very polluted”, who further branch out into 庭掃(*teisou*) or “garden tenders”.

This is only an example of the way discriminated people were mapped out and explained. However, the title of the schematic is quite telling for this categorization varied significantly depending on the location and the period. As mentioned earlier, in many cases, the different groups described above were also often interchanged between the categories of *hinin* and *kawaramono*. These two categories were not clearly differentiated in pre-modern Japan, “nor were these groups always separated legally, politically or ideologically from the *sanjo* residents (‘scattered’ or ‘marginal’ areas) or from a number of other types whose names vary according to the times and local practices” (Groemer).

The following map shows the distribution of *hinin yado* settlements in the Kinai region and the peripheral areas again during the Muromachi period [4].



Fig.2

Distribution of hinin settlements in the Kinai region and its peripheral areas (13-14C).

(Kinai)

On the map, the boundaries of the sub-regions of the five “kuni” are marked with dotted lines (Groemer). The *hinin* settlements are marked with the character 宿(yado) succeeding the name of the place. It is clear that the settlements were located out of the capital town of Kyoto and became more frequent further from the centre. There are particularly many such settlements in the Yamato (大和) and Kawachi (河内) areas. It can also be observed that some of the settlements marked as *yado* on the map could very well refer to *kawata* communities since they are located right on the river or riverbeds. The most important observation to be noted, however, is that wherever the *yado* quarters were located, they almost always stood if not right on then at least in close proximity to the limits of each sub-region. They were neither *out* nor *in*. These settlements were peripheral to the capital, the five “kuni” and their sub-regions.

There are scarcely any records that provide a clear explanation for the segregation of the *hinin* and the *kawata*. Pollution is the most commonly drawn “justification” for the segregation in medieval Japan.

However, as can also be seen in Fig. 1, it seems that some people who fell into the outcast category were not necessarily or immediately linked to pollution. In fact, the *shoumon*, the *kannagi* and the *teisou* worked in sacred spaces “where ‘pollution’ was feared more than anything else” (Groemer 267). The most dominant trait of all the groups classified as outcast was not so much the “dirtiness” or “pollution” of their occupation but rather the fact that they all lived in poverty and on many occasions acted as beggars. Ambiguous as the definitions of outcast in medieval Japan remain, it is clear that various people were discriminated against and segregated in one way or another into distant and unfavourable areas. The National Census Registers initiated by Toyotomo Hideyoshi in the 1580s and 1590s were the first step towards establishing an actual system of categorizing people and rendering occupational designations hereditary. The 1591 Edict Restricting Change of Status and Residence further rigidified the definitions of categories (Groemer).

In the following map, dated 1594—which would be one of the very last years of Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s rule during the Azuchi-Momoyama period—there is a clear indication of the location of the *かわた kawata* outcast community’s designated area. Indeed, it can be observed that the outcast community was once again well away from the town itself, which is marked with an arrow on the map below. Another interesting aspect of the particular location is the infertile land that encompasses it. Almost the entire area assigned as *かわた屋敷 (kawata yashiki)* or “kawata residences” is situated on land that is not cultivable. In contrast, the main town is conveniently placed on *上田 (jouden)* or “high rice fields”, very fertile rice lands. It can also be seen that the area remains not only physically apart but also perceptually hidden, not to be visible from any main road “for even the sight of a *buraku* is polluting” (Groemer). In fact, it was this very positioning of the outcast communities during the pre-modern eras that lead to the mystification of their image. “The communities were so far off, literally ‘in the boonies’, that people imagined them as they saw fit. These places were hard to access and deep into mountainous or forested lands.”

(Groemer). The outcasts in pre-Meiji Japan were often referred to as “forest people”, “mountain people” or “river people”, all references to the community’s proximity to nature, and were said to live close to/with the wild beasts. The outcasts were said to have been so much accustomed to the animals around them that they had adopted animal-like behaviour and habits. “There have been stories of the outcasts going into the town. The dogs would run towards them because they would recognize them as belonging to their own kind and the people would run away” (Groemer).

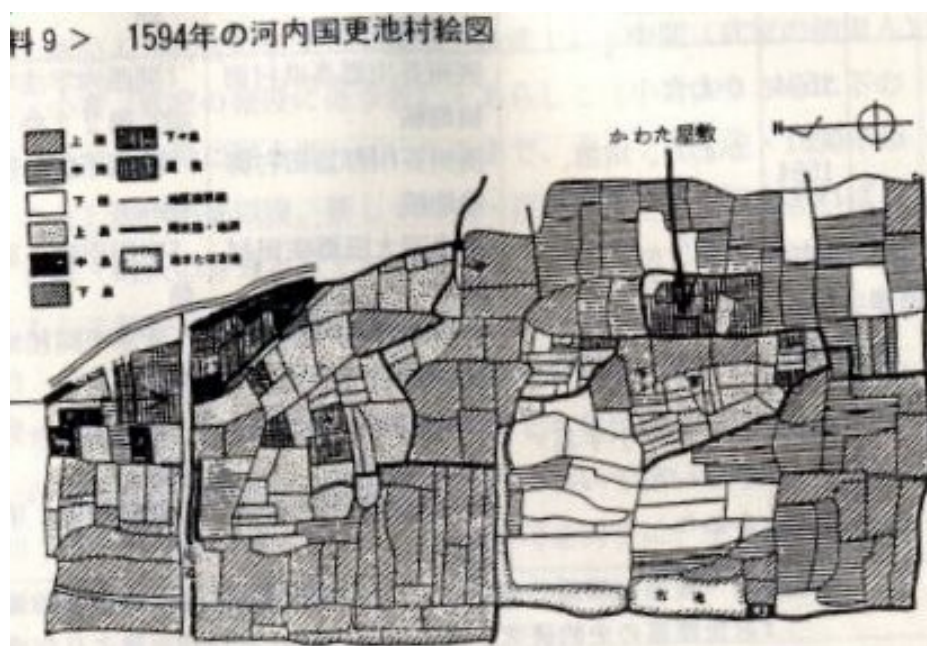


Fig. 3

1594 Map of Saraike village in Matsubara town, a present-day ward in Osaka city (Naohiro).

From Displacement towards Enclosurement and Classification

Displacement (rather than ranking) was how the outcasts of the Muromachi and the Azuchi-Momoyama era were positioned. This displacement also became more and more enclosed. During the time of Toyotomi Hideyoshi and towards the beginning of the Tokugawa period both the spaces and the people within them acquired clear definitions. The terms *ka wata* and *ka waramono* became commonly replaced with the term *eta*, which is immediately linked to pollution. “By 1657 even the Tokugawa *Bakufu* was using the term ‘eta’ in laws. From the mid-

eighteenth century the use of the term 'eta' was the rule, even though those concerned continued to refer to themselves as *kawata*" (Groemer 267). It was a strategic label for the now more rigorous removal of the outcasts from sight and social life. During the Tokugawa period, the communities were not only allocated lands away from the centre towns but also moved and further displaced as the 本村 (*honson*) expanded [5].

This map shows how in the short span of Edo period a *kawata* village was relocated five times, split in five and scattered around the main town.



Fig.4 Movements of Watanabe village in Edo Japan. Watanabe village in its final designation would be located within the area of today's Naniwa-ku in Osaka (Naniwa).

Following, it is also possible to see how the community in its final location is clearly labelled as 穢多村 (*eta mura*) or "eta village" and how it is situated in such a way that only a single road would link the distant outcast quarters to the main town of Kizu (木津). In fact, the area was accessible by two roads. However, one has clearly been interrupted. The *eta mura* or "the village of abundant pollution" is physically displaced. Access to it is limited as it borders large rivers and is

deprived of paths with the exception of one single artery linking it to the town centre.

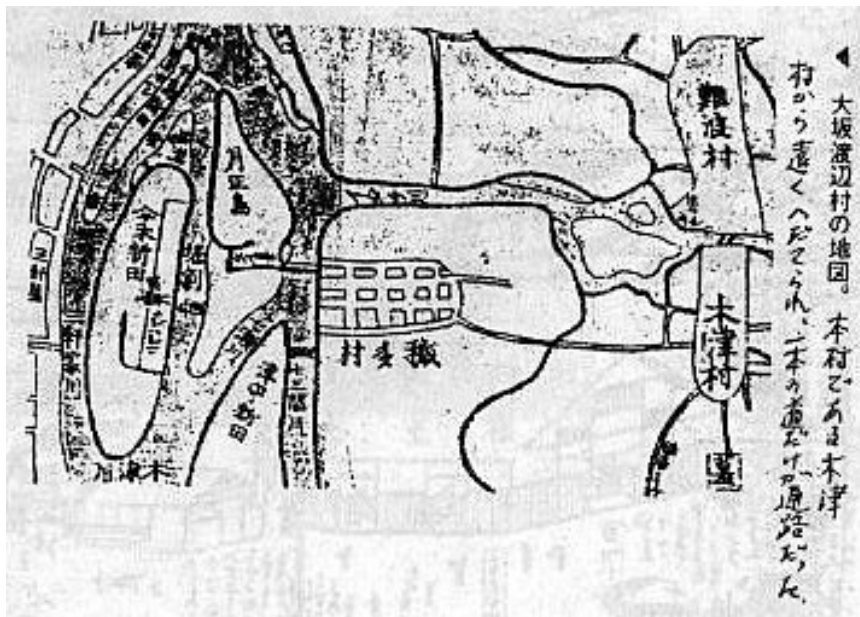


Fig. 5 Map of Osaka, Watanabe Village (Osaka Watanabe).

The next case is probably a slight detour from what was originally advertised as the scope of this survey. It does however present yet another very graphic example of the spatial positioning of outcasts in Edo Japan. This is an excerpt from the 1814 *Kanekusa no Waraji* Series by the renowned comic book author Jippensha Ikku. The scene depicts Dogo Onsen, a famous hot spring in Matsuyama city on the island of Shikoku. The area right behind the main building of the bath-house depicts a fenced, swamp-like space. The title right above this area when deciphered reads “乞食牛馬入込” (*kojiki ushi uma irikomi*), which would translate as “place for beggars, cattle and horses”. In other words, this area was designated for the *eta*, the *hinin* and their animals. The outcasts were not allowed in with the rest of the people using the main building of the bath house and were not only restricted but also hidden behind a fence. Once again, they were displaced, assigned a separate location that was also physically bound off. The picture-map below hints at the spatial isolation and enclosure of the

eta and *hinin* during Edo period. It is also characteristic of the way the outcast community was perceived and categorized.

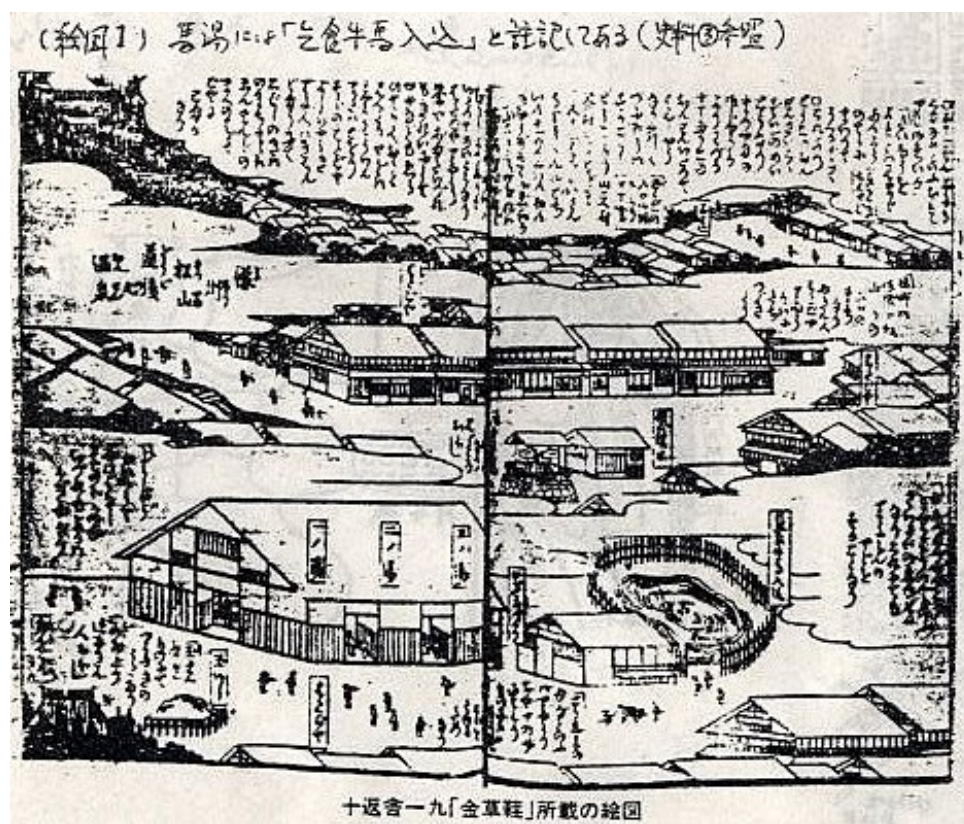


Fig. 6 Jipennsha Ikku “*Kanekusa no Wajiro*” picture-map (Ikku).

The various groups of people who for one reason or another were discriminated against had been physically removed from society since medieval times. Nobunaga’s preferential treatment policies for peasants and warriors and Hideyoshi’s national census registers followed by the 1591 Edict Restricting Change of Status and Residence in the Azuchi-Momoyama era could be seen as the trigger and starting point for segregation. But they were really more an act of structuring and categorizing segregation. The image of the outcasts as “being apart”, “living in the darkness”, “sharing their livelihood with the beasts”, “being beastlike”, “being scary”, “being mysterious” could be traced back and beyond the Muromachi era (Uesugi, *Burakushi*). By drawing a line around what was once an arbitrary あそこ (*asoko*) or “over there” and by naming the people who were once the arbitrary あそこの人 (*asoko no hito*) or “the people from over there”, the rulers and thinkers

of what was to become “Modern Japan” simply fashioned a rationale for the displacement and segregation of a great many individuals engaged in many trades and of many different backgrounds and histories.

Although the Meiji period saw the promulgation of the Emancipation Edict—which claims to free the social outcasts from their burdens and labels of *eta* and *hinin*—this rationale for segregation and displacement was not challenged [6]. The edict stated that “the titles of *eta* and *hinin* shall be abolished; and henceforth the people belonging to these classes shall be treated in the same manner both in occupation and social standing as the common people (*heimin*)” (Yoshino and Murakoshi). Now those who were legally restricted from movement and assigned living quarters during the Edo period were given the right to move and participate in social life in equal standing with the rest of their fellow Japanese citizens.

In this ideological move it is very important to note the rearrangement of the way power formation was being perceived. The pre-modern way of “spacing” people hints at an effort to define border zones and boundaries while controlling the flows and mixes within them. In contrast, the drastic theoretical change that followed with the Restoration signals a power formation much more interested in propagating the idea of sovereignty efficiently and evenly throughout the territory envisioned as the Japanese Nation. It is in this way that the need for portraying and, moreover, “naturalizing” The Nation and its Citizens became crucial to building Modern Japan.

2. Reinventing Outcast Spaces as a Part of the Nation

Becoming National Citizens – The Transformation of Physical Space into the Image of a Space

It is worth exploring here the notion of “citizenship” in more detail in order to better understand the spatial positioning of places and people during this tumultuous period. “Citizenship” and more particularly the

new notion of “Becoming the Citizen of a Nation” was a dramatic ideological move from the positioning of people within clear physical limits of space towards the placement of all individuals within the hardly conceivable image of the “Nation”. The models of both “Japanese citizen” and “Japanese Nation” were born and solidified during the Meiji period. The spaces and faces of lands and people were being rethought and imaged by the architects of “Modern Japan”. Individuals were now turned into “citizens” and were made out to be the leading actors in the structuring of “a society”.

The difficult process of rendering people partial to becoming integral to the concept of “nationhood” of course required strategic tools. In the case of Japan, as in many other modern nations, modern citizens were given freedoms, equality and rights. In a way, the generous promise of these three “gifts” through the regulation mechanism of the modern national legal system became the most powerful means of controlling human beings while transforming the physicality of the spaces within which they were located into an image. By creating institutions such as that of universal national education and a universal national language and by giving every citizen of Japan the right to become a part of these institutions, the architects of The Modern Nation moved forth to solidifying that very image while simultaneously and unconsciously also infusing it with instability.

The right to education was given through the establishment of the national education system in 1872. Another right was that of linguistic expression, first written and then oral, through the standardization of language or, as the title of the movement itself reveals—言文一致 (*genbun itchi*), the unification of spoken and written language (Twine). This standardisation movement focused on the so called “simplification” of written Japanese or, as it is commonly referred to, its “colloquialization” (Twine 433), and it was administered through the 国語調査委員会 (*kokugo chousa iinkai*) or the Research Institute for National Language, which was set up in 1902 and which proceeded to

the publishing of the “口語法” (*kougohou*)—“A Grammar of Spoken Japanese” in 1916 (Twine 451).

Education and language were thus rendered uniform by law. This initiative was crucial for the realization of what was widely advertised as “social change” under the greater umbrella of the “national space” (Twine 451). People distanced from the new capital of Tokyo were thus said to be brought closer together for they now “spoke the same and knew the same”. They were now members of a “unified nation”. In order for this “unification” to take actual effect, however, the people of the peripheries, the key players addressed in the nationalization initiative, had to be closely controlled. Education had become the mechanism and language had become its power. In order to exercise this power, controllers naturally had to be understood by those whom they controlled. What thwarted this enterprise was the reality that a great many communities identified with a great many different languages that were in time categorized as “dialects” inferior to the 標準語 (*hyoujungo*) or standard Japanese. There were also all the regionally specific habits and knowledge that proved more than difficult to simply disregard. Once this was understood, it was clear that all specificities need to be considered in order to proceed with the pursuit of centralising power.

This is where dialects, regional characteristics, regional culinary practices and the like were emphasised as distinct and “special”, truly unique to the Nation as a whole. Indeed, the distinctiveness and specificity of the various regions has been accentuated and utilized in different ways and to different degrees from Meiji to present day. However, what remains inherent within these positively portrayed qualities is certainly the distance *from* and the difference *from* the capital, which is where standards are being set. This issue is one of the main inconsistencies permeating the national construct—the difficulty of matching up to the imagined ideal. Such discrepancies and the way they have become more and more pertinent through time will be

discussed in subsequent chapters of this thesis. The main point here, however, relates to the effort of reformulating spaces, most particularly those occupied by outcasts. Linguistic and educational standardisation act as a means of reconceptualising space and community in Modern Japan.

To summarize, the spatial structuring of society in the times of Hideyoshi and Tokugawa was in fact still employed in the Meiji period, although it was manipulated in conceptual terms. The delineation of the centre-periphery model was employed again. This time, however, the tangible boundaries were replaced with imaginary ones. The Meiji period thus presented a modernity that shifted the power relations from the local to the “national” space. This space had to be depicted and imagined before it could become truly significant. For the depiction and imagination of the new Nation, the institutionalization of “culture” through efforts such as the standardization of language and education was implemented. The process of this implementation and stabilization of institutions has been long and very difficult but also successful. Yet, as it has succeeded in naturalizing the nation-state, it has also been unable to prevent its mechanisms from constantly pulling, stretching and skewing the boundaries that have kept it alive.

3. The Thorns Poking the National Space from Within

The Right to Be an Outcast

The *eta* and *hinin* were given the right to become 新平民 (*shin heimin*) or “new citizens” and the freedom to move and participate in all social activities. If this development is taken and explored on its own, it would certainly appear as a great opportunity for revising, reshaping and reformulating outcast spaces. There is, however, one detail that should not be left untouched. In 1872, four years after the Meiji Restoration, a law was adopted requiring every household to report births, death, marriages, divorces and criminal convictions. This was the first time in Japanese history that every citizen was required to have both a family

name and a given name. It was also the first time that places of original residence were recorded clearly, records were centralized and family registries were made a prerequisite when participating in social affairs. Although similar practices existed since ancient times [7], it was during the Meiji Restoration that the modern systematized 戸籍 (*koseki*) registry was first adopted to encompass every single household in Modern Japan (*Gyouseishoshi*). The emphasis was much more on the household than on the individual and much more on the original rather than on the actual place of residence.

This new arrangement did not legally restrict people from moving and mixing. It did, however, make it virtually impossible for people residing in what was now for the first time referred to as a 部落 (*buraku*) to make a living anywhere but within the discriminated community itself [8]. The “new free citizens” had the legal right to move without restraint but the social stigma surrounding them was now not only reproduced but also enforced. This was done slickly in the form of the modern family registry, where *shinheimin* status was well noted and where outcast origin was hinted at through “original birthplace”, which simply resurrected the physical boundaries and categories of Tokugawa.

Logically, upon pursuit of new employment or lodging, the people of the *buraku*, or the *burakumin* found that they could only rely upon their fellow “new free citizens” and that the most remote and disadvantaged locations, even within the larger cities, were where they could settle. Usually, these areas offered the cheapest land, in many cases around riverbeds. This arrangement does remind one of the social and physical positioning of the *kawata*, *eta* and *hinin* villages of the pre-Meiji period. There was, however, a substantial difference and that difference was closely linked to the same ideological reformulation of space for the construction of the Nation. While it was a concerted scheme for the creation of an alternative power formation, the crucial shift from physical delineation to an imaginary boundary—a movement

that began during the Meiji Restoration—simultaneously allowed for a continuing and unpredictable metamorphosis of the new *buraku*.

The Powers of Imagination and the Troubles of Imagining the Outcasts as Fellow-Citizens

By means of the regulatory framework set out in Modern Japan, the *buraku* was no longer a physically defined space but an imagined one. The *koseki* or “family registry” reestablished the notion of defining people as outcasts. Interestingly and also by means of that same national mechanism, the *buraku* was now no longer a space “outside” but a space “within” the Nation. With the “nationalisation” of Japan began the spatial internalisation of the *buraku*. That is to say, the *buraku* was slowly becoming a physical part of the main city, town or village. Where the *kawata mura* and the *hinin yado* of the pre-Edo and Edo periods were actually located outside the main municipality, out of site and with hardly any access roads, however, the *buraku* was moved within the head town as the Meiji government was succeeded by Taisho.

A Case of Physical Internalisation of a *Buraku*

The following map shows a community located in what is now Hyogo Prefecture called 芝村 (*shiba mura*) or Shiba village in 1769, which would be in the mid-Edo period.



Fig. 7 1769 Map of Shiba Village, present day Ashihara-cho neighbourhood of Nishinomiya City (Nanba).

Shiba village is an outcast community. On this map it has been highlighted with a red marker as a dot. It can be observed that it is not only out of the main town's limits but also across the river. In fact, it is surrounded by the river streams in such a way that it cannot be accessed let alone seen. There are no roads connecting it to the surrounding society.

It is interesting to see how this positioning changed during the last year of the Meiji period.



Fig.8

Map of the town of Nishinomiya, last year of the Meiji era (1912) (Nishinomiya machi tochiriyozu).

In this map, the town of Nishinomiya lies right below the two train lines. Shiba village has once again been marked, this time with a blue contour line. The red colour marks the populated areas. Rice fields are marked with yellow and fertile farmland is marked with green. It can be seen that Shiba village is still located away from the main town and from fertile land. However, it has moved north, expanded and is now

linked by a major road, which passes right through the village and gives it access to the surrounding municipalities, to the train station and the main town of Nishinomiya.

In 1926, Shiba village lies on the very border of the town of Nishinomiya.

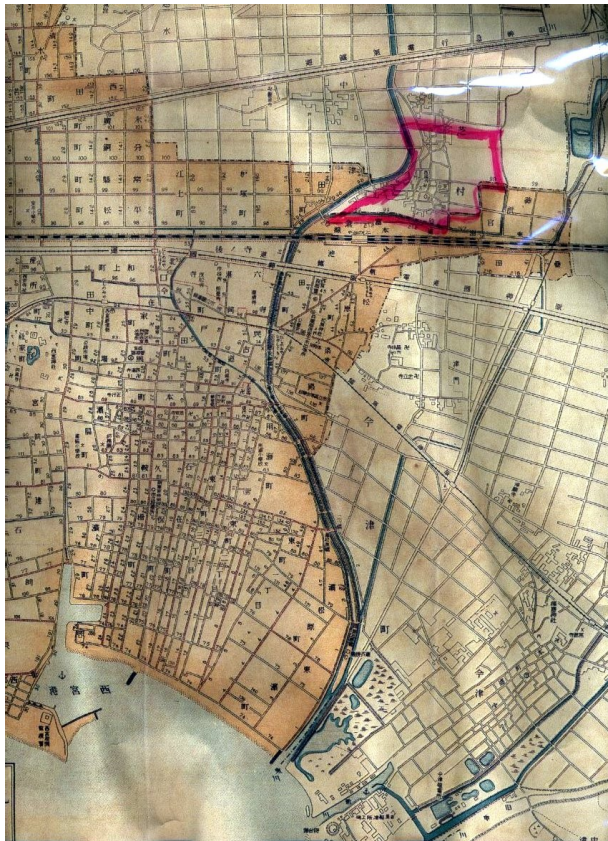


Fig.9 *Portion of a map of Nishinomiya city dated 1926. The location of Shiba village is contoured in red (Zu zenshi Nishinomiya).*

It has in fact shrunk to the north by about a block but it has also expanded to the east and to the south to sit almost on top of the town of Nishinomiya and its main train station on the JR line.

The next map is from the period between 1933 and 1942. It shows the changes in spatial positioning of the same *buraku* community. Shiba village is not even marked as such on this schematic. This is because it has become a part of Nishinomiya city. If examined closely, it can be seen that it was actually split into a few separate neighbourhoods, 神明町(*shinmei-cho*), 神祇官町(*jingikan-cho*), 西福町(*saifuku-cho*) and 芦原町(*ashihara-cho*), the last being the largest of the four. It should be noted that Ashihara-cho is not only the largest but also the least

sectioned area. This is to say, that the infrastructure has not been a priority in this area. Blocks are large, streets are few and houses are bulked together without a designated access for those not facing a street.

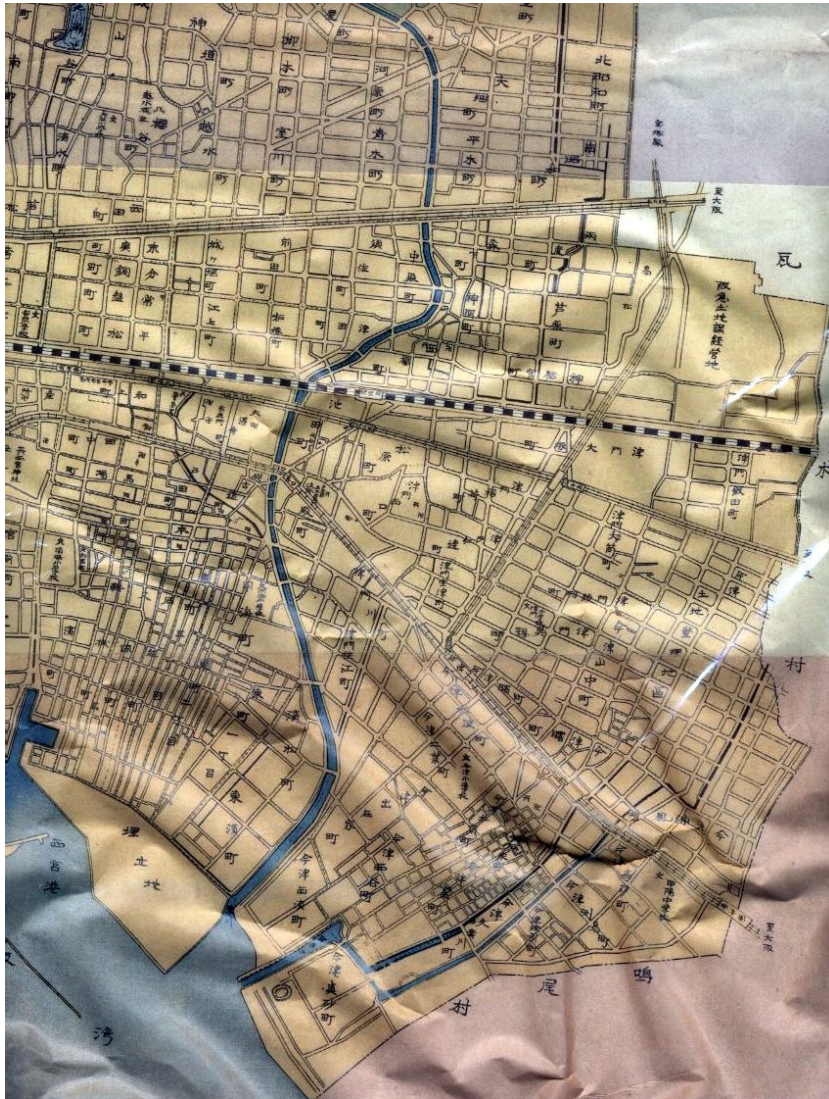


Fig. 10

Partial map of Nishinomiya city in the period 1933-1942. Shiba village has now become a part of the larger city and is located within the space enclosed by the river and the three railroad lines(JR Kobe line, Hankyu Kobe line and Hankyu Imazu line) (Nishinomiya kuikimeizu).

Without going into too much detail about the social and economic development of this community, it should be mentioned here that Shiba village housed a butchery, which continued its business during WWII

and which expanded greatly during the Post-War period [9]. All through this time, cattle and animal produce was brought in via the JR Kobe line and deposited at the Nishinomiya station. The northern side of the station, where the *buraku* community was located, was thus still largely avoided by the people of Nishinomiya for it was known to “smell”, to be “dirty”, “bloody” and “scary”. The roads leading to the community were advertised as dark and dangerous and children were advised not to go on them.

The restrictions and segregations are therefore still evident during the Meiji, Taisho and Showa eras even if the community has now been included in the city itself. Despite the fact that there are three main train lines surrounding the *buraku* and two main train stations, the respective exits and directions to the community are still stigmatized. Furthermore, the social image appears to be reflected in the municipal administration. City planning for the *buraku* cannot possibly be on a par with the surrounding neighbourhoods in regards to infrastructure and basic amenities such as sewers and water supply.

There are, however, a few key aspects that have now transformed the community intrinsically. First, in the period between the Meiji Restoration and the end of WWII, it became a community. The various people, who had been considered and physically demarcated as residents of an outcast space during the Edo, were now bulked together into the unofficial but lasting category/image of *burakumin*. Their living quarters were no longer distinguished according to occupation and with time not even according to their distance from the main town or their size. In many cases, the areas where *burakumin* lived had become impossible to outline. Many were appropriated by the growing town nearby and split into a bunch of districts within the new municipality. Second, most major highways, railroads and large stations were located in immediate proximity to these communities. It was not only easier to do, since the disadvantaged did not dare complain about the arrangement, but it was also cheaper because the land within and surrounding these areas was “naturally worthless” [10].

Thus, the integration and disintegration of the *buraku* as a physical space as well as the insertion of major travel hubs in its immediacy transformed its face and structure. There were certainly many disadvantages but also just as many—if not more—possibilities for movement and economic growth for the people living in the outcast quarters. While now located within the city, and while discovering the possibility of movement, however, those labelled as *burakumin* remained trapped in the new solid boundary of the “imaged” *buraku*—a “subnational” space, a supplement to the nation, which no longer had actual limits but proved more powerful than anything tangible can ever be.

4. *Developments in the Modern National Modes of Spacing in Post-War Japan*

It is important here to examine the ways in which the modern *buraku* developed as a subnational space through time. It is also important to note how with various shifts and turns, the set model—that delineation of the nation and national identity and depiction of the necessary but uncomfortable supplement of the outcast space—remained in place, guided national politics and affected the psyche of the modern Japanese citizen. This path was pretty much followed from the 1920s through to the 1980s, when the pattern underwent a crucial and significant transfiguration.

Let us now begin by briefly following the major events between the end of the Meiji period through to the post-WWII period. In 1922, the 水平社 (*suiheisha*) or “Levellers’ Movement” was created to defend the rights of those now labelled *burakumin*. The outcasts of Edo who were bulked together, not so much literally as conceptually, and rendered “new free citizens” were now striving to explore the potentials and scope of the pledges given by the founders of Modern Japan. Strongly influenced by the Communist Party in China and using the pledges of the new Modern Nation that Japan was claimed to be, they began by demanding “utmost respect for the dignity of human beings” and

“improved living conditions for the *burakumin* as well as complete elimination of discrimination” (Komori). The Suiheisha had only begun to work through its platform and get some minor attention when Japan became engaged in a much more substantial pursuit; WWII had consumed the energy and attention of the young “nation” and its leaders, largely interrupting the activities of the movement.

In 1945, following the defeat and surrender of Japan to the Allies, a new constitution, the 日本国憲法(*nihonkoku kenpou*) was created to replace the Constitution of the Great Japanese Empire or the 大日本帝国憲法(*dai nihon teikoku kenpo*). The new constitution was designed to emphasise democracy and human rights within which “*all people are equal under the law and there shall be no discrimination in political, economic or social relations because of race, creed, sex, social status or family origin*” [11]. One year later, the members of the pre-war Suiheisha movement gathered in Kyoto and founded the new 部落開放全国委員会(*buraku kaihou zenkoku iinkai*) or the “National Buraku Liberation Committee”, headed by Matsumoto Junichirou, the father of the Suiheisha himself. In 1947 Matsumoto was elected vice president of the House of Counsellors in the Diet. Eight years later, the movement was renamed once more, becoming the 部落開放同盟(*buraku kaihou doumei*) or “The Buraku Liberation League” (from here on to be referred to as BLL), which is the name it holds to this day. There are many reasons why this change had occurred. One would be the ideological split that was forming between some of the members within the association. In 1953 the local government had begun issuing small subsidies to *buraku* communities. This move was followed by the 1960 Law to Establish a Deliberative Council for Buraku Assimilation, the 1965 report entitled *Fundamental Measures for the Solution of Social and Economic Problems of Buraku Areas*, which was authorized by the Prime Minister and, most importantly, in 1969, the commonly referred to “Special Measures Law” or the 同和対策事業特別措置法(*douwa taisaku jigyou tokubetsu souchihou*).

It was at that point that the Japanese Communist party, which had hitherto been a part of the Buraku Liberation initiative, split from the BLL, later founding a separate organization named the 全国開放運動連合会 (*zenkoku kaihou undou rengoukai*) or the “All Japan Federation of Buraku Liberation” (from here on to be referred to as Zenkai-ren) (Reber). The disagreements were based primarily on the fact that the BLL was dealing with the Japanese government with the aim of receiving funding and, according to the Zenkai-ren members, was neglecting the goal of fighting for equality for all disadvantaged groups. The Special Measures Law was thus the point of breach between the two organisations, for it facilitated the infrastructural and economic improvement of strictly *buraku* areas by assigning them financial help and disregarded the initial goal of achieving human rights in general. In order for the measures of the 1969 law to take effect, the areas needed to once again be delineated and named “special”—同和地区(*douwa chiku*) or assimilation zones .

So, how did all of these changes alter the space of the *buraku* if at all? There were communities that resisted both the BLL politics and the assimilation projects. Certain of these areas sided with the Zenkai-ren and were not given the status of assimilation zones. Others did not take sides at all and were also left as they were. In the case of some of the former and most of the latter, the main issue was with the label, which appeared to once again segregate the community physically and restrict it to its land. Jobs were created within the assimilation zones. Money was allocated to those living within the assimilation zones. Help was offered to the spaces within which discriminated people were said to live. It was thus that the *buraku* community was controlled. By ensuring that the disadvantaged zones received funding, the new “democratic” government fulfilled two crucial goals. First, it kept the *burakumin* within the *buraku* and in many cases it brought them to it. It was obviously a difficult task to trace a physical boundary to a community that for years was being solely imagined. The boundary had to be imagined as well and in many cases it encompassed a variety of

people who had never even been considered or had considered themselves *burakumin*. Second, the collaboration of the state appeared to answer to the demands of the powerful international human rights organizations that were beginning to apply considerable pressure. It was ensured that the *buraku* areas, which were now a very central part of the municipal picture, were “beautified” for the sake of the occasional critical—and possibly influential—observer [12].

Following the passage of the Special Measures Law, the space of the *buraku* was drastically transformed. The *buraku* areas within major cities were cleaned up. The slums and barracks were demolished and new apartment buildings were constructed. Roads were built where there were none; sewers, gas pipes and water were provided; the people of the “new” *buraku* were encouraged to attend not only school but also higher education institutions; programmes were set up for the elderly and the young.

The areas that did not receive the “special” *douwa chiku* status and that had been associated with the BLL and were now a part of the new Zenkai-ken followed very similar trajectories to those of the advantaged districts. These areas were, however, negotiating with the local municipalities and not by way of the BLL. They developed in the same pattern as the BLL-administered *buraku* areas but with a slight delay. The areas that refused to cooperate with either activist organization were left unattended and rarely discussed. The majority of these *burakus* are located within rural areas and in many cases would be sections or a few houses within a village. All of these communities, the ones falling in the former and those falling in the latter categories remain unlisted as *buraku* areas and their exact locations as well as any data on the people living within them remains vague.

The areas that were designated *douwa chiku* status have been assigned precise boundaries and centres. These boundaries have been allocated by the most active and powerful BLL members from these regions but in many cases not even from the area. These

boundaries were then approved by the Japanese government. The limits and centres have thus been assigned quite strategically in accordance with individual and political agendas and do not correspond necessarily to areas that have been socially segregated throughout the years. This is to say, at the point in which the areas were categorised as *douwa chiku* certain households found themselves located outside of the drawn perimeter while others fell right in even though they might not have been situated within the socially outcast area previously.

All in all, the structural changes that affected many—even though not all—disadvantaged areas and communities did not in any way lift or shift the previously established modern image of the *buraku* or the *burakumin* as belonging to a supplemental, “subnational” space. The transformative developments were strictly institutionally driven and the reality of people’s needs, desires and perceptions were moulded into the political incentives for claiming particular physical spaces and “beautifying” them. In other words, the structural makeover of areas more or less sporadically designated as *buraku* had very little to do with any social or ideological tackling of the *buraku* problem and discrimination in general. The image of the *buraku* remained as it was designed within the grand national project of modern Japan in the beginning of the century.

Transforming the Subnational Space into the Micronational Space

In the 1980s, however, there were some intriguing social movements that did much to transform the concepts of minority and community not just physically but also ideologically. At a time when Japan’s efforts were turned towards becoming a globalised nation, non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations called for the mobilisation of local communities with the idea that the people of the neighborhood should be the ones deciding the fate of their own living quarters. It is this shift towards the local that brought about the metamorphosis of the “subnational” into the “micronational”—a truly transformative practice

that rendered the once “supplemental” *burakumin* a part of many “micronational” communities which constituted the nation of Japan.

It is indeed this very move that triggered substantial shifts in the way the *buraku* problematic and identity were perceived. As the Special Measures Law was extended in 1997, much of the structure of the modern *buraku* areas was altered. People from other disadvantaged groups such as the resident Koreans, divorcees, Okinawa-born Japanese, people of other *buraku* areas (in many cases rural areas where the Special Measures Law was not implemented), sick elderly (for whom there were convenient facilities within the *buraku*), and financially weak students, who appreciated the lower costs of living, were all welcomed in the now micro-nation of the *buraku* in the spirit of building a diverse and rich community. One interesting statistic is that of the percentage of *burakumin* born and residing in some of the larger *buraku* areas of Osaka today. People registered in this category within the designated *douwa chiku* today vary between 20 and 40 percent [13]. This information is significant not only because it shows that the physically delineated *buraku* can hardly be characterised as “a place where *burakumin* reside” but also because it once again raises the issue of the “image” of *buraku* spaces and identity.

It is commonly said that the area to which one has been registered in the *koseki* or family registers follows people said to be of *buraku* origin even after they relocate from their birthplace or even if they have never resided in a *douwa* area. This kind of pattern fits well into the schema set out in the process of building the modern nation. In more recent years and particularly in contemporary Japan, however, this argument has become quite complicated. There is not only a growing number of children of mixed marriages between *buraku* and non *buraku* but also many born in the *douwa chiku* districts and profiting from the assimilation programmes but not necessarily having any long history or connection to the discriminated community. The once solidified “image” of the *buraku* is inevitably being questioned and challenged.

The situation was further shaken up in 2002, when funding for *buraku* areas was ceased. In April 2007, community youth centres were closed by the municipal authorities and BLL local offices were required to move away from what was considered the heart centre of the former *douwa chiku*, the community centre. These were also required to change title from 解放会館 (*kaihou kaikan*) or “Liberation Centre” to a variety of different headings that in most cases included the 人権 (*jinken*) or “human rights” character within them. This new arrangement was said to promote general locally based human rights initiatives and not solely *buraku* designated projects. The *buraku* issue was claimed to be resolved.

The resolution proclaimed so abruptly and with such ease, however, referred not so much to the issue of discrimination as ideological segregation of human beings but rather to the infrastructural/economic contribution the state had assigned to the areas the “*burakuness*” of which was now being questioned. The actions taken in 2007 were said to have been sparked by a scandal involving a municipal official of Osaka City who had abused his privileges as a local BLL leader in applying for and receiving community funding, rather than by the resolution of the *buraku* issue. His act was advertised and discussed excessively in national media just before the decision to make the changes was made. The official was introduced from the outset as a “*burakumin*”, a “criminal related to the Yamaguchi clan of the Yakuza”. His deeds were immediately connected to “his community” and to all other *buraku* communities that were described as “strange”, “mysterious” places that “have been and still remain taboo” and where “a variety of suspect individuals dwell” (Akai). Statements such as “after all they’re all the same” and “it’s better not to talk about it because it’s so scary” are still very common (Akai) [14].

Media slogans of this kind only highlight the continuous attempts to hold onto the space within which lies the imagined *burakumin*. The image of the *buraku* as the place “over there” and of the *burakumin* as

“the mysterious person from over there” remains vague, indefinable but very real. This notion was not in any way shaken by the Special Measures Law or by the different approaches to and initiatives towards liberation. The areas that did not side with the BLL and/or the Zenkai-ken were not marked by law, did not receive any funding and did not participate in the assimilation initiatives. They remained poor and discriminated. The areas under the protection of the BLL and Zenkai-ken were assisted in acquiring financial and social advantages that were restricted to designated areas. Discrimination towards all people labelled *burakumin* remained. Whether poor and meagre or well-off and beautiful, the *buraku* as a space, as an image is a “fearful place”, “a place of mystery”. Both the place and the people of the *buraku* “should not be discussed”. This image is being propagated and exploited. It has also been and is continuously being questioned, challenged and opposed by the community and those who see themselves as being connected to it in one way or another.

In summary, outcast spaces in Japan have undergone three major shifts through the centuries. These shifts are linked mainly to the different approaches towards power formation adopted in history and accordingly bring about distinct issues and trigger distinct ways of attempting to deal with them. If we could look at three moments in Japanese history and define them as pre-modern, modern and post-modern Japan, then what would particularise outcast spaces within these moments would be the following. Pre-modern Japan’s outcast spaces were peripheral, physically segregated and delineated but were also important for social development. The modern *buraku* was relieved of the physical boundaries, integrated but abjected. Finally, the post-modern *buraku* or rather the notion of relatedness to the *buraku* triggered by contemporary globalization politics provides yet another, still unresolved but quite unexpected pattern in the imaging of *buraku* spaces.

It is thus difficult to ignore the fact that both the people and the spaces named outcast have been in transformation and motion from when they

were first recorded. The locations, sizes, inhabitants, their occupations—all of these aspects of the communities have been in constant flux. The ways in which the outcasts have been portrayed and perceived, however, has proven more than difficult to alter ever since the times of change in Japan, namely Meiji—the age of the Modern Nation. Despite having been challenged, the image of the *buraku* is still repeatedly linked to the image of the *hinin yado* or those of the *kawata yashiki* and the *eta mura*. The multiplicity of negative qualities said to have been assigned to the outcasts of medieval Japan, mainly in order to demystify a group of people who lived physically and socially away from the majority population, covers the face of the *buraku* today. Social vices such as a disrespect for life, proneness to criminal behaviour and barbaric habits are commonly discussed in “private” settings and more than commonly hinted at in national media. The *buraku* is easily labelled “dark”, “mysterious” and “dangerous” even as the person speaking is taking his/her child to play in the accommodating playground of a *douwa chiku* area.

These discrepancies cannot but suggest the need for rethinking the way in which the *buraku* issue of today is approached. History has been a major tool for scholars and policy makers willing to understand, explain or cover up the contemporary problem. As demonstrated here, history does need to be explored for it provides valuable clues to the complex and convoluted paths outcast communities in Japan have trodden. Instead of utilizing this conclusion to insist on the arbitrariness of discrimination towards the modern *burakumin*, however, I believe it needs to be acknowledged that, arbitrary or not, discrimination has created discourses that do affect people associated with the *buraku*. History can be utilized differently to provide us with fresher and clearer perspectives on the way *buraku* spaces are being transformed as we speak. It is by looking at local rather than national histories and by fervently continuing to examine local *buraku* spaces and the realities of local *buraku* people today that we can begin to understand the ways in

which lives are changing and how these changes continue to reformulate the spaces as well.

NOTES

1. The literal translation of these terms is as follows: "eta" - much pollution, "kawata" - plenty of leather, "kawara" - riverbanks, "kawaramono" - people of the riverbanks, "hinin" - non-human.
2. Terminology varied with time. In the Osaka region the terms "kawata" and "kawara" were used predominantly until well into the Edo period, when the term "eta" and references to "eta villages" were common. See Fujisato 3-16.
3. The term "hinin yado" would translate as "the living quarters of the non-human".
4. The five "kuni" areas surrounding the capital city of Kyoto during the Muromachi period.
5. 本村 (*honson*) refers to the central village and is placed in opposition to the 穢多村 (*etamura*) or 河田村 (*ka watamura*), which were the outcast quarters.
6. The Meiji Restoration of 1868 marks the time of collapse of the Tokugawa shogunate as well as the beginning of dramatic changes in Japanese history. The ideology of Japan as a nation-state is commonly cited as having been born in this period.
7. It was in the year 670 that the concept of family registry first came to life under the title of 庚午年籍 (*kogonenjyaku*) or "family registry of the year of the horse". It was followed 30 years later by the 川辺里戸籍 (*kawaberi koseki*) or "riverside villages registry" in 701. These initiatives were taken for taxation purposes. However, after the collapse of the legal codes (based on Chinese models) of the Nara and Heian eras, these taxation methods became meaningless and were thus abandoned. During the Edo period, registries were reinstated but this time it

was rather for keeping control over the Christian population. It was not until the Meiji period that a centralised record of family registry was created.

8. The term "buraku" literally means village and is still employed in this sense in certain areas of Japan even today. However, during the Meiji period the term 特別部落 (*tokubetsu buraku*) became common and it referred to outcast areas. These were later simply referred to as "buraku" areas and the people residing within them as "burakumin". Today, both "buraku" and "burakumin" are terms referring to minority areas and their residents and their use remains a "taboo" for the majority of Japanese.
9. Ashihara is one of the communities that will be introduced and examined in further depth in Chapter 2.
10. See interview with Yoshihiko Yamamoto on July 3rd 2007 (in possession of author).
11. Article 98 of Nihonkoku Kenpou. For further information on the post-WWII constitution see Reber.
12. The concept of "beautification" and the projects involved in "beautifying Japan" will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.
13. See Interview with Kojima and Ooga in Asuka and Hinode on July 21st 2007 (in possession of author).
14. See interview with Onoda of May 27th 2007 (in possession of author).

Chapter 2

Three Buraku Communities, Three Different Stories:

Asaka, Ashihara, Kami-no-Shima

1. How are Spaces Shifted? Who Shifts Spaces?

In the previous chapter, the main focus was on the way outcast spaces were defined, bounded and imagined in relation to the shifting of the functions of power formations over time. This introductory section thus offered a brief history of the spatial formations and transformations underlying the contemporary *buraku*. The goal of this enterprise was to emphasise the importance of looking at local histories in order to understand major ideological movements such as the shifts within minority space and identity from the subnational to the micronational level.

In order to better grasp the trajectories of such transformations of space and identity, this chapter will introduce actual *buraku* communities of today. It will present their local progression and development through time. Three communities distinct from each other geographically, historically, economically and in social status will be examined. The reason for choosing these particular communities for this case study is that they present a great example of the ways in which *buraku* areas can stand physically distinct from one another while simultaneously being close to each other in their experiences of living within the imaged and imagined *buraku* space. The ways in which this space has moved and transformed historically and the ways in which it is being actively rethought today within these three communities is what makes them engaging for comparison.

In order to facilitate a better understanding of both the concrete and ideological positioning of these three communities in respect to each other, the following analysis will be presented symmetrically. This is to say, there will be a clear pattern in the way the communities are dealt with. There will be an introductory historical presentation outlining the

material appearance, growth and development of each *buraku* village as an outcast territory. This will situate the areas and provide a better idea of the concrete paths the people within them have trodden, the physical boundaries with which they have been presented and have dealt with through time.

This history will then be examined from a different angle, namely through stories of individuals from within the communities. This section is therefore a call to memory, and personal memory in particular. The importance of an account of memory, and particularly that of individuals, lies primarily in the possibility of thus offering a different kind of locality to the historical perspective, a shift from local histories towards personal histories of the local. Such a move allows for a broader review of the interplay between *buraku* spaces as they are perceived and reproduced by the collective communities inhabiting them and the actual personal relatedness of individuals to these same spaces. There is a tension to be observed here. This kind of tension is also clearly found between the practice or call for local “Tradition”—an “ahistorical” continuity—and the exercise of “traditions” or historical practices, both of which are traceable in the performance of songs, dances and festivals. The translation and analysis of such rituals in each one of the three communities is meant to act as a hint towards the tension as well.

The final section of this comparative study is thus intended to further develop and emphasise this same tension by focusing on the gradual rethinking of traditional practices sought and classified as defining the *buraku* in terms of Traditional or ahistorical progression. In other words, by studying the more recent history of the three communities and engaging in their political struggles, achievements and movements, this last section is meant to highlight the shift towards an ideological reformulation of the imaged and imagined *buraku* space and identity. I see this move as a type of new performative repositioning of the *buraku* within the transformed micronational space discussed earlier—an opening towards a new type of relatedness to the *buraku* as a concept.

Let us now proceed with the presentation of the three communities.

2. Historical Background of Three Buraku Areas

This section offers an overview of the historical data available for the three *buraku* areas examined namely Asaka, Ashihara and Kami-no-Shima. This information will encompass the period from the first records of the areas' existence all the way up to the first couple of decades of the twentieth century or up until the first traces of political activism linked to the *buraku* community in Japan. The importance of this section, which is indeed strictly factual, lies not only in its situating of the three *burakus* for the reader; it is also important because it concretely emphasises how during the period discussed, outcast spaces throughout Japan have gone through very distinct and varied paths in regard to geographical location, population and economic development while nevertheless remaining linked to each other by a position of an averse physical appendage to society. This is to say, *buraku* communities were put under the same common denominator due to their development and growth in time as attachments to but never parts of social structures.

Asaka

Asaka ward is situated within the Osaka city area. It is today a small community of about 530 families situated to the south of Osaka city, on the west bank of the Yamato River and near Sugimoto-cho station on the Hanwa line of the JR network. Asaka is a *buraku* community affiliated with the Buraku Liberation League and today deemed the most pro-active and successful BLL chapter in Osaka city. The same community was also however labelled the most destitute *buraku* at the start of the League's initiatives in the immediate post-war period.

How did Asaka come to life? What caused it to remain poverty-stricken for centuries and what had then made it to become so well-off in such a short period of time? There are many changes in the history of Asaka that contribute to the understanding of the situation in which the

community finds itself today. There are also, however, just as many aspects of that history that remain unclear and untraceable and in turn, make it very difficult to draw a straight line between today's Asaka and the people of Sugimoto Shinden of the Edo period. It was indeed in the years before the mid-Edo period that the area where Asaka stands today was completely transformed and a group of people deemed "unworthy" settled there for the first time to build the foundations not only of a *buraku* but also of the entire region where once stood the Ajiemon Lake.

After long discussions about the reconstruction and expansion of the Yamato River, a plan was finally approved and launched in 1704. The works required were extensive and truly challenging. Many members of the discriminated community, the people of *eta* and *kawata* villages of the Kawachi, Setsu and Izumi areas were drafted for their undertaking (*Asaka no . . . okori*). Many of these people were not only employed for the period of the construction of the new riverbed but were also relocated to work as permanent labourers, thus ensuring the wellbeing and rapid recovery of the negatively affected villages and inhabited areas around the newly built river.

Sugimoto village was one of the communities that desperately required assistance. In fact, it was also one of the villages that had strongly protested against the construction of a new river bed since the first plans were proposed in the 1620s. Sugimoto was located in close proximity to the west of the planned route of the river. In addition to the fact that the works would ruin great many rice fields, it was also said that they would fill up and destroy the pre-existent Ajiemon Lake, which provided Sugimoto, the surrounding villages and their inhabitants with precious water for irrigation and other household needs. These not-so-optimistic perspectives pushed the Sugimoto village head to request of the Shogunate the permission to permanently relocate people of the *eta* and *kawata* villages employed in the works to an area nearby the banks of the river and not too far from Sugimoto village. These people would then be sure to transport the water from the river into the village

for its everyday needs. Simultaneously, they would rid the village of its unwanted carcasses, both human, which they would in turn bury and animal, which they would dispose of somewhere far away.

People from Kawachi, Setsu and Izumi were gathered in the Yosami region in which Sugimoto was the central village and made to settle on the very banks of the newly built Yamato River. The area was named 杉本新田 (*Sugimoto Shinden*) or the “new fields of Sugimoto”. In the year 1708, it was allocated 9 koku of rice paddies, which would be equivalent to land from which about 45 bushels or about 360 gallons of rice could be collected. In 1716, the fields had grown to 15 koku and 12 years after, to 20 koku. In 1818, there were 24 households, 21 of which were allocated their own rice fields and 3 of which did not own a field. In 1865, households increased to 30, but among them 17 owned rice fields. By 1871, the family units were now 53, only 19 of which owned their rice fields and 44 of which were without fields.

The inhabitants of Sugimoto Shinden were initially brought in to do the work that the local residents of Sugimoto saw themselves as incapable of doing. The people of the newly formed community were to bring in the water from the recently built Yamato River to the fields of Sugimoto. The work of the residents of Sugimoto Shinden consisted of carrying large barrels of water connected to a water wheel. These water carts would be used to bring the water to the village and then irrigate the paddies. The work was so labour-intensive that neither the Sugimoto Village residents nor the residents of the surrounding villages were willing to engage in it. The discriminated people of Sugimoto Shinden, however, were not even asked whether they would like this kind of employment simply because it was well known that they had no other choice.

Despite the hardship of the work, however, the reward was solely the land that the *eta* and *kawata* immigrants were allocated. Moreover, it was more than clear that that land could not feed the community. This is why any other employment was sought and welcome. The

occasional disposal of dead bodies and animals was one of the options offered by the community. For this particular task, being close to the river was actually very convenient. The dead animals used for farming in the village of Sugimoto were now washed and skinned, with the meat then treated to be eaten by the members of the community, who had a great shortage of food. The skin was left to drench in the water, then dried and used to produce various goods such as leather shoes to replace the traditional geta and Taiko drums for festivals and military celebrations. When necessary, the meat was sold at the Tennoji village meat market in exchange for rice.

There are also records of connections between Sugimoto Shinden and the surrounding villages such as Yamanouchi. It is further clarified that people from the community were given the unwanted jobs in the surrounding villages and were thus able to sustain a living (*Asaka no . . . okori*). However, when thinking of Sugimoto Shinden in the Edo period, what remains the primary trade of the community is the supply of water for irrigation to Sugimoto Village. In fact, by the beginning of the Meiji period, the people of Sugimoto Shinden had become the primary water suppliers not only for Sugimoto Village but also for the many villages in the Yosami area. Indeed, this is how the community had managed to establish connections elsewhere and receive various tasks that would help it survive despite the constantly worsening living conditions.

It is difficult to attempt to revisit the Meiji period history of Sugimoto Shinden as there are hardly any records available. In fact, it is known that there are diaries as well as documents left from that era but access to these has remained strongly restricted even for the local historians and community workers engaged in tracing the history of the village (*Asaka no . . . Roujintachi*). There are, however, certain facts that have become known.

In the sixth year of the Meiji period (1873), there were 84 families residing in Sugimoto Shinden of which 16 owned fertile rice fields and

68 did not possess workable land. Compared to the numbers of three years before, the families owning land had decreased by one and the families without fertile land had grown by 24. The population of Sugimoto Shinden in 1877 is 434 people. In 1890, there are 615 people living in the community. The population in the surrounding villages of Yosami, Yamanouchi, Sugimoto, Abiko, Karita and Niwai did not increase during this period. It was solely Sugimoto Shinden that was steadily growing in numbers. The land of the community did not expand, however. This suggests that it was people involved in activities other than agriculture who had moved into Sugimoto Shinden. This amounts to about all that is known about life in Sugimoto Shinden during the Meiji period. Taisho and Showa, however, are periods about which much more information has been collected thanks to the living memories of the elderly in Asaka today (*Asaka no . . . Roujintachi*).

In 1918, a document entitled 部落台帳(*buraku daichou*) or “ledger of *buraku* areas” was published in Osaka. It described the conditions of discriminated communities around the prefecture. Information about Sugimoto Shinden appears in this document as follows. From 1916 to 1918, the households in the community grew from 225 to 232 and the population increased from 979 to 1070 people. The average number of persons per family amounted to 5 people. There were 157 families involved in garbage collection and antique sales, 38 families involved in agriculture, 12 families engaged in construction work, 4 families that owned geta workshops, 4 families that had barber shops, 2 families that produced tooth brushes and 4 families involved in other trades (*Asaka no . . . Roujintachi*). Approximately 70 percent of the families living in Sugimoto Shinden at that time were therefore engaged in garbage removal and antique sales. The next major trade appears to be agriculture. It is mentioned that 38 families were involved in agriculture. However, the earlier information in regard to families owning fertile land indicated that only 16 such families were present at the time. The remaining 22 families were most probably engaged as day farmers in the surrounding villages. In all, the families involved in

farming constituted no more than 10 percent of the population. 12 households were engaged in construction work and, among the various other jobs mentioned above, there were also people selling goldfish, keeping public baths and protecting the local graves. The majority of people were involved in a great variety of jobs.

According to the “ledger of *buraku* areas” of 1918, one in every four persons in Sugimoto Shinden had a “close to average standard of living” (*Asaka no . . . Roujintachi*). This is to say that 75 percent of the people residing in the *buraku* were hardly managing to make ends meet. There is yet another document offering information on the conditions of living in the *buraku*. The document was in fact issued in 1899 and distributed via the magazine 社会 (*shakai*) or *Society* (*Osaka fu zentai*). This report reveals information about the levels of earning and expenses of people deemed poverty stricken. It lists more than 110 different types of jobs held by people around the city of Osaka and its surrounding areas. Garbage removal, antique sales, and construction—all of these professions are listed in this document as “jobs leading to poverty”. Seventy percent of the people residing in Sugimoto Shinden, however, were involved or were forced to become involved in just these professions.

It is thanks to documents such as “the ledger” of 1918 that this kind of information could be gathered. Documents such as this, however, were compiled for particular reasons and for the purpose of particular projects, namely the national organization and demarcation of people into categories. It was indeed not long after the “ledger” was issued, in 1925, that Sugimoto Shinden became a part of Sumiyoshi-ku and a neighbourhood of Osaka city. This merger was a new beginning for the people of the community. It was certainly a reformulation of the position of the *buraku* within the modern Japanese Nation but it was also simultaneously a reformulation of its position within the local administrative unit. The people of Sugimoto-cho were now defined via statistical data as a part of a nationally unified marginalized group.

They nevertheless had to now confront and tangibly experience discrimination at the level of the city.

Ashihara

Ashihara is presently located quite strategically between the two largest train stations in Nishinomiya city—Nishinomiya Kitaguchi and JR Nishinomiya. One of the largest *buraku* communities in Japan finds itself today in the very hustle and bustle of the city and is in immediate proximity to department stores, office buildings and large shopping arteries. Indeed, the area is literally surrounded by these structures of modernity, for Asaka, in its own way, remains unobstructed by the busy crowds. Walking in the quiet streets of the historical *buraku* once known as 芝村(*shiba mura*) or Shiba Village, it is difficult to imagine the now elderly men chatting and laughing in the front yard of the local community centre as young revolutionaries standing against all authorities and refusing to associate themselves with any and all governmental initiatives.

Shiba Village did not become a part of Nishinomiya City until 1934. From the first records of the community's existence until today, the *buraku* has fought for the freedom and wellbeing of its people in myriad ways. The first reference to the community is made in 1591 in a document describing and outlining the areas surrounding the town of Nishinomiya (Fukinotou, *Yuki to kibo*). These records refer to the area as カワラノ村 (*kawara no mura*), which indicates that it was an artists' village [1]. The map indicates that all households possessed farmable land. At this time, the area appears not to have a proper name. Later records however, refer to the area as 皮田芝村 (*kawata shiba mura*). The term *kawata* was used to refer to communities in which people who dealt with leather and kept cattle and horses resided or were made to reside. This is the first recorded instance in which the residents of Shiba Village were labelled *kawata*. Indeed, the first documents listing Shiba as such are dated 1648. This means that Shiba was first put in the category of *kawata* more or less sixty years later than the term

came into use as derogatory and was employed to segregate communities.

In 1746, the area's designation changed once again. It was now referred to as 中村枝郷皮多芝村(*nakamura shikyo kawata shiba mura*) or *Kawata* Shiba Village, branch of Nakamura Village. There were then two distinct changes in the position of Shiba. First, the term *ka wata* did not alter in pronunciation but did change in writing. Where before the compound included the characters for hide or skin in combination with the character for fields, now it became a combination of the character for hide and that for much or many. This change of characters was in fact a further step in the process of segregating the communities deemed outcast. In Shiba, it still took place 61 years after it was implemented elsewhere.

The second factor to consider here is that in 1746, for the first time, Shiba was listed as a branch of a main village, namely Nakamura. At this time, the village consisted of 50 households and 350 people. Only five years later, most probably due to the heavy flooding in the coastal areas around this time, the village population had increased drastically and the main occupation of the residents had also had to change, there being insufficient land to sustain the great numbers. There were now 115 households of which about 57 percent were involved in manual labour consisting mainly of transporting heavy loads and 13 percent kept and dealt with cattle and horses. At this time, there were 115 cows and 17 horses in Shiba Village.

In 1771, Shiba remained the outcast quarters of Nakamura but it was now clearly declared to be an *eta* village. Shiba carried the name 芝村穢多 (*shiba mura eta*) literally translated as "Shiba Village of great pollution". The use of the term *eta* was again implemented in the case of Shiba 65 years later than in other outcast areas across Japan. The reason is unknown but it could be related to the similarly late and abrupt change in the community's main occupation from entertainment

to the keeping of cattle and trading in hides and meat (Fukinotou, *Yuki to kibo*).

The following progression in the development of Shiba Village, however, is even more intriguing. In the final years of the Edo period, a very small number of outcast villages in Japan were given town status. This was done to demarcate these communities as larger than the allowable size for a village. It is not to say that these few communities had now become independent of their head-villages but rather that the land owned and the population of the outcast settlement exceeded those of the head-village. Shiba was one of these few newly designated towns. In 1861 it was named an 穢多町 (*eta machi*) or “polluted town”. While the village was not displaced from the authority of Nakamura, it was certainly recognized as a municipality whose grandeur could be influential and even dangerous.

The steadily increasing population of Shiba was becoming more and more threatening to the regulating authorities. The new Meiji government therefore strategically used the high number of residents in the town to exclude Shiba from the reforms it undertook during the year 1889. At this time, small communities were bulked together to form wards or larger municipalities. These would then be commonly administered with facilities shared by all. In the province of Hyogo, 3300 towns and villages were grouped together to form 24 towns and 402 villages. In the area around the larger town of Nishinomiya, eight villages were put together to form one community. Shiba alone was left on its own and with its original name, Shiba Village. The reason given for this decision was that the community was too large and could not be grouped with others. Indeed, Shiba was becoming larger and larger. By the end of the Meiji era, the town had grown to 262 households and 1049 people. However, twenty years earlier, similar numbers in other nearby communities had not stopped the government from deciding upon grouping them with other villages. In 1889, Shiba was denied the possibility of assimilating with other villages and towns but it was also simultaneously released from the authority of Nakamura.

Shiba had sought its independence from Nakamura. That said, during the time of the new proposals of the Meiji government, the community was also looking forward to losing the label of a polluted people and being offered the possibility to interact on equal terms with its surrounding areas and their residents [2]. The new Meiji Education Edict made primary schooling compulsory [3]. The newly grouped areas' primary schools were rearranged and all combined communities were assigned one school facility to serve all the children of the communities involved. The residents of Shiba Village had gathered their resources already 15 years prior to the Edict and built the first primary school in the area. In 1874, Shiba already possessed an outstanding facility for serving not only the needs of the community but also those of the villages surrounding it. Yet, following the reforms of 1889, Shiba alone remained a single municipality where the local primary school was still separate from all others and where only children of the village could be taught. For the next hundred years the primary school of Shiba Village remained a 100% *buraku* school. Within Japan, there were only three examples of primary schools of this sort. Children studying in these schools had no contact with young members of their surrounding communities.

Shiba was completely segregated. The area was further labelled as "bad land" in terms of both its worth and its quality. The price of the land of Shiba varied between 28 and 36 Yen per Tsubo whereas in neighbouring areas it varied between 39 and 45 Yen [4]. More than 49 percent of households in the area did not possess fertile land and those who did owned land that was workable but of very poor quality. Indeed, the area was largely inappropriate for farming. It is only logical that most residents of the village were at that time employed at the local slaughterhouse which had now become one of the largest enterprises in the community. The local butchers and kettle owners had grouped together and created a cooperative in 1900. The cooperation was successful and allowed for the opening of a slaughterhouse in 1905. After the construction of the local primary school, this enterprise was

one of the community's most substantial investments. It also soon became one of its most profitable ventures. Nevertheless, it has to be noted that even then, about half of the village continued to rely upon the produce of Ashihara's fields.

In 1934, after decades of negotiations, Shiba became appended to Nishinomiya city. This administrative change brought about new ways for the *buraku* community to be defined in respect to economics, geography and politics within Japanese society. Even more critically, the *buraku* was now weighed, measured and judged within the modern urban structures in which it was rationalized.

Kami-no-Shima

Kami-no-Shima is said to be one of the richest *buraku* areas in the province of Hyogo today. It is also known to have been an exceptionally well-off area since its establishment. Such statements are rarely—if ever—associated with *buraku* communities, which, after all, have been known as “outcast quarters”, “discriminated areas”, “places of poverty, filth and desperation”. What, then, sets Kami-no-Shima apart? How did it become rich and why was it labelled *buraku*? By looking at the history of Kami-no-Shima and the life of its people, some of these questions could be answered partially. What remains unclear and vague can only be deliberated and speculated upon.

The first records of the existence of a community where Kami-no-Shima lies today dates back to 1553. Reference documents marking Takamatsu (the original name of the community) as being first designated a Shin Buddhism branch can be found in the local Mantokuji temple (Kami-no-Shima, *History and Life*). Ninety-two years later, in 1645, Takamatsu appears on the Setsu Region picture map. This time, however, it is clearly marked as a 皮田(*kawata*) or outcast area belonging to Kami-no-Shima. This is to say that the name Kami-no-Shima was originally the appellation of the main village under whose control the outcast quarters remained. In the updated picture

map of 1697, Takamatsu is marked as 上の島皮多村百六石余(*Kami-no-Shima kawata mura hyaku roku kokuyo*) which would translate as “Kami-no-Shima ‘kawata’ village owning more than 106 koku of land”. It thus becomes clear that in 1697 Takamatsu already possessed enough land to produce 530 bushels or 4240 gallons of rice. This constituted great wealth not only for an outcast community but for any community of the same size.

In 1711, there were 152 inhabitants of Takamatsu. Fifty years after, the population had grown to 222 people and in 1788 Takamatsu numbered 233 residents, 54 households, 107 koku of land and 17 cows. The community possessed $\frac{1}{4}$ the land of its main village and more than half of its cattle. In fact, it is said that the people of Takamatsu rented and worked as much land as they themselves possessed on the territory of Kami-no-Shima itself. Takamatsu was thus primarily a farming community specialising in the production of rice and owning enough land to sustain a steady growth in population and income.

In fact, it is important to note here that being the outcast village of Kami-no-Shima, Takamatsu had to deliver to its landlords all produce not used to feed the residents of the community. Therefore, no excess rice was ever sold during the Edo period. Yet, in return for the rice, the people of Takamatsu received hay. Such a reward hardly appears useful at all. However, since it was all they could have, the outcast residents put what they had received to good use producing straw sandals. These sandals were then sold in the main village itself, but also in surrounding communities and as far away as Osaka, Nishinomiya and Kobe. The work of making straw sandals was left to the women of the community and, since these women were therefore a most valuable asset to their household, it was crucial to keep them in. A very particular custom had thus developed. 足入れ婚(*ashiirekon*), a marriage in which the bride remains in her parents’ home, had become very common in Takamatsu [5]. The man would move in and stay with his wife’s family until the new couple had children. At that time, the

woman could no longer work so, she was allowed to leave. This custom had continued in Takamatsu until 1965 when the last groom was recorded to have moved into his bride's household (Kami-no-Shima, *History and Life*).

Another profitable business for which Takamatsu was well known and for which it is still mentioned today is the production and sale of flour. The rice peals remaining after each harvest were used to make a variation of "Mugi-cha", or barley tea. Despite the fact that rice peals were used, the taste was very similar to the popular tea and people of the community as well as of other nearby "kawata" villages looked forward to harvest season to purchase the drink. Having once made the tea, the residual petals were once again utilised, being dried and crushed to now make rice flour. This product was extremely popular and was again sold not only in the surrounding areas but in the larger cities as well.

Being the owners of cattle was also quite advantageous for the people of Takamatsu for they were able to transport heavy loads for people who needed it and obtain a reward for their work. In fact, this was primarily what men did while the women of the community were making straw sandals. The farming carts were attached onto the animals and luggage was thus moved easily from one place to another. These arrangements were also used when fertilizer was transported and sold in the area. Takamatsu's men purchased manure from the *buraku* communities nearby and went to sell it at higher prices in Osaka. This was one of the village's most lucrative enterprises.

The changes that came with the Meiji Restoration also proved quite beneficial for Takamatsu. It was not so much the social status of the community that had changed; Takamatsu was never really labelled an "eta village" but remained "*ka wata*" until Meiji when the title was indeed removed but not forgotten. What had changed was the economic situation of the people of Takamatsu. Now all the land that they rented and worked became their own property. Seeing that the community had

approximately 107 koku of land on their own land and almost as much within the premises of Kami-no-Shima, the village was now not merely well-off but prosperous. The richest family in Takamatsu owned 4 hectares of private land. It was also this family that had once initiated the fertiliser business in the village and had led the community to success.

Despite his wealth and prominence in the community, however, the head of this same family, the Teramoto family, was not allowed to ride on the newly constructed Hankyu railway in close proximity to the village solely because he was recognized as a member of the outcast village. In 1889, the same man had also witnessed how the surrounding villages of Takamatsu had refused to join their lands and collaborate in making a larger community solely because they viewed the village and its people as “polluted”, when the Meiji government had promoted conglomeration of smaller areas into single units. Such prejudice infuriated Shinji Teramoto and led him to join others and later take active part in the establishment of the 大日本同胞融和会 (*dai Nippon douhou yuuwa kai*) of the Yuwa(reconciliation) movement in 1902 (Neary, *Political*).

However, as Takamatsu had been a wealthy village relative to other outcast villages and had experienced fairly little hardship, the pressure to fight and engage in militant action was not the same. As the name of the movement itself suggests, its members sought reconciliation and assimilation. This is why when in the beginning of 1920 some activists saw the work of the Yuwa movement unsatisfactory and began the foundations of the Suiheisha, the leaders of Takamatsu withdrew from the initiatives and remained neutral and disassociated with the *buraku* activist groups until the mid-1970s. The work of the Suiheisha, the post-war Buraku Liberation League and the Zenkai ren was viewed as “too radical” by most residents of Takamatsu [6] A local group entitled 五月会結成 (*satsukikai kessei*) or “The May Association” was

established to deal with and discuss the interests of the people of the community.

In the meantime, Takamatsu was expanding faster than ever before. After the Meiji government's new land allocations, the population of the village doubled in the span of 100 years. In 1913, Takamatsu was recorded to have had 648 residents and 116 households. In 1920, the population grew to 789, with family units numbering 143. Fifteen years later, there were already 898 people and 154 families living in Takamatsu, which was now renamed Kami-no Shima-cho and attached to the city of Amagasaki. The main occupation of the residents remained farming, supplemented by straw sandal making, transportation and trading fertilizer. In fact, these vocations were kept up until the late 1960s, with farming remaining a minor trade for some families of Kami-no-Shima today.

In summary

All of the information provided above was gathered from materials and publically disseminated sources produced by the collective of people residing in the three areas. These materials were claimed to be produced for the purpose of preserving and disseminating the local history as well as the "culture" and "traditions" of the *buraku*.

From the three accounts, it becomes clear that the areas have had very different historical trajectories in regard to their corporeal development. Asaka originated as an area developed artificially for the purpose of housing workers, providing cheap labour and thus sustaining the well-being of the region. It started out as a strategically and concretely bounded space within which various people of lower social status were placed to serve a specific function. With certain minor changes in time, this was how Asaka was kept as a source of affordable workforce in the historical period observed.

Ashihara, on the other hand, was a self-sustained village, an actual community with established land and trades. It too served a function in

the region but was not originally dependent on external labour for its survival or development. The people of the community had a history together and their occupations were commonly determined by genealogical lineage. Unlike Asaka, Ashihara was not a community of immigrants located artificially but rather a self-sufficient village that was assigned the role of performing undesirable labour in a time of need. This function was particularly highlighted in times of natural disaster, when Ashihara was forced to receive an influx of outcasts who had lost their physical possessions or dwellings and were now to relocate where it was cheap and where the least power needed to be exercised to convince the locals to accept the new arrivals. It was thus that Ashihara's population and economic standing changed drastically. It was also thus that its physical enclosure and societal exclusion were further solidified.

The story of Kami-no-Shima is yet again quite unique. The area was wealthy and focused solely on agriculture. The residents of Kami-no-Shima were farmers who indeed served landlords and received little reward but who were also known as specialists in their trade and who had the opportunity to develop various other related occupations that rendered them economically well-off. Despite the economic comfort of the community however, there remained boundaries setting it apart for its duties, not so much primary occupations as requirements, such as garbage and carcass disposal etcetera. Every region needed to have somebody to deal with this undesirable task. In the case of Kami-no-Shima, this job was assigned as an obligation to the people in the area. It was not a source of income but a task to be fulfilled in return for access to farm work. Kami-no-Shima is therefore yet another example of an outcast village well delineated and physically kept under control.

What can be deduced from these three cases and more particularly from the historical materials compiled on these three *buraku* areas is that though truly apart in their foundational and structural progress, they have acted as supplemental spaces to their surrounding societies. These areas have been demarcated for a function that was

indispensable for but unthinkable within the nation as it was imagined. There are two crucial and contradictory implications of this development. First, despite their diverse sources, *buraku* communities were in the process of being organized and defined into unified categories to be discriminated against on the national level. Second, as a result of this rationalization, while being marked out, the *buraku* communities were also positioned in respect to or as an attachment to the city. Therefore, even though these groups of people were now transformed into unified subjects of national prejudice, discrimination was experienced locally, in terms of urban organization. As this thesis proceeds to argue, this chapter will also go on to offer concrete examples of how this supplemental position of subnationality, sub-humanity, within which the *buraku* had found itself, despite its persistence, is being challenged by organizations and negotiations of *buraku* diversity on the local level.

In the following section, personal stories and memories of different individuals will be offered as an alternative means to understanding the *buraku* in terms of locality. The individual stories add on to but sometimes also clash with the collective local histories. These two together, on the other hand, clash in many ways with national histories. The multiple clashes are bound to bring about questions, leading in turn to the need for rethinking both spaces and history. In other words, these memories could be perceived as both a result of having borne witness to the trauma of history and a means of working through that trauma. Memories and the diverse forms in which they are presented—traditions, cultural practices, historical experiences—could also be seen as hinting towards the modern *buraku*'s attempts at negotiating its relation to the city and, in turn, to the nation.

3. *The Importance of Personal Memories of the Local*

Stories

The sentimental recollections of the elderly of present-day Asaka are today being exposed through the personal stories told to and

documented by the younger residents of the community. It must be mentioned here that people have only recently been encouraged to engage in sharing their memories with the next generation. The focus has only recently shifted towards a recognition of the importance of personal memories of the local. This enterprise has been primarily the work of volunteer non-governmental not-for-profit community groups. These groups have now directed their efforts towards the development of local support structures through the revival/creation of community spirit. A great deal of emotion is put into these stories when told and even more meaning is placed on them by the youth who hear them.

An elderly woman of Asaka talks about her life in Sugimoto Shinden. She tells how her parents bought potatoes from people of the surrounding villages and resold these as well as the melons and squash they managed to occasionally get at the market. In winter, the children and the grandmother of the house were involved in boiling potatoes and selling them to the community. In summer, the parents went to Kotsuma or Tanabe, both larger municipalities close by, and sold gold fish. For the children of the house, it was most enjoyable to listen to their parents' stories about these places once they had returned after a day of work. In between all these jobs, the men of the house worked to dig out ballast and help in construction works. Sometimes, they engaged in rebuilding the banks of the Yamato River and in later times in the construction of railroads.

The entire family was indeed involved in various jobs throughout the year. This story certainly illuminates the statistics claiming that resident *burakumin* involved in a variety of low income jobs. It does more than just that, however; it provides information about family relations, about the ways in which family members interacted with each other and shared responsibilities and about the ways in which they managed to enjoy the few minutes they had together.

An elderly man reflects upon his work experience at the age of 17–18 years old. He says with pride that he was already a “working man”,

extracting sand from the Yamato River and making ballast for construction. He recalls how he had to lift and carry about a ton of sand per day in order to receive 2 Yen and 50 Sen. Again, with a smile, he adds that he was one of the best in his team and that the whole *buraku* knew him to be reliable.

Research gathered from the databases of the Osaka City Hall reveals that at this particular period of time, 1926–1930, the average income in Osaka city varied between 35 and 40 Yen (*Asaka no . . . roujintachi*). According to this information, the pay received by the man working in construction was not at all bad. What has to be considered, however, is that this type of work is also extremely physically draining and not performable by everyone. Furthermore, it is a job that depends on weather conditions and can therefore be impossible to undertake in times of flooding, for instance. In such circumstances, a household involved in construction work remained without income for not only a day but sometimes several weeks. This type of information could readily be found in the pamphlets and history posters of Asaka. What cannot be seen there is the pride in the old man's voice and the smile on his face when boasting of how well acknowledged he was in the community and how almost everyone held respect for him for being such an eager worker.

An older woman talks about working from the age of eight. She watched children for about 2 Sen per day, made toothbrushes for 20 Sen per day and geta for about 25 Sen per day. Another elderly woman tells her story of taking care of younger children while also playing with her friends around the village. At the time, Sugimoto Shinden was already named Asaka but was still a rural displaced area. She talks of playing in the woods surrounding the river banks while carrying babies on her back all winter through. In spring, she and her friends would spend time near the river still carrying young children. When they went to the forest, they picked strawberries and brought them home. In autumn, they hid in the pine woods and enjoyed looking and feeling the drizzling rain coming down through the trees.

A man describes how he would go and collect the basins and banana leaf baskets of water from the river. He talks of the muddy water collected in them and how sick he felt having to drink it. He later adds jokingly that despite it all he still misses the taste of that murky water. This story relates to the water shortage of the area. Asaka was located very close to the river and it was thus where water was gathered. Until 1930, water was collected with buckets and baskets from the river and used for everything, from drinking to cooking to washing. Whenever it rained for a few days and the river became misty and muddy, the people of Asaka had to use what was available. The water would be left to settle and then the cleaner portion would be used. In 1930, a water pump of 15 metres with a water tank attached was built in the community. This utility was used by everyone for everything, from collecting water for cooking, to washing and drinking.

The purpose of these stories is not to count or recount a history and particularly local *buraku* history during the first few decades of the 1900s. Rather, they offer a look into the recollections of *buraku* individuals of the prewar generation, who emphasise their feelings of pride in their labour, their perseverance and their success. People lived miserably and found ways to survive despite the difficult circumstances that they were offered. It is not so much the hardship but the ability to survive that these memories focus upon.

Songs, Dances, Festivals

Songs, dances and festivals offer more examples of local memories, local “culture” remembered individually as an aspect of the contemporary *buraku*. These memories are yet another instance of the capacities of the pre-war generation to survive and work through the trauma of history. They are also, however, a crucial ingredient in and trigger for the contemporary reinterpretations of *buraku* traditions.

- **Asaka**

As of the Taisho period, the community of Asaka was expanding in numbers, though little is known about why this occurred or the origins of the people who were immigrating. There are stories of community-organised festivities that are said to have brought people together and helped them forget the hardships of everyday life.

On New Year's Day, young girls of the community would go around to all the houses and sing a song entitled 「ヤットコゲンサイ」 (yattokogensai). “Yatto” literally means “finally” or “at last” and “kogensai” refers to girls who are about 12–13 years old (*Asaka no . . . roujintachi*). The lyrics of the song went as follows:

Naae, saae...

It's New Years and there are pine decorations everywhere

We are here to celebrate

Naae, saae...

We will not say it twice

We are now finally 12, 13 years old and soon will be young adults

Naae, saae...

We and you are cousins, it's true

Naae, saae...

And even though we are all family, we still acted shy

But now we are finally 12, 13 and soon to be young adults

Naae, saae...

May you live until you are 100 years old and I, 99

Naae, saae...

Until our hair turns white

We are finally 12, 13 years old and soon will be young adults.

The elderly of Asaka today recall taking part or receiving the group of girls with nostalgia. They talk of this tradition as a pleasant and enjoyable one that people were always looking forward to. Another such entertaining activity involved older and younger men gathering at the village square and playing games together. One such game was called 「ハッタリ」 (*hattari*) or “bluff”. The men would make twelve larger boxes and write one of the twelve Chinese zodiac signs on each one of them. They would then make 12 cards and do the same. From a line drawn some distance away from the box, each man would have to try and throw the card in its matching box. To play, each man had to pay 1 Sen. If he got the right card into the right box, he would receive ten times the amount he had paid.

Once New Years was over, work began as usual. After working out of the house, people would return home and continue with their side-jobs. There was no electricity in Asaka until 1920, however, so people used oil lamps, which were also very costly. When electricity was brought into the village, people would turn on the light at 6 in the evening and turn it off at 4 in the morning when they would finish with their work. Once done, women would bring the children’s taiko drum and spend an hour playing it. This activity had become very popular at the time and soon there was a local group of players and dancers formed.

In spring, on the 16th of April, people would gather and go to the pine forest near the river to celebrate the local Shinto festival. Older people of Asaka today call this event 「春ごと」 (*harugoto*) or “Spring Event”. The beautiful pine woods of Asaka, which to this day bring out such nostalgic feelings in the elderly of the community, were cleared during the Second World War an air-raid shelter being built in their place. The woods were the main recreation area for the people of the *buraku*.

Between the 15th and the 17th of August, Asaka celebrated Obon, the summer Buddhist festival in honour of one’s ancestors, with a variety of dances created by the community and later recognized as unique to it.

In October, there was yet another Shinto festival, during which all six surrounding villages would gather at the local shrine and a Sumo wrestling event would take place. It would be a match between the younger boys of the communities. According to the stories of the older residents of Asaka, the village was quite strong in these days.

- Ashihara

Ashihara's original involvement in agriculture can also be hinted at from the long lasting popularity of traditional practices related to the planting and collecting of produce. One such practice is a dance called シャコ踊り (*shako odori*) or Shako Dance. It was performed primarily at the end of harvesting season and around the time of the Obon festivities. It is a dance that is said to have also been practiced by the surrounding areas and villages from present day Ashiya all the way to Itami. The dance, however, was said to have been performed differently in Shiba Village in particular, for the movements and gestures were said to have been rougher and more rigid in order to represent the hardship the farmers had in working their rocky land. This dance, which is in fact still performed in the *buraku* today, has also been one of the distinctive features that rendered the members of the community vulnerable to the discriminating eyes of the neighbouring villages and towns. The Shiba Shako Dance was labelled rude and offensive [7]. Its movements were "sharp and awkward" and people danced while also screaming out loud and making considerable noise [8].

Another practice customary to Shiba Village and similarly regarded as "vulgar" was the よいしょ節 (*yoisho bushi*) or the "Yoisho tune". When a girl and a boy were to get married in the village, their relatives would get together and a member of the girl's family would begin chanting followed by a member of the boy's family. There would be different stories being chanted in the same tune. It would be a kind of conversation between the two parties in which they would pretend to be the two love-birds talking to each other or simply tease the bride and the groom respectively. Indeed, many of these chants were greatly

embarrassing for the two youths getting married, while being truly enjoyable for the participating relatives. An example of one such chant follows:

Boy's party:

The night is still young but it is slowly getting late

They are both taking out their mirrors and opening them up

They see each other's faces in their own reflection

She says: I hope he never leaves me whatever happens

He says: Whatever happens I have to go for it . . . the wrestling of tomorrow

Girl's party:

You need to wait! All that is significant lies in my chest

If you are thinking of a hundred or two hundred coins

You better think of a thousand

And if you go up to a thousand more

Maybe you will be able to get to me

Boy's party:

You are straddling an Arabian horse holding the reins with both hands

And so skilful you are at manoeuvring

What a magnificent soldier you are and me a geisha

Both are now maddened by the hardship of waiting, aren't they?
(Fukinotou, Yoishobushi)

The lyrics of most chants referred to the frustration of waiting and abstaining from making love. Some were particularly vivid, while others were more subtle in their imagery and allusions. The bride and groom had to sit in the room with their parents and relatives while the chants were performed. This activity was usually seen as a happy and cheerful event and in most cases it would be observed by the whole village. The

audience would laugh and cheer repeating “oyoisho, yoisho” after each chant.

One other custom that is said to date back to the early 1900s or to the end of the Meiji era is the singing of a lullaby. It was initially sung to put children to bed but with time it became more of a folkloric anthem of the community, which is certainly what Ashihara’s lullaby is today. The song goes as follows:

The temple’s tree over there has grown even taller than the roofs

Tall is the one tree of the temple

And on that tall tree soon peaches will grow

Nanchororinya osharito e

Shoori shoori, ima shoori e [9]

This is how mother sings to her child everyday

It is the truth you know, that’s how it is

A man cares for some little children

embarrassed, isn’t he?

It’s a women’s job to take care of children

Nanchororinya osharito e

Shoori shoori, ima shoori e

This is how mother sings to her child everyday

It is the truth you know, that’s how it is

If you are to go pray at the temple than go quickly

Because once seven o’clock comes around

all racoon dogs will come out running

Nanchororinya osharito e

Shoori shoori, ima shoori e

This is how mother sings to her child everyday

It is the truth you know, that's how it is (Fukinotou, Ashihara).

On average, people of the community had about four children per household. In Shiba Village, these children grew up surrounded by their relatives and neighbours, who took care of them and protected them as they were slowly becoming young adults. “There was a need to protect our children”, says one of the oldest members of the *buraku* today [10]. The young ones of the community needed the support of everyone so that they could later deal with all the hardships of discrimination they would encounter. The 子守り歌(*komori uta*) or lullaby was more than just a song. It was a surge of emotions, of hope and perseverance. For the people of the community, children signified a future of better days that needed to be cherished and protected [11].

- Kami-no Shima

As much as Takamatsu was a well-off village that refused to fight aggressively the discrimination against *buraku* communities, its people also worried about the future of their children. There were many children in the village, about six per family at times, and so parents who still worked hard in order to preserve the well-being of the community, expressed their wish to protect their children from hardship in their songs. Takamatsu also had its own lullaby, a song taught and sung to this day in the area. The Takamatsu lullaby was usually sung by women while they were working in the fields or selling straw sandals and carrying along their younger babies and children during the entire day.

The Song of Kinzaburo

Even if I hate you, Kinzaburo

I still love you, Kinzaburo

And when you are crying, my Kinzaburo

I too lose spirit, I too lose spirit

I feel proud and ashamed at the same time

Caring for you, my Kinzaburo

Until dark caring for my child

Do not push me away, my Kinzaburo

My child is crying, my child is crying

Proud and ashamed at the same time

And when we fight, my Kinzaburo

Whatever you might have done

I just want to run away, Kinzaburo

I feel so very terrible

Proud and ashamed at the same time

And when we go around people's houses, my Kinzaburo

It is so very noisy, so very busy

I am sorry, so sorry for it Kinzaburo

But it's my duty to take care of you that way

Being proud and ashamed at the same time

I push away an eelworm from your back Kinzaburo

It's disgusting but please do not be upset

It happens around here, it does, you know

Proud and ashamed at the same time

I am singing Kinzaburo

Singing and chattering away

*But the song, like a rock, Kinzaburo
Can also hit you, can't it
Proud and ashamed at the same time*

*If it's that kind of song, Kinzaburo
Then make me stop
I know how tiring it is to listen to the same song
Day after day Kinzaburo
Proud and ashamed at the same time*

*I admire you, my Kinzaburo
Even when my legs cannot hold me any longer
And still I am worried, very worried, Kinzaburo
Proud and ashamed at the same time*

*You are walking in front of me, my Kinzaburo
Walking stubbornly ahead
Rudely passing gas Kinzaburo
Proud and ashamed at the same time*

*At the temple's gardens Kinzaburo
Pick up the piece of paper with writing on it
"Rich Man" is Kinzaburo
What the paper reads, you see
Proud and ashamed at the same time*

If you are to get a bride Kinzaburo

Get one that knows all

When she would make you stew, my Kinzaburo

She would not need to add stock to it

Proud and ashamed at the same time

Go quickly now Kinzaburo

Cross the Junrei bridge

What you will see then Kinzaburo

Is the house where your parents live

Proud and ashamed at the same time (Kami-no-Shima, *History and Life*).

Takamatsu was wealthy but the people of the village worked hard to keep their situation. As the area relied primarily on farming, there was a need for larger families whose members could help out in all tasks. Children were thus numerous and they needed to be taken care of. In the Takamatsu lullaby, mothers sang of their hopes and fears for their young ones while working in the fields but they also bonded with other mothers who shared their feelings. The lullaby was usually sung by a group of women working together. Furthermore, there are more than three different variations of this song that still remain popular in Kami-no-Shima today and are sung at the local Bon Dance Festival in August as well as during the Culture Festival in October.

Other occasions for women to bond and discuss their problems were the gatherings while weaving straw sandals. As the women of the community worked together, they chatted with each other and shared their troubles, excitements and day-to-day stories. This is how the 高松組(*takamatsu kumi*) or “Takamatsu Circle” was created. It had begun as a women’s group in the late Edo period but was later joined by the men of the village, who came in the later hours and took part in the

discussions and stories. This group has been one of the cultural features of the community and remains a cherished memory for the elderly today (Kami-no-Shima, *History and Life*). References to the Takamatsu Circle are commonly made in plays and tales performed and told during local events and celebrations.

During these occasions, there is also a particular dance that is performed, the イッチャコラ (*icchakora*). This dance is said to be a variation of the Shiba Village Shako dance but is less aggressive in its movements and incantations. In fact, Shiba, being fairly close and being a poorer but very populous *buraku*, was one of the most popular destinations for the tradesmen of Takamatsu. Indeed, this is one of the reasons why the two communities shared many of the same linguistic, cultural and culinary practices [12].

Memories of songs, dances and festivals have become very important for *buraku* communities today. Like the stories of daily life, they have acted as a means of survival through history. In a way, the recollections of such practices have done much more, however; they have become the very foundations of the contemporary reinterpretations or the integration of the sentiments infusing these memories into something new, into acts of “culture”—negotiations of *buraku* spaces in relation to the larger communities to which they have been attached.

In Summary

The telling of personal stories or the recollections of experiences and cultural practices can be interpreted as acts of witnessing to the trauma of *buraku* history, aiding new generations in coming to terms with that history. This mode of remembrance can also be viewed as part of a broader recollection shared with other Japanese communities that survived the hardships of the war and the immediate post-war period. Certainly, it is possible to take these memories as presenting *buraku* histories and experiences in terms of historical unity. They are, in fact, how such personal stories are being collectivised and how negative

identity is being projected onto *buraku* people. They are also the means by which unified activism is most commonly called upon and labelled a reaction to national discrimination.

The most important function of such memories within the *buraku*, however, is that they bring about alternative understandings and representations of local spaces in relation to their surroundings. Memories are being acted out, reinterpreted as “culture”, as “tradition”. These acts have proven the most paradoxical and risky attempts at “monumenting” the *buraku* while in many ways “commodifying” it and thus still problematically rendering it universal. *Buraku* “culture” and *buraku* history have been defined and exposed in museums, at city festivals, at food fairs. They are there to be consumed. The *buraku* has, at first glance, been reified. Simultaneously, however, via these presentations of traditions, cultural practices and experiences, the *buraku* is also, and more importantly, negotiating its relationship to the city within which it finds itself and, in turn, to the nation to which it has been attached. Such negotiations undeniably shift and resituate *buraku* spaces within a micronational perspective. In other words, the *buraku* is managing its affairs on the local level. It is furthermore forming community organizations and political alliances in argument with or even in opposition to cities. At this level, *buraku* history and experience are defined by diverse negotiations with Japanese municipalities rather than a unified response to Japanese national discrimination.

The following section therefore looks into the more recent history of the three *buraku* areas discussed above. More specifically, it engages in greater detail with the activist struggles in which these three communities have engaged, the local conflicts in which they have partaken and their achievements in modern times.

4. Activism, Political Struggles, Achievements

Asaka

Today's Asaka is drastically different from the picture drawn up to this moment of the small village of Sugimoto Shinden and Taisho-period Asaka. In the past 80 years, much has changed to transform the community completely and render it one of the most beautiful, safe and comfortable areas in Osaka city. The physical transformations of the community had been in progress since it had first been implanted into the area. However, one of the major changes that rendered Asaka more vulnerable and, in many ways, more wary of both the authorities and the surrounding communities, happened in 1929. At that time, the city of Osaka sent a proposal for purchasing a large amount of land in immediate proximity to the *buraku* for the construction of a university, namely the Osaka City University.

The land where Osaka City University now stands was cultivated by a number of families in Asaka for certain private owners from Sugimoto. Letting the city purchase the land from the owners meant allowing for a great many people to lose their jobs and income. The price offered by the city was also truly insignificant and would seem to have been a cover-up of an actual confiscation. At the time, however, the protesting members of the *buraku* were not well equipped to fight their battle. They were all illiterate, ignorant of legal matters and certainly not sufficiently confident to sustain their requests [13]. The land was bought by the city and the Osaka City University walled off the *buraku* community from the west. The people involved in cultivating the land in the area lost their jobs. But the families involved in garbage collection and construction took advantage of the circumstances.

Exactly thirty years after the university was built, another letter arrived in the community from the City of Osaka. The letter stated that the city would once again like to purchase land, this time for the purpose of building a subway garage. The land sought was property of the *buraku* and so, the letter was therefore accompanied with an offer. Three *tsubo*

was to be paid at 1700 Yen [14]. The offer also included a clause stating that should Asaka oppose the proposal, the city would move into the area and take over without providing compensation. The university campus, the subway garage and the Yamato River enclosed Asaka and isolated it completely from its surrounding communities.

In 1959, Asaka was not much different from the way it had been 30 years before. People were poor for they were only allowed to follow the education system up to the end of elementary school and were then immediately immersed into the work market. They could therefore get only very low wage day jobs and suffered low status in Japanese society. The *buraku* itself was a cramped area with no basic infrastructure, no sewer system, an insufficient water supply system and tiny alleyways where no fire trucks or ambulances could ever make their way. Public toilets were shared by 15 families per unit and water tanks were dispersed around the community to be used by 30 families per unit. The gas piping was cut off at the very border of the *buraku* and thus was not accessible by the community. These meagre living conditions experienced no more than 50 years ago were accepted by the members of the community on faith and not questioned or challenged in any way up to 1959.

Around this time, however, in a neighbouring *buraku* called Yata, where the Buraku Liberation League had taken lead and where results were already being seen from its actions, the people had managed to obtain the basic rights to further education and the acquisition of driving licenses. These achievements prompted the leader of Asaka to visit Yata and inquire about the possibility of his obtaining a license. After a lengthy discussion with the local BLL members, he was urged to instead take action and follow the Liberation League's lead in order to obtain not just a license for himself but also freedom for all his people. This is the point at which Asaka became a part of the Buraku Liberation League initiative.

The Asaka Liberation League was founded in 1965. On July 19th, 1965, an action for the right to better housing began. Out of 944 households in Asaka, 100 households stood up for better housing conditions. One hundred and fifty housing units were built in 1967. Still, there were many arguments within the community. The elderly were not happy that their children were involved in political struggles and thought they should not be vocal about it all.

When the houses were finally built, another problem had arisen. The *buraku* was once again outlined. People living in the 同和地区住宅 (*Douwachiku juutaku*) or “Assimilation Area Housing Units” were obviously *burakumin*. Those in the community who opposed the actions of BLL stood against the housing and placed electric wiring around the newly constructed buildings.

“The process of uniting people was a long and difficult one”, claims the head of the community today [15]. It took 10 years for the Asaka community to unite. What needed to be done, according to leader Yoshihiko Yamamoto, was to educate people. He was in the basis of founding an association for education, which focussed not simply on middle school and high school but also on post-secondary education. The Asaka chapter of the BLL fought to obtain scholarships for *buraku* children to go to school, to improve schooling conditions, to reduce the number of students in a class from 50 to 30 and to increase the number of teachers from 1 to 2 or 3 educators per class.

In 1974, Asaka numbered 2800 people and 944 families. Eighty percent of the people residing in Asaka supported the Buraku Liberation League and twenty percent stood against it. That year, the BLL, together with a group of academics from the Osaka City University, conducted a survey to evaluate the living conditions in the community. The survey revealed that six out of seven people in Asaka were illiterate; 2 out of 3 people in the community who claimed to be employed by major companies were not listed as these companies’ employees; a *burakumin* spent an average of 13 hours of work per day

and gained 100 000 Yen whereas a non-*buraku* person spent on average 8 hours of work and gained 150 000 Yen; 490 houses were located on the river bank and 82 percent were in bad condition; 202 houses were located on the actual river bed; there were 74 ethnic Korean households in the community.

This is when people really started thinking about taking serious action. In March of 1976, an Association for Comprehensive Planning was set up as well as a Labour Union and a Teachers' Association. In June 1976, an 18-hour-long negotiation took place at the 浅香人権文化センター (*asaka jinken bunka sentaa*), the Asaka Human Rights Culture Centre. There were 300 people gathered in the building and 20 people supporting the activists from the outside. The negotiation was with the city of Osaka and the requests from Asaka were as follows:

1. get rid of the subway garage
2. improve housing conditions
3. repair and reconstruct the Yamato river bed
4. demand local facilities—a clinic, a public bath

Asaka won these negotiations. In October of 1976, a city planning team began work on the housing and infrastructure. The entire river bed and river bank were cleared and new housing was built onto the hill above the river. In October 1976, the river bed was taken over by the city for reconstruction. The city had asked to purchase the land near the river. There was a meeting entitled “The Transparent Negotiation” at which the initial offer was of 3000 yen for 3 *tsubo*. The final decision was to pay 300 000 yen per 3 *tsubo* of land. People who sold their land at the time made a lot of money and to express their gratitude to the local BLL members for their guidance, donated 300 million yen to the Asaka Liberation Association. With the money made, the association started out by constructing public facilities to be used by all and everyone: a medical clinic, a public bath, a workshop for garbage collectors, a community hall. The City of Osaka funded the construction of a youth

centre and a facility for the elderly. It took 10 years to build all of these projects but they are still used by the community.

The agreement to take down the subway garage was signed in April 1982, but the garage was actually demolished completely in 1987. In 1984, a workshop was started that encouraged people to work together in order to make their city beautiful. Asaka belongs to the Sumiyoshi ward and the idea was to get people from the community but also from the neighbouring areas within the ward and work together. Japanese reading and writing classes were now offered at the local community centre to the illiterate elderly.

In 1987, a private company, Asaka Personal Relations, was established. It employed 120 people involved in community business. It generated a profit of 450 million yen in its first year and donated 100 million to the Asaka Liberation League.

In 1988, a council was established for the use of the subway yard. The council began by creating a festival in the now free location. In April of 1988, 35,000 people assembled at the festival grounds for what was named the largest local festival in Japan. What is most intriguing about it is that it was the year in which the Showa emperor died and in which no festivities were in order, for all of Japan was in mourning. The Asaka Freedom Festival took place despite the prohibitions and attracted more people than any other local festivity had until that point. Ten years later, in April of 1998, the festival hosted 50 000 people.

The motto of the Asaka Liberation League is that discrimination needs to be addressed in order for it to be resolved. "If you see it", says Yoshihiko Yamamoto, "step forward and eliminate it!" His strongest feeling seems to be that there is a need for talking, learning and teaching and that this can only be done when people relate to each other. The Asaka BLL branch is a strong promoter of international relations and they began cultural exchanges with China as early as 1971. From 1985 until 1998, 26 exchange students from China had come on cultural exchanges to Asaka. Asaka, joined by the

surrounding *buraku* areas of Yata, Kashima and Hirano, has worked on a project for the construction of 10 elementary schools in Konan Province, China. It has also founded the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights, which helps poverty stricken areas in various Asian countries fight for better housing conditions.

In 2002, when the support for Dowa areas was ceased, the Asaka BLL office was asked to pay rent for using an office in the former Liberation Centre, now renamed Human Rights Culture Centre. Activities in the community continued as usual, emphasising the importance of working together and remembering the history of the *buraku*. Activities for children and the elderly were fostered, as were volunteering initiatives. The leader of Asaka withdrew his community from a comprehensive program training community workers in *buraku* areas and subsequently placing them in the municipal system. He took this action claiming that the program helped propagate corruption rather than ameliorating the standard of living of the community as a whole [16].

In 2003, an association called 熱と光 (*netsu to hikari*)—"Passion and Light"—was established for helping mentally disabled people. Within the programs of this association children with mental disabilities were cared for and educated.

In 2007, as a result of the Asuka scandal [17], the BLL office in Asaka was required to move away from the Human Rights Culture Centre. The Youth Centre was closed down for all activities in the month of April and the Facility for the Elderly, which at the time was hosting more people from outside Asaka than from within the area, was given an ultimatum to shut down by the end of the year. The local Obon festival was cancelled due to lack of funds and a desire to financially sustain the everyday activities involving those who had lost their facilities namely the young and the old. More than 30 members of the community had lost their jobs or were redistributed to lower responsibility municipal positions. Still, many community activities remained as lively and as vibrant as they had been. Literacy classes,

taiko practices for the young adults, entertainment sessions for the toddlers—all of these activities took place full force in 2007. Today, the main focus of Asaka's branch of the BLL is on preserving the life of the community, for its beautiful parks and housing units are becoming barer and barer.

Asaka is a *buraku* where 100% of the residences are social housing. This is to say that within the grounds of Asaka, there are no private dwellings. An arrangement of this sort is unique for the city of Osaka and for Japan in general. It was instigated and supported by the leader of the community, Mr. Yoshihiko Yamamoto, a strong believer in the ideas and ideologies behind the Chinese Communist Revolution and a vivid supporter of Jiichiro Matsumoto. To this day, Yamamoto believes that in order to enrich the community, all finances need to be reinvested in its social structures, education and cultural exchange. It has indeed been that leadership that has made Asaka an exemplary *buraku*, free of corruption and prospering in regard to social standards and international initiatives.

Asaka is losing its youth, however. The assimilation residences have now been transformed into regular social housing and the municipal regulations do not allow people who have once left their apartments in such buildings to return to them unless they can prove a need and a low income situation. Most young people from Asaka have grown up inspired and encouraged to obtain higher education and, in consequence, to secure high ranking positions. These people are incapable of returning to their community even if they want to do so. The young are leaving not because they want to flee but because they are seeking to prove themselves. The efforts and ambitions of the young people of Asaka have taken them elsewhere. The Asaka community workers today are thus seeking to attract young families, couples, students and foreigners in need and to continue their activities while rejuvenating the area. The young adults who had grown up in the area, who have today succeeded in assuring their future and who have

had to leave Asaka are now returning to volunteer and participate in the activities undertaken by their parents.

Asaka *buraku* is continuing to transform. In the Asaka of today, the meanings of the terms *buraku* space and *buraku* identity are taking a new turn—a turn towards a concept of locality as “micro-nationness” or a community/ “*machi*” (Ishida). This is a move that has developed mostly through the last three decades together with the growth and popularity of volunteer and non-profit organizations based locally. It is a move that can similarly be observed in the two other communities discussed below, albeit propagated alternatively and instigated by different means and for different reasons.

Ashihara

The local primary school of Ashihara, built in the late 1800s and not given the chance to expand and host children from outside the community despite its capacity to do so, has now become yet another symbolic place for the people of Shiba. If it were not to be a window of opportunities for the young, it was a protective castle where the young were raised and taught how to seek their opportunities. The village was placed apart and secluded, but the people of the community had the spirit to fight and achieve, taking advantage of everything given to them in order to do it. In a way, it was probably also that spirit that led to the decisions made by the respective governments with regard to the community and the additional boundaries placed around Shiba.

The initial change in Shiba’s status from a “village” to a “town” was not just a decision based on numbers; the village became a designated town after two uprisings in Nakamura for which its people were responsible. In 1851, the residents of Shiba gathered together and entered the premises of the main landlords of the head-village to protest against the high rents demanded of tenant farmers in Shiba. The protest was a minor success for they did manage to achieve a slight decrease of the fees they were charged. This achievement, however, seemed insufficient for the people of Shiba. So, nine years

after, they collaborated with the farmers of Nakamura itself and again proceeded to strike the landlords for a decrease in rents. One year after this incident Shiba was named a town under the authority of Nakamura. This progression placed an exclamation mark on Shiba and allowed Nakamura to seek assistance from the larger municipality of Nishinomiya in cases of distress coming from the “eta town”.

In January of 1866, the people of Shiba went to Nishinomiya to demand the release of their village leaders, who had been imprisoned for protesting and demanding assistance with the water supply for irrigation during the drought season. The action was successful and the leaders were released. In the month of May the same year, 2,000 residents of Shiba entered the town of Nishinomiya, rallying for the rights to water for irrigation and respect for the people of the *buraku*. Similar actions soon spread all over Japan later culminating in the Meiji Restoration (M. Noguchi, *Buraku Mondai*).

It was most likely that restlessness and the difficulty in quietening down the people of Shiba that triggered the extra measures put in place to distance the community from society. This is probably why when in 1873 the first train station on the JR Osaka-Kobe line was built on the very edge of the town of Nishinomiya directly adjacent and to the south of Shiba, no exit was projected towards the village. The residents of Shiba had requested an exit already at the time the station was built and had repeatedly made their requests to the mayor of Nishinomiya every single year since. The north exit of the JR Nishinomiya station was only opened in 1950, 77 years after the station was originally built.

Shiba Village and its people were some of the most active initiators of anti-discriminatory action in the early 1900s. The community was also, however, truly versatile in the ways in which they perceived and handled their battles. Yorinobu Matsumura and his sister, Yukiko Matsumura, were the first regional heads of the Suiheisha movement for Shiba. Until 1929, they were most involved in the actions and initiatives of the movement, which was strongly influenced and inspired

by the ideologies of the architects of the People's Revolution in China. In 1926, Yukiko Matsumura went to the city hall of Nishinomiya as Shiba Village ambassador to express the community's desire to join and be incorporated within the limits of the town of Nishinomiya. However, she was not the first to present this request. In fact, the Suiheisha movement was a fairly new and small organisation in the village. The community had long ago created its own Village Committee for Freedom and Rights. The members of this committee had already paid several visits to the mayor of Nishinomiya requesting the merger between Shiba and the town since the 1889 Meiji government reforms. The residents of Shiba, whether by way of the Suiheisha or by way of the local community association, wanted to be included in the larger municipality of Nishinomiya and thus be able to expand their and their children's opportunities. Shiba Village was allowed to join the town of Nishinomiya as the borough of Ashihara in 1934, 45 years after its first request (Fukinotou, *Yuki to kibo*). Ashihara was split into eight areas, Morishita, Nakadono, Shinmei, Saifuku, Ashihara, Nakasusa, Tsuda and Shingikan.

As in other places around Japan, the Second World War years were very quiet with regard to activities to combat discrimination. However, it was right during the war that the residents of Ashihara transformed the local "Village Committee for Freedom and Rights" into the "Ashihara Council". This organisation was set up as a non-activist group concerned solely with the well-being of the community. As such, the group was able to continue its activities even after the passage of anti-movement legislation in 1942 (Reber). This legislation was passed in a time of growing fascist sentiment, when all individuals and groups pursuing the communist ideal faced prosecution. The "Ashihara Council" had thus provided for the needs of the *buraku* residents even when activist groups such as the Suiheisha were not allowed to function. The Council had been there for people in a time of crisis when the *buraku* areas around Japan were looked upon as "conspiracy nests", as places where illegal schemes were being plotted. The

residents of Ashihara had found a way to surpass the restrictions that were imposed. They had also taken a direction that would later lead them into a path not trodden by any other *buraku* community in Japan—that of independently organised action.

It was not until 1945 that the members of the Suiheisha Movement could get back to work. It was also around this time that the disagreements between the newly formed and renamed National Committee for Buraku Liberation and their originally devoted partner, the Japanese Communist Party, began to spring to the surface. To the JCP social equality advocates, the new post-war goals of the National Committee appeared incompatible with the original objectives of the Suiheisha. Even though Junichiro Matsumoto, one of the main instigators of the pre-war activist initiatives as well as a member of the JCP, was elected chairman of the National Committee, he now appeared interested in political involvement and aiming at collaboration with the conservative Liberal Democratic Party for exclusive privileges for the residents of *buraku* areas. This was not what the JCP members had in mind. They were not looking for exclusivity and were not interested in fighting that battle. Their ambition was rather to achieve social equality for all. The majority of the residents of Ashihara took a stand apart from both the JCP members and the Buraku Liberation Committee [18]. As they were already actively involved in the functions of the “Ashihara Councils”, the battles and disagreements between the two parties were perceived as a “combat of the poor” [19]. Indeed, Shiba’s people were in a situation apart. The community was large and well-off and even though it did suffer from the prejudices of the larger municipalities, it did not necessarily experience the hardship that small villages were going through. Shiba’s people did not see a need for a full-force organised aggressive activism but preferred to focus on more community based self-improvement activities.

Despite very low membership rates, the National Committee for Buraku Liberation succeeded in setting up a branch in Nishinomiya city in 1951.

The community of Ashihara, although still very active as an independent organization in the discussions and events organized by the National Committee, proclaimed itself free of engagements with this local office. There were five members of the borough of Ashihara who participated in the setting up and development of the Nishinomiya regional office. The majority of the community remained involved with the local “Ashihara Council”. It was indeed the council that, in 1969, after the Special Measures Law was passed, made sure to have Ashihara designated as a 同和地区 (*douwā chiku*) or “assimilation area” in need of financial support. In fact, only five of the eight areas of Ashihara were assigned the title “assimilation area”, for the other three areas refused to be labelled as such. It was also the “Ashihara Council” that was in charge of administering the funds received. The community itself engaged in the hiring of contractors for the construction of eight “reform residences” to which, in the same year the law was passed, 70 percent of the inhabitants of Ashihara were able to relocate. One year after the construction of the residences in Ashihara, gas was also finally made available to the community.

Indeed, the construction of improved residences and the provision of the most basic amenities took place later in Ashihara than it did in areas where the Buraku Liberation League had a stronger influence, for it was primarily the BLL that instigated and pushed for the voting of the Special Measures Law and its implementation. Many *buraku* areas under the protection of the BLL were able to begin improvements while negotiations were still going on but not yet completed. However, the “Ashihara Council”, remaining true to its motto of non-militant action, took advantage of the opportunity once it was fully offered even though representatives of the community were present at all discussion and negotiation sessions with the Liberal Democratic Party in power.

In 1976, the *Zenkai*ren the All Japan Federation of Buraku Liberation was formed. The *Zenkai*ren included Japanese Communist Party members who had been expelled from the Buraku Liberation League

for their unfaithfulness to leader Jiichirou Matsumoto during his 1969 run for Congress. These members had not voted for Matsumoto, who had run in the national precinct and consequently won a place in the Senate (Reber). Three of the five residents of Ashihara involved with the Buraku Liberation League became members of the *Zenkairin* in 1976. The remaining 3765 inhabitants of Ashihara at the time belonged to the now reformed “Ashihara Council”, newly entitled 芦原同和推進協議会 (*ashihara douwa suishin kyougikai*) or the “Ashihara Council for Promotion of Assimilation”, from here on referred to as the Ashihara Dowa Council. The council now consisted of 27 local organisations designated with different tasks relating to the wellbeing of the community. The council was dismantled in 1982, when the organisations within it began working independently.

One year after the breakup of the Ashihara Dowa Council, the local primary school was closed down because of very low attendance and because the local education association had been requesting for the past ten years that the children of Ashihara be given the opportunity to study with their peers from other communities. In fact, the low attendance rates at the school were due to the increased number of local children being sent by their parents to schools outside Ashihara. In 1983, the Ashihara Primary School was thus appropriated by the Nishinomiya school board and the local children were redistributed to the surrounding neighbourhoods’ primary schools.

The closing of the Ashihara Primary School was the first step towards the cultural reformulation of the area. The school, which was built with the collective funds of the community and treasured as the place where the new generations were raised and protected was now history. Only three years later, the local slaughterhouse, which was now known as the Nishinomiya Meat Centre, was relocated to the industrial zone of Nishinomiya city after the growing complains of the surrounding communities. The same year, the cattle grounds immediately adjacent to the JR Nishinomiya station were also closed down, cleared and

transformed into a parking lot. The north exit of the station was cleaned of the profuse animal stench and the bloody streams flowing from the Meat Centre across to the canal running parallel to the train tracks.

As of the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, Ashihara no longer smelled and was no longer bloody. It had beautiful parks and playgrounds, ten outstanding residences housing more than 1500 families, a local daycare centre and a community and culture centre. But Ashihara remained the cheapest residential land in the territory of Nishinomiya and a place of distinction, in no positive sense, for most residents of the city.

In 1991, yet another local organisation was founded, the Fukinotou. This organisation acted as a promoter of learning about the history and culture of Ashihara *buraku*. Similar to the “Ashihara Council” and the “Ashihara Dowa Council”, Fukinotou has proclaimed itself a non-militant, non-activist organisation and has become the group with the widest attendance and membership in the Nishinomiya *buraku* community. There are 250 official members of Fukinotou today and more than 2000 attendees of Fukinotou’s meetings and events per given year. The Fukinotou leaders and members are also avid attendees of all Buraku Liberation League lectures, events and symposiums. They are, furthermore, very frequently invited to give talks at BLL conferences. Fukinotou, however, remains adamantly apart from the Liberation League and prides itself on its independent status.

In 1995, the Great Hanshin Earthquake literally levelled Ashihara. Four members of the community lost their lives. All of its 2500 families were housed in the three surrounding primary schools and the local Wakatake Community Culture Centre. The earthquake occurred on January 17th, but some families remained in community shelters until the beginning of April that year. No funds were available for the reconstruction of Ashihara. With the help of Fukinotou, a few families whose houses were completely demolished were able to acquire apartments in the “reform residences”. To this day, some buildings in

Ashihara remain visibly unbalanced and cracked from the 1995 disaster. Apart from these sad reminders of the tragedy, the area has recovered completely.

The reforms of 2002, which stopped all funds to the Dowa project, did affect Ashihara, for it was no longer allocated any funds. However, in comparison with other communities under the protection of the BLL, where the allocations were much greater and more frequent, Ashihara did not lose much. Similarly, in 2007, when youth Centres and facilities for the elderly were closed down, Ashihara was not affected, all the activities of the community being concentrated in the local Wakatake Community Centre, where all associations and organisations present were non-militant and non-activist.

Today's Ashihara is a vibrant and a dynamic neighbourhood. The Wakatake Living Culture Centre is now the heart of a great many activities attracting more than just Ashihara locals. The three communities, which had once split from Ashihara because they did not want the label of "assimilation areas", have now changed drastically. Possibly because of their immediate proximity to the main station of Nishinomiya, the Hankyuu Nishinomiya Kitaguchi station, these areas have come to be inhabited by people from elsewhere coming for work or simply looking for strategically situated areas. Many of these people, either ignorant or unbothered by the *buraku* history of Ashihara, have become the most frequent participants in the activities offered by the Centre. Traditional arts, crafts and music classes are offered for free at the Wakatake Centre and everyone is welcome. All of these activities are strongly encouraged, organised and sustained by the members of the Fukinotou and the various other free organisations of Ashihara. The local festivals are now known for their colour and gaiety and are visited not only by people from the surrounding areas but also by those who come to join the festivities from places as distant as Kobe, Ashiya and Amagasaki.

There is, however, an issue similar to that faced by Asaka that is causing the community to worry. The young of Ashihara are leaving the “village”. Ashihara today consists of 2500 families, 20 percent of which possess their own land and dwellings. The “assimilation residences” have now become “municipal social housing” and just like the motivated young people of Asaka who leave in search for better jobs, the young of Ashihara depart and are later unable to return. Three years ago, in 2005, the city of Nishinomiya built 50 new social housing units in close proximity to Ashihara. Many young families housed in the “reform residences” preferred to exchange their now older and more constricting living accommodations for new apartments in these buildings. The large *buraku* of Ashihara is getting smaller and older.

Yet, the activities so enthusiastically pursued by the community members are changing the face and voice of Ashihara, if not the constituency. The great variety of people visiting and choosing to spend their time in Ashihara today is an asset that the residents of the *buraku* cherish. Today, the majority of Ashihara’s residents are involved in education and community work. They are primarily employed in schools and organisations outside Ashihara and they are devoted to opening up the perspectives of the young people whom they are teaching and counselling.

Other recent developments that are also transforming the *buraku* are the new investments being made in its territory. Construction companies are purchasing cheap land and building modern housing units and apartment buildings. To make them attractive to the potential buyer, these companies are also investing in the improvement of the surrounding areas. Ashihara is moving and changing, as are the people living there and those passing by. Throughout the years, the community has gone through a great many transformations, but one thing it has retained is the free spirit that allows it to venture in as many directions as possible. To this day, Ashihara remains unattached to any particular political or activist organisation and houses more than 40

community associations and groups. The local representatives of the BLL, the Zenkai ren and the more recently formed within the Liberal Democratic Party 自由同和会 (*jiyuu douwa kai*) or “Liberal Dowa Association”, are all welcome to join the community meetings and participate in the decision-making [20]. All activities in Ashihara are collaborative efforts.

This collaboration has indeed been the focus of the various organisations and volunteer groups since the breakdown of the Ashihara Dowa Council in 1982. The shift from a centralised, externally controlled decision-making authority towards a locally based amalgamation of interest groups brings up once again the idea of an emerging alternative perspective on local space as well as on the concept of *buraku* in general.

Kami-no-Shima

Like Shiba, Takamatsu had retained a distance from all activist and militant organizations, its residents creating an independent community group. Takamatsu's dissociation from the Suiheisha and later from the BLL lasted up until 1973 when a community group led by a young man named Shigeki Nishikawa joined the Buraku Liberation League and founded an office in Takamatsu, now officially called Kami-no-Shima and a present day neighbourhood of the larger municipality of Amagasaki. Only few years prior to this arrangement, in 1965, some entrepreneurial men of the *buraku* had sold land and built apartment buildings in the area with the profits. The community was not in need of economic help from the municipal or national government. The area was up-to-date with all infrastructural and residential utilities. As mentioned above, its residents were even making business from excess land. The apartments in the buildings were rented to people from outside of the *buraku*, to young families and single workers in need of a strategically located lodging. The proximity of the area to one of the main stations in Amagasaki, Tsukaguchi Station, was a great advantage when renting the units.

In 1975, the local BLL branch proceeded to construct social housing for the few people in need within the community. Out of 400 *buraku* families residing at the time in Kami-no-Shima, 80 were allocated apartments in the new 改良住宅 (*kairyo juutaku*) or “improvement housing”. The remaining 320 families owned their own homes, which were in a good enough state not to be left for these reformed accommodations.

In 1986, the Teramoto family, the wealthiest and most prominent household in the community mentioned previously, joined the Liberal Dowa Association of the Liberal Democratic Party and set up a representative office in Kami-no-Shima [21]. Such a move was to be expected by the elite of the *buraku*, for this circle of people sought to remain as far away as possible from the leftist political wing from the very start of all anti-discriminatory actions in Japan. The Liberal Dowa Association offered a very convenient position for these people—a true position in power, both within and outside the community. The LDA does not have many members in Kami-no-Shima today, but it has retained a measure of respect. Indeed, the representatives of the LDA are always invited to give their opinion whenever a major decision affecting the community is to be taken by the local BLL branch office. Certainly, the LDA is an influential even if not a large structure in the “village”. The majority of the *buraku* residents of Kami-no-Shima, however, whether because of the charisma of Kawanishi or because of the various programs offered under the umbrella of the BLL, have chosen to associate themselves with the local chapter of the Buraku Liberation League.

Indeed, it is important to clarify that it is the majority of the “*buraku*” residents of the area because in fact, as of the mid-1980s, Kami-no-Shima housed 1800 families, only 400 of which were said to be and considered themselves *burakumin*. The remaining 1400 households living within the *buraku* were either renting or had bought their lodging in the apartment buildings constructed by the entrepreneurial land

owners in the late 1960s, or had purchased land and built their residence in the area. Surprisingly enough, the non-*buraku* families who own houses within Kami-no-Shima appear to be just as numerous as the self-proclaimed *buraku* ones [22]. Even more surprisingly, after a questionnaire was passed around these households in 2003, 60% of the respondents claimed that they knew the area was a 同和地区 (*douwa chiku*) or “assimilation area”—which literally amounts to a *buraku* already—when they were buying their property [23].]Another fact that stands out and also needs to be noted here is that Kami-no-Shima’s land was historically of the same value as the lands of the areas surrounding it. In fact, in recent years it has been observed that the *buraku*’s land is more expensive than the land in areas adjacent to it but more distant from the Hankyu Tsukaguchi Station.

This is to say, the reason the 1400 families presently residing in Kami-no-Shima but not originally from there chose the area for their homes was certainly not related to the price of the land. It is also clear that many—if not most—of the people immigrating into Kami-no-Shima were well aware that they were moving into a *buraku* community. Today, the non-*burakumin* population of Kami-no-Shima consists primarily of young couples and families whose children frequent the local kindergarten facilities and schools together with the children of the entire neighbourhood.

Kami-no-Shima is a young *buraku*. There are many young children and teenagers as well as young adults actively participating in the life of the community. The Kami-no-Shima youth section of the BLL is actually one of the most involved groups in the entire Kansai areas. There are 30 members in the association and they range from 14 to 28 years old. The group meets once a week and is in charge of organizing a variety of activities throughout the year. The members of the group participate in all national and regional BLL youth symposiums, conferences and lectures as well as in many human rights events throughout the country. There are presently no non-*buraku* youths holding a membership in the

youth section of the BLL. All children of the community, however, participate in the activities organized locally by the group.

Kami-no-Shima's parents are not concerned about their children leaving the area. On the contrary, they are worried that the young have had a very comfortable life in the *buraku* and have not learned how to seek their own opportunities in life. Today, most adults in Kami-no-Shima have been engaged in community work. Through the Dowa Assimilation Programs and the facilitating measures of the BLL, most men and women of Kami-no-Shima, who had until that time been involved primarily in farming, found fast-track employment as community workers. In addition to the comfortable salaries they received as such, most families also acquired rent from the apartment buildings they had constructed earlier. The children of these men and women therefore saw their parents' laid-back lifestyle and naturally presumed they too could continue in these tracks. The parents, in turn, were unable to advise their children how best to select their career paths. It is thus that the majority of the young men and women in Kami-no-Shima today have found themselves employed mainly as part-time workers.

However, it is also these same part-time workers who stand in the middle of the community activities organized by the youth group of Kami-no-Shima. These are the boys and girls who gather the entire neighbourhood and remind them of old traditions and cultural practices. These are the people who are today, in an age where the Buraku Liberation League is becoming weaker and the Dowa Assimilation Programs have been completely cut out, keeping the spirits of the "village" alive or rather reformulating these spirits and working hard to combine efforts with all members of the area regardless of their origin. The motto of the youth group is "From a community of 400 families to one of 1800—one single Kami-no-Shima". This slogan calls for a different way of perceiving and living in the community. It is a maxim that encourages differences and involvement, a maxim that opens up

the limitations posed by previous activist and governmental structures and allows for alternative self-governing practices. While the economic prosperity of the newer generation of Kami-no-Shima causes a concern among the elderly, these new, locally based initiatives are welcomed and applauded by the people of the neighbourhood.

5. Conclusion

Asaka, Ashihara and Kami-no-Shima have gone down their respective paths in history and have fought their respective battles. Asaka was artificially created, artificially sustained and just as artificially brought back to life by its people, who had been crushed and pushed from the time they knew themselves. It was heavy manual labour that the men and women of Asaka were brought in to do and it was the endurance that these people had learned to sustain that helped them survive the rough times and drag in the reforms.

Ashihara was an old and large community that resisted the pressures and prejudices of the larger structures and authorities surrounding it. It fought to preserve its values and spiritual independence and, despite challenges, managed to retain the freedom to which it was accustomed. Taking only as much advantage from the post-war reforms and assimilation measure as would allow the people of Ashihara to maintain their neutral status and slowly building the rest themselves rendered the *buraku* what it is today—a large and united community standing under no political or activist umbrella.

Kami-no-Shima was a fairly small village of great wealth and hard-working people. Like Ashihara, it too stood wary of the drastic measures and initiatives taken by the *buraku* activist groups in Japan, which rose as early as the end of the 1890s. It took Kami-no-Shima more than just a few decades to join the Buraku Liberation League and at that time, the people of the area had already secured themselves an economically stable and comfortable lifestyle. The contributions from the assimilation measures and BLL initiatives were thus mainly

communitarian. The goal of the people was to fight social discrimination. It remains the main objective of the younger generation of Kami-no-Shima today. The focus, however, has shifted from the *buraku* as a supplemental space to the *buraku* as a partial space of the nation—a micronational locality that stands apart amidst many other equally particular local communities and that confronts and negotiates with the city to which it belongs.

All three *burakus* have transformed in time—the places, the people, their livelihood, their ambitions, their fears. What is most significant, however, is the transformation of the meaning of the term and concept of *buraku* space.

This is not to say that a drastic shift is perceived in the way the majority of people in Japan imagine the *buraku* and the *burakumin*. Certainly, practices of discrimination have not become extinct despite the claims of the government in power, which has recently decided to cease the funding for the Dowa Assimilation Project.

In 2005, a family moved out of Ashihara after discovering that they had purchased an apartment in a *buraku*. They blamed the local real estate company for not advising them of the “area’s nature” and literally covered the neighbourhood with hate posters pointing out the area as “dirty” [24]. The same year in Asaka, a woman divorced her husband after six months of marriage, claiming that he had deceived her by not letting her know he was *burakumin*. The man was a graduate of Waseda University and a prosperous businessman. He had met the woman, a university classmate who had been divorced for several years and had a child from her previous marriage, in a Tokyo convenience store. Falling in love, he proposed marriage and subsequently purchased a house in an area not far from Asaka. After 6 happy months of married life, he found his wife gone and a note left explaining how she had found out about the man’s background and how betrayed she felt. In 2004, a first year university student originally from Kami-no-Shima jumped off the 10th floor of a university residence

after her professor in Korean Studies told her she would not pass the class with an essay comparing *buraku* and resident Korean discrimination in Japan. He had added that he refused to read the paper since the topic was not appropriate to his course.

Discrimination against *burakumin* persists in Japan. People of the *buraku* are still treated as a unified homogeneous group. A negative identity is projected onto the *buraku* in a unitary fashion, while a unified positive Japanese identity is being put forward. *Buraku* people cannot but confront such discrimination. Indeed, the “subnational” mode of discrimination endures, but it certainly does not explain what has happened in the many *buraku* communities in Japan in the past few decades.

As of 2007, the governmental programs and legal measures have been terminated. However, the local activities and initiatives have, for the past three decades, moved in a different direction and have now taken a dramatic turn yet again, a new approach towards community, towards local space. This new approach presents possibilities that were never envisaged up until this moment. The new volunteer community initiatives in *buraku* areas come in different forms but under the unified and well-known title of 街づくり (*machi zukuri*) or “community building”. This expression/concept was first introduced as a counterpart to the top-to-bottom strategies and “national initiatives” of urban planning posed by the Liberal Democratic Party in the post-war years and most particularly in the late 1960s. It was later adopted by the Buraku Liberation League as it offered an excellent ideological model for the reformulation and reconstruction of the impoverished areas. Starting in the 1970s, the government in power realised the potential of this increasingly popular concept and began using “community building” as an ideological tool in its economic development projects. The most successful of these national campaigns is the “Discover Japan” promotion of the Japan National Railways which encourages people to travel Japan and discover its various “treasures” of “culture” and

“beauty”. In the mean time, the campaign further encourages local municipalities to “culturalize” and “beautify”.

In the late 1980s, early 1990s and with the start of the 21st Century, the “machi-zukuri” concept has been widely taken up by social and non-governmental organizations in order to encourage individual and community involvement. Right about then, political structures such as the party in power, the Liberal Democratic Party as well as the JCP, made the same concept a priority in their political pledges and platforms. In 2006, the substance of “machi-zukuri” was yet again revisited and shaken up by the new leaders of the party in power, coincidentally the LDP again. “Community building” has now been taken further to literally represent “nation building”. “The making of a beautiful Japan” has become the overarching umbrella over “community building” initiatives (Abe, *Utsukushii*).

This is to say that community is no longer perceived simply in terms of local economy. In a way, this allows for an alternative way of looking at *buraku* today as models for what is happening to communities in Japan. As mentioned earlier, *buraku* communities had experienced the ideology of “machi-zukuri” in advance of and more forcibly than other locales. Naturally, their take on this concept and their appropriation of it have been quite different. The histories and experiences of the *buraku* are thus potential points of departure for thinking about the fate of local formations today. In these circumstances and in these times of ideological, political and social transformation, it is only logical that a more thorough examination of the new *buraku*—a new micronational space—and its people’s initiatives, their visions of the “making of a town”, is necessary.

NOTES

1. カワラノ村(kawara no mura)=河原者村(kawaramono mura). The term kawara mono was used to refer to actors, artists and

entertainers. In the Edo period the term began to be used in a derogatory sense to indicate the lower status of the people engaged in these professions.

2. See notes on interview with Fukinotou members in Wakatake Living Culture Center of March 19th 2007 (in possession of author).
3. In 1872, the Meiji government passed education legislation that rendered primary education compulsory. In 1886, the first Minister of Education, Arinori Mori, passed a new education policy known as the Education Law or 学令(gakurei), which centralised the use of textbooks and stated these could only be issued upon approval of the Ministry of Education. Emphasis was placed on the subjects of history and geography and the propagation of the concept of the nation-state was fostered.
4. See note 2 above.
5. See notes on interview with Kyoji Ota and Shigeki Kawanishi at Kami-no-Shima General Centre, September 21, 2007.
6. See note 5 above.
7. See notes on interview with Nobutoyo Kojima and Kyoji Ota in the Osaka Human Rights Museum, July 1, 2007 (in possession of author).
8. See notes on interview with Junko Yamashita in Wakatake Living Culture Centre, July 17th, 2007 (in possession of Author).
9. These two lines in the refrain are said to have no meaning but rather stand as nonsense syllables expressing care and emotion, similar to “tralalalala” in other languages.
10. See notes on interview with Tatsuko Yamada in Wakatake Living Culture Centre, June 18, 2007 (in possession of author).

11. See note 10 above.
12. See notes on interview with Kyoji, Harumi and Rakuto Ota at the family's residence, August 17, 2007 (in possession of author).
13. See notes on interview with Yoshihiko Yamamoto in Asaka, February 8, 2007.
14. A "tsubo" is a Japanese measure of area that equates to 3.3 square metres.
15. See note 13 above.
16. See notes on interview with Yoshihiko Yamamoto in Asaka, July 3, 2007.
17. The Asuka community should not be mistaken for Asaka. These are two separate buraku communities in Osaka. The Asuka Scandal is one of the most publicised and discussed issues in the history of buraku media imaging. In Japan it is commonly referred to as the 飛鳥事件 (Asuka jiken) or "Asuka Incident". The way the incident has been entitled is representative of the strategic classification of scandals involving burakumin. Asuka is a small borough of Osaka city located in immediate proximity to Shin-Osaka train station. It is also one of three designated buraku areas situated adjacent to each other and surrounding the JR train line. Kunihiro Konishi was the head of the regional Buraku Liberation League Branch in Asuka in May 2006 when he was arrested for having embezzled nearly ten million yen from Asuka-kai, an Osaka-based social welfare foundation that he was also in charge of. The corruption scandal was carried as far as to link Konishi to the Yamaguchi-gumi, Japan's largest underworld syndicate and to reiterate over and over the connection between the man's buraku origins, position and criminal history. Once in jail, the incident became advertised as

the Asuka scandal and all social repercussions were laid over the small Asuka buraku and soon over the entire buraku community.

18. See notes on interview with Fukinotou members at Wakatake Living Culture Centre, April 14, 2007 (in possession of author).

19. See note 18 above.

20. The Liberal Dowa Association was formed in 1986 under the protection of the Liberal Democratic Party and at a time when the Buraku Liberation League was at its peak. It was yet another attempt to create a window for the more conservative minded individuals residing in buraku areas as well as a slick attempt at weakening the BLL. For further information on the history of the Liberal Dowa Association see its official website at: <http://www.jiyuudouwakai.jp/sub1.html>

21. See note 12 above.

22. See note 7 above.

23. Approximately 70% of the people who were targeted responded to this survey.

24. See note 8 above.

Chapter 3

Instructions Given:

“Building a Nation = Building a Community”

1. *Transforming the Relation Between National and Local Under the Conditions of Globalisation*

In order to grasp the idea of the “new *buraku*” discussed in the previous chapter—or rather, in order to understand the reasons for which in the recent three decades there has been a progressive move towards a reformulation of the way *buraku* spaces are being managed and addressed—it is crucial to look at the role of globalization and more specifically, the role of the global city into the shifting relation between the concepts of nation and locality.

In this chapter, this shift will be examined with respect to “machi-zukuri”. This is a truly complicated term to translate, and in this chapter I will sometimes render it as “community building”, sometimes as “community initiative” and sometimes as “urban planning”, with the understanding that these translations are approximations. The term “machi” is complex because it can refer to a town, an area of a city (an urban area or zone), a locale or locality. Furthermore, it frequently carries ideological connotations of “community”. The term “zukuri” (from “tsukuru”) simply means “to build” or “to make” but when used with “machi”, it introduces a sense of plan or intention, which allows for “machi-zukuri” to take on meanings close to community initiative or urban planning. It is the multiplicity of meanings entrenched within “machi-zukuri” that renders it a powerful political tool throughout history. The complexity of the term has been used to produce a shift in focus away from social welfare and towards self-responsibility. In other words, responsibility is removed from the nation-state and attached to non-governmental individual or corporate groups. This is claimed to empower citizens for the good of the Nation (Abe, *Utsukishii*). The multiplicity of meanings inherent in the concept of “machi-zukuri” has

thus been utilised to provide greater latitude in imaging the “machi” as both a global city and a micronational commune.

In this chapter, my focus is primarily on how the concept of “machi-zukuri” emerged, how it has been appropriated by contemporary neo-liberal agendas in Japan, and how *buraku* have responded to the challenges caused by such appropriations.

2. The Birth of “machi-zukuri”—A Move Towards Decentralisation

The concept of *community initiative* has had a long and tumultuous history in Japan since the turbulent decade of the 1960s. It was first introduced as a counterpart to the top-down traditional urban planning approach (Steiner). As of the introduction of the 新都市計画法(*shin toshi keikaku hou*) or the “New” City Planning Act in 1968 (Evans), the movement towards decentralization of urban planning has become more and more influential and more importantly, has greatly transformed the concept of civil engineering (Ishida).

Community initiative was not initiated through a legislation procedure but was rather introduced as an alternative comprehensive approach to city-building, that incorporated the thinking of not just the superstructure of a municipality but also of its soul (Ishida). That is to say, the “machi-zukuri” concept integrated the people of a community into its making. It was not simply a matter of increased public participation, however. The movement towards “machi-zukuri” was viewed as a step towards the “re-vitalization of civil society in Japan” (Evans), a form of decentralisation that worked towards the reconstruction of the notion of “local community” (Honma). However, this all-powerful paradigm, similar to the notion of “machi”, has remained more than ambiguous from its very launching (Matsuno). It is this ambiguity in both the meaning and use of the concept of “machi-zukuri” that has allowed for its various and most obscure appropriations.

Here, *community initiative* will be examined and traced through its multiple transformations and mutations in time in the goal of understanding the nature of its most recent and controversial implications. The ways in which the idea and practice have been taken up in *buraku* communities and have been skewed and reshaped to fit the people's needs and hopes will also be sketched out before being discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

In an age of increasing political and environmental opposition to the Liberal Democratic Government's pro-industrial and economic growth policies, the 1968 New City Planning Act left civil planning as the responsibility of prefectures rather than the central government. It does need to be noted here that all "prefectures as agents of central government, are responsible to central government ministries (in this case generally the MOC – Ministry of Construction), and their new planning powers were merely delegated" (Evans). In this sense, the new law did very little to get rid of the top-down centralised system of urban planning. It was, however, the first step towards a transformation, even if a fictive one, of the structure of municipal development.

Another important move, the introduction of the 地区計画 (*chiku keikaku*) or "District Planning System" in 1980 opened up the possibility for further regional involvement. It was a measure for increased efficiency in condensed urban areas particularly in zones in close proximity to railway stations. The municipal government had direct control of the decision-making in regard to District Plans. Furthermore, as residents and landowners, citizens also had a say in the drawing of these plans (MOC, *Urban Development Project*). In 1992, the municipal master plan system was introduced through the amendment to the City Planning Act. This system required all municipalities to create their own master plans, which were to also be legally approved and commented on by the citizens of these municipalities. In 1999, yet another amendment was passed. From "administrative tasks to be delegated from the central government to local governments", the act read "tasks

to be initiated by local governments” (Ishida). All of these events were important stages in the decentralisation of urban planning in Japan. In many ways, the concept of “machi-zukuri” instigated these legislative changes and propagated the actual tangible shifts in the perception and experience of *community initiative*.

It is necessary to delve more deeply into the separate stages and the political and economic circumstances within which the transfer of control and responsibility in respect to community management took place. Before doing so, however, it is also important to clearly explain the trajectory of this transfer. The concept of Urban Planning in Japan underwent great transformations as of the mid-1960s. These transformations, closely linked to theories of *community initiative*, began as a popular impulse towards decentralization of power. They triggered the opening up of real opportunities for negotiation as well as political possibilities for many local communities and disadvantaged groups such as the *burakumin*. While the Japanese government slowly began utilising the concept and carefully skewing it to fit its own purpose, in recent years, the notion of *community initiative* has become not only more useful but a part of the state’s political platform. The nation-state has retreated from public welfare while dropping the responsibility onto local communities. The autonomy in decision-making that was initially sought has been granted, but with it full responsibility in regard to financing community projects has also been abandoned by the state and transferred to the locales under the pretence of granting them their rights and liberties. The following section will consider how exactly this was done.

3. *The Process of Appropriating and Exploiting the Concept of Community Initiative*

As mentioned earlier, “machi-zukuri” was born in a time of political and environmental protests, or, as these widespread activities were referred to in Japan during the 1960s and particularly in the second half of the

decade, 市民運動 (*shimin undou*) or “citizen movements”. These movements focused on the objection to environmentally unfriendly industrial or infrastructural projects and were regionally specific. It was the large participation in such protest activities that led people to re-evaluate the meaning of community involvement and seek associations with local issue-oriented groups that focused on *community initiative*.

The State and Social Welfare: Governmental Involvement in Community Initiative

In 1965, the term “machi-zukuri” was used by the Kobe Municipal and Welfare Council in combination with the adjective 明るい (*akarui*) or “bright” to signify “the building of a bright and lively town” (*loka*). As of then, the concept was rarely used alone but rather decorated with a variety of adjectives emphasising the social and human factors behind the process of community building. The movement towards civil involvement in the process of community building opened the door for many members of minorities who had up until that point been segregated and disadvantaged in posing questions and negotiating due to their locality. These negotiations were conducted primarily between small areas within a municipality and the municipal government. It was thus that *burakumin* were able to engage in political activities related to “machi-zukuri”. What is more, they were for the first time able to feel the concrete achievements of their long-time struggles. In this very period, most infrastructure and housing projects in *buraku* areas were launched and financial assistance was granted for the first time (Kadooka, *Hajimete*).

As of the beginning of the 1970s, “machi-zukuri” saw a change in spelling notation, the previously utilised character for city or 街 (*machi*) being replaced with its *hiragana* or syllabic equivalent. This change was not so much stylistic as it was ideological, for it represented a move towards a “softer” style of “community building”, rather than a

pragmatic “construction of cities”. This “softening” of previously more structural concepts was also largely the result of a tendency towards revisiting and repossessing the “local” or, as it was referred to in Japan, 地方の時代 (*chihou no jidai*), translated by Sam Steffensen as “the era of localities” (Steffenson) [1]. Steffensen sees “machi-zukuri” as an element of an era of positive re-evaluation of rural Japan, “a reaction to the standardization and destruction of local individuality and culture that, it was felt, rapid urbanization and industrialization had made characteristic of modern Japan” (Steiner). It was at this time that the concept of “nostalgia” became a major factor in the reformulation of state politics and an important element in the neo-liberal retreat that the government had already begun making (M. Noguchi, *Buraku Mondai*). Initiated by the frustrations with the gradually suffocating scenery of the Modern City, this period of public nostalgia for the natural countryside was thus also the beginning of an age of increasing governmental involvement in social enterprises. Popular sentiment was well recorded and acknowledged by the political authorities at the time. Such sentiment was considered in the preparation of strategic projects addressing these same issues and thus achieving great support while also producing tremendous political and economic gains.

The Liberal Democratic Party, which was in power at the time, deployed the concept of “machi-zukuri” while also reformulating it into ふるさとづくり (*furusato zukuri*) or “building hometowns”. In the late 1970s and beginning 1980s, the most popular “national initiative” to be closely monitored by the LDP was launched as a campaign of the National Japan Railways under the title “Discover Japan”. The main advertisements of the campaign presented the ふるさと列車 (*furusato ressha*) or “hometown train”, which could bring the frustrated metropolitan population to the “beautiful countryside”, “everyone’s hometown” (Robertson). Simultaneously, great efforts were put into the resuscitation of the rural areas, where local politicians were encouraged to act as examples for their fellow villagers. They were

awarded titles of “honorary villagers” and pushed to encourage local developments focusing on the “beautification” and “culturalization” of the countryside (Robertson).

In this same period, between the mid-1970s and beginning 1980s, *burakumin* organized in activist groups such as the Buraku Liberation League managed to bypass “nostalgia” and carry the concept of *community initiative* further. Now that most *buraku* areas had seen rapid resuscitations and infrastructural improvements, what was most needed was the social support, the encouragement of social and humanitarian initiatives that were to set an example to the “nation” as a whole (Uchida). Volunteer groups of *burakumin* activists set off to visit slum areas in neighbouring Asian countries, where cultural exchanges as well as discussion sessions were organized to deliberate on the ways in which disadvantaged minorities needed to build and strengthen their communities. “*Buraku-zukuri*” or “buraku initiative” became a widely used term that carried a great many connotations. It was, first and foremost, however, the title of a new movement towards the strengthening of the community’s *buraku* or minority identity and the positioning or negotiation of that identity in respect to that of a municipal citizen and, in turn, to that of a Japanese citizen.

Around the same time, in the early 1980s, the Japan Communist Party also took up the concept of *community initiative* in order to encourage the intervention of the working classes in the ways their cities and environment were being manipulated and mutated by larger political and economic magnates. The call of the JCP addressed not so much the community development and building as it did the civil involvement into the actual physical operations and management of municipalities. This battle was transformed slightly towards the end of the 1990s, when the JCP strategically followed the flow of events and swung its actions towards the larger goal of supporting the work and contribution of non-profit and volunteer organisations. This move was certainly

made with the aim of pushing through the agenda of the right to civil participation in urban planning.

In short, in the 1970s and early 1980s, despite the fact that the state was already beginning to thrust the neo-liberal agenda, there were still possibilities to push for and achieve genuine reform. *Buraku* communities and other disadvantaged groups took advantage of these opportunities and were able to involve themselves in and negotiate with important decisions in municipal government about local development both on the infrastructural and social level.

In the early 1990s, “machi-zukuri” activities and groups were becoming more and more abundant with the support and encouragement of the now largely autonomous local governments. However, despite the rapid spread of such groups, the central government still exercised tight control over the registration of such non-profit organisations. Without the legal status, NPOs were thus largely restricted in the scale of their activities and operations. This only demonstrates that despite the various legal and political moves towards independent civil society institutions in Japan, through most of the twentieth century, such organisations faced an essentially hostile regulatory framework (Sorensen and Funck). Indeed, the reason for this hostility had much to do with the political inclinations and perceptions of power. The concept of *community initiative*, with its easily mouldable configuration, allowed for effortless access into the foundations and structure of social institutions. It thus also allowed for a similarly effortless control of their functions, primarily through financial involvement. With time, however, spirits started to run high and views in respect to control and regulation began to move not just away from the centre but towards an altogether different notion of a centre.

This is where politics of globalization enter into the picture and provide yet another avenue for “machi-zukuri” to be tested. It is at this very point that the departure of the state from local management begins to

appear as a possibility. This possibility has to be regarded as a two-sided opportunity, one that was indeed triggered by the ambition of social, non-governmental institutions but also one that was put to good use by the nation-state.

Local Autonomy for the Good of the Nation: *Community Initiative* as an Individual Responsibility of Every Japanese Citizen

- Local Communities Taking Things into Their Own Hands: The *Buraku* as a Local Community

In 1995, in the wake of the Great Hanshin Earthquake, frustrations with the state's role in local community management started to come to the surface after the central government showed itself unable to respond to the crisis adequately. It was then that the local volunteer "machi-zukuri" groups were most efficient in aiding earthquake victims. In consequence, the public actively responded to the actions of the volunteers and NPOs and placed their trust in these local organisations. The opposition parties, with the JCP and the Social Democratic Party in the lead as well as NPO activists certainly took advantage of the situation to push for revisiting and reformulating state-civil society relations. As a result, in 1998, the Special Non-Profit Activities Law was passed. Nearly 20 per cent of the 13 000 NPOs registered in the five years after the passing of the law claimed an involvement in "machi-zukuri" (Sorensen and Funck). Indeed, many of these NPOs were immediately linked to Dowa assimilation areas, which, with the turn of the century, also lost their funding and had thus turned towards different ways of continuing community activities.

In 2002, social welfare legislation and most particularly the Special Measures Law financing Dowa assimilation areas were re-examined and subsequently repealed. In 2007, funding to *buraku* assimilation areas was ceased altogether. The term "Dowa" was scratched out of the political and operational dictionary and a new concept was brought to the surface, namely 人権(*jinken*) or "human rights". This is when the

community initiative was brought back to life in the *buraku*. Having lost the financial support and been stripped of employment and much needed and relied-upon social facilities, the community had to rethink its options and future opportunities. The new paradigm of the 人権なまちづくり (*jinken na machi zukuri*) or the “Human Rights Community Initiative” became most prominent in the discourses of the now weakening Buraku Liberation League. In a way, this constituted a recommendation to the separate communities to take on their own paths of community building. It was also a sign that the BLL, struggling to survive the pressure of the LDP’s real threats, was aligning itself with the governments’ neo-liberal strategies of coping with decentralisation. What directions were taken and how the individual communities chose to appropriate or neglect the new notion of “Human Rights Communities” will be discussed in the following chapter. What needs to be addressed and examined in more detail here is yet another crucial development that took place right as the BLL was struggling to keep its position and reputation and as the *buraku* communities themselves were taking things into their own hands.

- The LDP and “machi-zukuri”

Interestingly enough, the legislative change pushed by the political party in power brought about yet another major political shift. As if itself shaken up by the repealing of the Special Measures Law, the Liberal Democratic Party also came up with a new and revised outlook on *community initiative*. “Shaken up” is probably the wrong term to use here, for the surprise could not have been a great one given that the LDP had been carefully planning this move since the last re-installment of the law in 1997. Whether the newly introduced “machi-zukuri” idea of the Liberals was an individual strategy instigated by Koizumi and later advocated by Shinzo Abe or whether it was the gradation of a plan already drawn up in the 1970 with the “Discover Japan” campaign is difficult to say. In either case, the impact of the use of the concept of

“machi-zukuri” by the LDP in national politics rather than through state-run enterprises conducted primarily for economic gain, has now become a seriously controversial matter that was not necessarily quietened down even after the abrupt resignation of Prime Minister Abe and his replacement with the much less polarising figure of Yasuo Fukuda.

After the divisive term in office of Koizumi, who had managed to stir Japan's relations with its neighbours with his annual visits to the Yasukuni shrine where Japan's war criminals are enshrined and due to LDP proclamations that the Prime Minister's choice was a “normal act of patriotism” (Akaha), Shinzo Abe stood wary of visiting the controversial place but instead published two books on his views of “patriotism”. This is where the concept of *community initiative* was revisited and where the idea of linking it to the “making of a beautiful Japan” as a greater notion was introduced (Abe, *Utsukushii*). The recurrent theme in Abe's books is that the Japanese people must move away from the feelings of fear and guilt permeating the intellectual community and media in post-war Japan and “restore their respect of traditions which the nation has built over hundreds of thousands of years” (Abe, *Utsukushii*). Abe's conviction is that the citizens of Japan need to be able to look up to the state and thus develop a solid sense of pride and identity. He goes further to persist that the feeling of 愛国心 (*aikokushin*) or patriotism is an aspect of people's love of their native/local space—郷土愛(*kyoudoai*) (Abe, *Utsukushii*).

Quite conveniently, in his short period in office, Abe also managed to launch an education reform campaign that was indeed a response to various educational and social problems, including the major textbook controversies recurrent in the Japanese education system. It was, however, also an attempt to put his ideas of vigorously propagating the notion of patriotism in action. In his book *Towards a Beautiful Country*, Abe dedicates an entire chapter on his views on educational reform. He

states that “post-war Japan sought in *kokkashugi* (国家主義, statist nationalism) the cause of the war of 60 years ago and the reason for Japan’s defeat. As a result, the equation State=Evil was built in the core of the post-war Japanese people. Therefore, it is difficult for them to draw inspiration from the standpoint of the state. More than that, there is strong tendency to avoid [state inspired ideas]. This is one of the failures of post-war education” (Abe, *Utsukushii* 202) [2].

To inspire students and encourage them to look up to the State, Abe presents an assessment system aimed at controlling and improving the quality of school management. He also addresses the importance of the role of family in education and urges educational facilities to provide “good family models” for their students, while suggesting that the gender-free approach to education might not be the most appropriate (Abe, *Utsukushii*). As for the family unit itself, Abe expresses the view that the “ideal family” would be one in which grandparents, parents and children live together and learn from each other. All of these guidelines are a part of ex-Prime Minister Abe and his party’s agenda on the “building of and loving the new beautiful Japan”, which, as stated earlier is only an extension of the “building of and loving one’s community” (Abe, *Utsukishii*).

This, of course, cannot but revive the old call for nostalgic memories of the “*furusato*” or hometown so proficiently employed in the 1970s through the “Discover Japan” campaign. The winning formula here is indeed hidden in the concept of “nostalgia”. There is no real gap between the primary stage of neo-liberal politics in Japan and their contemporary applications. As of the 1960s, the LDP’s strategies of decentralized control were being actively developed and all along, “*machi-zukuri*” was the vehicle that carried it through. What made Koizumi and Abe’s politics “new”, “refreshing” for some and “shocking” for others was that in a time of tension, they pulled back to the surface the now almost forgotten notion of “nostalgia”. In a time when the Global Village was being imagined and when centre-periphery relations

were being displaced, the LDP was claiming to commend local diversity and individual freedoms by coming up with a “rooter”—a solid linkage to a past that people had for a long time tried to forget. In a way, the idea was not at all new; it was just a continuation of a plan shown in a different light.

In September 2007, after a series of corruption-related events that were unfortunate for both Shinzo Abe and his party, the former presented his resignation as Prime Minister of Japan. Shortly after, he was replaced by Yasuo Fukuda, also a representative of the Liberal Democratic Party. The new Prime Minister’s Cabinet was said to have had an incredibly high level of support—57.5 per cent—which was seen as a fresh beginning for the LDP. The main reasons given by respondents for their choice was the sense of stability that Fukuda exudes (“How Long . . .” in *The Daily Yomiuri*), with no expectations that new policies would be unveiled, nor any belief in strong leadership. “People feel that the old conservative LDP has been resurrected”, says the Democratic Party’s Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama (“How Long . . .” in *The Daily Yomiuri*). It is interesting to see here what exactly was resurrected. In fact, if one were to look at the newly uploaded website of the LDP, all that seems to have changed is the photograph and profile of the new leader.

The concept of *community initiative* remains at the forefront of the party platform. It is indeed worth looking at the “new” outline of the definition of “machi-zukuri”, which is clearly delineated as one of the nine major points of emphasis in the future action plan of the LDP. The nine points are as follows: development of basic policies; an emphasis on household economy; an emphasis on raising children and education; health and science; preserving nature and the environment; the importance of improving people’s daily life; an emphasis on food safety; the importance of “machi-zukuri”—*community initiative*; and a focus on international peace. What, then, does “machi-zukuri” consist of? Not to

worry—the answers are not to be sought further. The LDP provides them:

1. *Promoting sightseeing as fundamental to our nation – show foreign tourists the best of traditional Japan;*
2. *Expanding the new generation LRT public transportation system to promote regional vitalization;*
3. *Revision of the “Third Legislation on Community Building” (まちづくり3法)—restriction of suburban developments of large shopping malls and entertainment complexes;*
4. *Revision of the “Mountain Village Promotion Legislation” (山村振興法)—remodelling the “Mountain Village Promotion Legislation” in order to better protect our beautiful countryside;*
5. *Revision of the “Peninsular Areas Development Law” (半島振興法)—revive regional resources and promote autonomous development of local areas;*
6. *Disaster prevention measures—drastically reform the “Basic Disaster Prevention Plan” (防災基本計画) and improve and promote regular practices of public disaster exercises;*
7. *Bus Transportation Revitalization Project—promote the increased use of shuttle busses for local transportation;*
8. *A counter-plan to the life-threatening railway crossings—accelerate the development of counter-plans with regard to the encumbered citizens using the crossings on a daily basis;*
9. *Create culturally significant tourist attractions, exhibit historical treasures and restore historical and cultural monuments in order to propagate the development of tourism which is fundamental to our nation;*
10. *Revitalise urban centres for they represent the nation’s welcoming face—improve the central event plazas, encourage the revitalisation and organisation of local cultural events and the construction of new shopping arteries within the urban and municipal centres;*

11. *Strengthen and sustain large-scale emergency disaster prevention squads in municipalities;*
12. *Improve disaster prevention in densely populated areas—reduce and resolve the issue of densely populated areas and proceed to develop stronger communities and areas resistant to major disasters;*
13. *Encourage private urban development—liven up the Urban Regeneration Project (都市再生プロジェクト) in order to improve private-sector vitality.*
14. *Double the number of foreign visitors to Japan—promote the idea that tourism is fundamental for our nation, encourage the regional and local areas to regain their beauty and restore their culture;*
15. *Urban regeneration—aim at first-rate urban redevelopment and economic reform;*
16. *Municipality merging—continue to improve the process of merging municipalities;*
17. *Gentle community building—promote barrier-free, gentle community building;*
18. *Urban vitalization—there is a terrible need for improvement!*
19. *Urban regeneration and land fluidization—aim at first rate resuscitation of the Japanese economy (Jiyuu Minshu Tou).*

Immediately after ex-Prime Minister Abe stepped down from office, his official website, where a conspicuously similar version of the above “to do list” in regard to *community initiative* used to be posted, was completely stripped of its original content (Shinzo Abe’s Official Website). Obviously, the guaranteed undertakings enlisted there were not all written in vain because they seem to have found a very comfortable long-term place on the most current LDP website. This is probably what Hatayama meant by “resurrecting the old LDP”—using the copy/paste method but in a different font. In fact, this copy/paste action is not a new skill either, for the sprouting attempts at neo-

liberalism of the 1960s had already provided good material for Koizumi and Abe too.

All this inevitably leads to a reassessment of this sudden shift or return to old values. It is highly interesting that the enterprise resembles so closely the “Discover Japan” campaign and yet adds a certain “innovative” aspect onto it. This would probably be the different approach to control. Where, in the original initiative, the focus was on the state/government as the major actor pulling the strings and representing the nation, in the second initiative it is the people who are being tossed into the role of being responsible. In a way, after close to 50 years of exploiting the notion of decentralisation for the exercise of control, and while slowly moving away from but not fully dismissing the structure of governmental involvement, it was only logical for the LDP to take a step further and write off the welfare-state as an act of “liberating” those whom it was originally meant to serve. The following section will take a more detailed look into the strategies and implications of this new approach to power formation.

4. *Community Initiative—Resurrected or Reinvented?*

In respect to the “new machi-zukuri” formulation presented above, there are a few points that need to be paid closer attention. First would be the recurrent emphasis on tourism as “fundamental to the nation” and, in connection, the importance of restoring regional beauty and culture as well as the “creation of culturally significant tourist attractions”. This particularly prominent idea reminds one of the 1978 “Discover Japan” campaign. There is, however, a fundamental difference between the ways in which the latter and former were presented. What seems to hold more weight in the current case is the focus on local, self-instigated “beautification” and “culturalization” (Robertson) of the regional areas. Unlike the “Discover Japan” initiative, this one creates a clear separation between the people of Japan and the “foreigners”—the observers and discoverers. Even though it is no

longer the Japanese who will be brought to the “beautiful countryside”, as the “Discover Japan” slogans proclaimed, there are the foreigners who need to be shown how worthy the countryside is. The responsibility of all Japanese people, according to the new LDP campaign, is therefore to show the beauty they have already discovered for themselves to the “outsiders”.

What has to be highlighted here is not so much the shift in focus from the inner to the outer observer but rather the shift of responsibility from the nation-state onto the individual. This, as mentioned earlier, was not a sudden change but a gradual transition that took place in the span of half a century and that was indeed initially sought, albeit in a different shape and form, by the peoples whom it affected. The “granting” of this “liberty” by the LDP is now a part of the party’s political platform and no longer a promotional venture of a state-financed enterprise. The pilot project has now been enhanced, with the better version packaged as a legitimate policy, as a state ideology promoting the rights and responsibilities of Japanese citizens as opposed to involving, controlling and financing their well-being. It is also outlined as and almost entitled a “nation building” initiative. Most of the points describing what *community initiative* entails are coupled up with the “for our nation” phrase, which almost seems to act as a justification for the preceding clause and renders it unquestionable (*Jiyuu Minshu Tou*).

The second point to consider is the stress on the revitalization of urban centres as the “welcoming face of the nation”. Here, too, “the nation” appears unsurpassable even if removed. Once again, it is the performances, the events exhibiting Japan’s “traditional culture” that are being encouraged. It is interesting how the phrase “creating culturally significant tourist attractions” is used just before the note on “urban centre vitalization” and how the verb changes to “return” towards local cultural events only one sentence later. The *creation* of culture, the *creation* of events, the *creation* of communities—the notion of taking matters into one’s own hands and “creating” appears well

masked under terms of return, resurrection, restoration of “the nation”, which are emphasised and appear simultaneously. It is “the nation” for which it is *fundamental* to *create/restore* and “the national face” for which the citizens of Japan need to *beautify/culturalize*.

The final point that needs to be taken into consideration would be the note on promoting “gentle, barrier-free community building”. The term バリアフリー (*bariaa furii*) is borrowed not only from English but also from the programmes and manifestos of the numerous NPOs and “machi-zukuri” organizations and volunteer groups that stood against the state-run 都市計画 (*toshi keikaku*) or urban planning in the '80s and '90s. It was in fact used as an expression signifying the contrast between the concepts of *community initiative* and “toshi keikaku” or urban planning. This is where the LDP skilfully employs the ambiguous nature of the “machi-zukuri” idea and plays out the notion of living beyond barriers—living as a locally governed part of the nation, making use of local resources, dealing with local problems and achieving local profits *autonomously* and “for the good of the nation”. The focus on the promotion of local (commonly or perhaps deliberately interchanged with “regional”) autonomy, which also answers to the creeds of local non-profit and volunteer associations, peculiarly renders localities at once modeled upon the global city and micronational enclaves.

5. The Grand Plan: Saving on Welfare Money, Delegating Responsibility to the Localities—All for the Beauty of the Nation!

The LDP has thus moved in two, at first seemingly contradictory, directions—towards the encouragement of regional and local self-governance and individual autonomy of localities; and towards the *revival* of the “nation” and a stimulation of a strong “national pride” and “national identity”. Certainly, there are very clear implications for this two-directional plan. There is, of course, the fact that by moving away

from social welfare initiatives, money is being saved. There is also the fact that just as it “gives” local communities the right to control themselves, the state is being removed from the responsibility of making sure all is going well within them. There is finally the fact that by positioning “the nation” as the “natural” reason for the need of self-“responsibilization”, the state most proficiently conceals its aim of controlling the masses and directing longed-for economic growth. In other words, the state allows certain freedoms to the local communities and gives individuals the right to autonomy and national pride as an extension of local pride. The untrusting masses, while feeling empowered, are expected to instinctively act to follow the instructions given to them by the authorities for speedy economic expansion.

The scheme is an old one and indeed still very potent. However, as neo-liberalism carries various possibilities for its masterminds and followers, it also does so for the masses. Giving the autonomy to local communities to govern their own development while encouraging them to remember the good old times and restore the values and traditions they held in the past is a dangerous business—dangerous because many of these communities might actually believe the concept that reviving and building the spirit and pride of their people is a contribution to the reviving and building of Japan itself. It is also dangerous because many communities might take advantage of the possibility to expose and open up what *they* call “culture” and “identity” and claim them to be a part of the “new nation” and the “new national identity”. It is dangerous because by departing from a state of “subnationality” and becoming a “micro-nation”, communities like the *buraku* also adopt the responsibility of interfacing with the world on their own, of autonomously partaking in the building of the nation that is Japan.

6. In Summary

It is now time to examine how *community initiatives* have been taken up on the local scale and most particularly in the *buraku*. As mentioned

in the beginning of this chapter, with the drastic changes in the legislation affecting *buraku* communities, the concept of “machi-zukuri” or *community initiative* was taken to a new level. In the *buraku*, the notion of local autonomy has now become not just a part of a political platform but a reality. Autonomy in the *buraku* was enacted just as the words were actually put down on paper—not so much as a right but rather as a retraction of state support and public facilities. The situation has led the people of these so rapidly affected communities to think over their options and begin appropriating the idea of being freshly empowered to transform their *image*, that same image that has remained set in stone for centuries.

Community initiative is being rethought and reinterpreted in the *buraku* areas of Japan as we speak. The “beauty” of the “traditional *buraku*” is blossoming in the urban event plazas, in culture festivals, community plays, exhibits and local historic tours that are in some cases offered in both English and Japanese. The *buraku* is perhaps “creating”, perhaps “returning” to its “traditional roots”. Yet, whether these roots are those that the leading neo-liberalists had in mind when advocating a revival of local culture as a fraction of the revival of Japan as a nation is a sensitive question. Certainly, it is important to acknowledge that the acts and performances of “machi-zukuri” in the *buraku* are there to be enjoyed today and that the audiences are numerous.

The new perception of power formation and particularly the shift of the relation between the state and the local in the conditions of globalization in Japan have thus lead to a newly formulated yet strictly economically driven control of the masses but also, to a possibility of the emergence of different and hardly controllable images and definitions of local identity and, consequently, minority identity. The *buraku* has indeed been implicated in the process of thinking through and developing *community initiatives* much earlier than the majority of locales in Japan. It has thus also developed different strategies for coping with the implications of the concept of “machi-zukuri” as it has

been introduced and reintroduced by the state. Therefore, *buraku* communities once again are adapting to the concept of “micro-nationness” faster than other local communities. It is thus that the former might very well act as models for thinking about the fate of local formations in Japan today.

The following chapter will consider the ways in which contemporary *community initiatives* are being interpreted in the *buraku* areas previously introduced in Chapter 2. Through observations and analysis of the activities and projects undertaken in the communities, a better idea will be sought of whether the concepts of *buraku* space and in consequence of locality are being rethought in contemporary Japan, and if so, how.

NOTES

1. This term has also been taken up by Jennifer Ellen Robertson and translated as the “age of localisation”.
2. The quotation was also used and translated by Akaha.

Chapter 4

The Voices of the *Buraku*

1. Towards “machi-zukuri”

Today, the *buraku* communities of Japan are yet again facing a new reality in which independence and autonomy have grown to be the most prominent concepts. These areas have been refused further financial support through the Dowa Assimilation Programs and have been deprived of the facilities that had become the centres of all community activities. Whatever the reasons for these changes, they are definite and irreversible. The Buraku Liberation League—the most powerful and influential organisation fighting for the rights of *buraku* people and responsible for the initial implementation and further renewals of the Special Measures Law and the Dowa Assimilation Programs—has become much less significant in the life of *buraku* communities today. In fact, the members of the regional BLL chapters are now themselves seeking to move away from the traditional paths followed up until this point. The tendency towards an alternative, independent way of “machi-zukuri” or community initiative has grown stronger. People of *buraku* areas are choosing to shift their focus from the generalizing and overarching umbrella of “the *buraku*” to the more specific and yet open notion of “our community”.

This does not appear as a movement towards a cover-up of the problems that the areas have been and still are facing. Nor is it the result of an agreement with the politicians in power on the resolution of the “Buraku Issue” and discrimination in general. Very much to the contrary, the people of *buraku* areas whom I was able to interview claim that despite nine decades of fighting and resisting, despite all the tangible acquisitions and ameliorations, very little has changed in the way the communities are perceived today. This is why, they insisted, a new path towards a more substantial transformation in respect to difference is being sought at present.

Interestingly enough, “community initiative” has become the title of many new independent projects in these areas. This concept, so controversial 20 years ago but so commonly used and manipulated today by the same political authorities that crossed out the issue of *buraku* discrimination as arbitrary, is not rejected but rather taken up in the *buraku*. What is interesting here is how and why this is done. Are the people of the *buraku* simply applying the contemporary neoliberal LDP model to their specific community, or are they nostalgically looking back to the *community initiatives* of the 1960s and 1970s, which had sought a solution in welfare?

It seems to me that the answer to this question cannot simply be situated in a rupture between “‘good’ versus ‘bad’ “machi-zukuri”. Rather, the contemporary *community initiatives* I have observed today in various *buraku* areas involve a much more complex relationship with the state—one that goes beyond welfare but also resists the neoliberal agenda. In other words, *burakumin* are now finding possibilities to challenge the power structures which have simultaneously constricted and liberated them through time, without necessarily rejecting those structures.

In order to get a better idea of the ways in which *community initiatives* have been perceived and undertaken in the *buraku*, it would be helpful to examine in detail some conversations and interviews with people from the three communities introduced in Chapter Two. The conversations will be contextualized and analyzed here with the aim of situating their importance in the broader discussion on contemporary “machi-zukuri” and the challenges presented by such a concept. The full transcripts of these interviews are further appended to this thesis for more thorough consulting.

2. Dialogues

The importance of this section lies in the variety of challenging ideas in respect to the *buraku* presented in a puzzle of conversations. What strikes one is the autonomy with which the speakers express their

opinions and the diverse scope of suggestions in respect to *community initiative* that they reveal. Certainly, most remarkable is how the ideas confront the modern “machi-zukuri” model while not necessarily discarding it or attempting to retrieve the “old” real planning prototype. By examining the goals and the stakes for a number of people from three different *buraku* areas, this section reveals the tensions inherent within *community initiative* as a contemporary paradigm and allows for another way of situating the importance of *buraku* today.

- ***Community Initiative as a Matter of Adjustment to Power Structures***

The first conversation to be discussed here is one with Mr. Ryoji Araki, a man of the *buraku* community of Asaka, which is located in the city of Osaka. In 2007, he was acting as Vice President of the Asaka Buraku Liberation League Branch as well as Director of the Asaka Youth Centre. From the latter position, Mr. Araki was soon expecting a dismissal, seeing as a law had just been passed to close such facilities (*Kiro ni tatsu*; M. Noguchi, *Hineoribe*). In the past decade, he had been directly implicated in the process of developing the idea of *community initiative* in Asaka and had been a key player in the committee representing the community in the head office of the largest and most influential *buraku* political organisation, the Buraku Liberation League.

My initial questions to Ryoji Araki were related to his personal and material change of position and then to his take on the impact of these major material changes to the community. He began his story by positing two strong convictions he held. First, he made sure to expose his negative feelings towards the decisions made by the government in regard to assimilation of *burakumin*. “They say there is no more discrimination so there is no need for special measures. Discrimination has a long way before being extinguished. The stigmatized image of the *buraku* continues to follow its people wherever they go today. It’s a made-up image of made-up places but it’s very real and it has not ceased to be real” [1]. Araki was thus highly critical of the reasons

given for the cutting of funds to *buraku* communities and organized initiatives. He claimed that these initiatives, which were originally supported by welfare programs pressed by the *burakumin* and offered by the state, led to tangible, positive results. They were not, however, results that could be called satisfactory, insisted Araki, but rather a step forward towards change.

He went on to explain that in Asaka, the people leading the BLL chapter were in fact unhappy with the welfare projects and had long worked independently from the League's directives. He mentioned that this had always been an issue and that the only reason that Asaka's leaders could get away with it was that the area had slowly become an "exemplary *buraku*" in terms of lifestyle, infrastructure, employment and education. The cutting of funds, however, meant depriving the community of the resources that allowed it to sustain itself. People were reliant on the state financial support to continue prospering and to fully engage in the process of building autonomy in *community initiatives*, claimed Araki.

When asked about his opinion on the future of *community initiative* and more specifically on the future of what the government had recently labelled "Human Rights Community Initiative", Araki did not show complete despair, contrary to my expectations after hearing his take on the cessation of funding.

"We are now thinking of the ways we should change our approach to these activities and continue them despite the lack of space and money. It is important to move on and take our responsibilities further. Our community is losing its youth but we are also becoming more diverse. There are many people now in Asaka who have come in here for different reasons but who were not originally from the area. This tendency has become more and more prominent with the transformation of the assimilation housing into municipal social housing. It's not necessarily a bad thing. On the contrary, we need to look at it as an asset to our community. We are diversifying.

This is what we need to consider when we think of how to continue our community activities” [2].

Araki goes on to note that he does not believe in the LDP’s claim to have repositioned their emphasis from the support for particular disadvantaged groups onto an insistence for general human rights. Araki insists that the state’s new Human Rights Initiatives are not what they claim to be. He adds, however, that if the *buraku* has to make do with this formula, it will be because it has the experience and because the *burakumin* have had to deal with fighting for human rights as a community through history.

There are a few crucial points that need to be taken from this conversation. There is certainly a sense of regret for what has been lost. The regret concerns both the material, structural gains that the welfare state had offered in times past and the shifted theoretical focus from the *buraku* onto the *community*. This regret was mainly expressed in combination with the conviction that the deed was not driven by a concern for the *community* as such but rather by a long-held desire to stop dealing (both materially and theoretically) with a complex issue. Araki was not surprised, however, by either shift. Even though, at the start of the conversation, he mentioned that there was no question about the Buraku Issue being resolved, he made it clear throughout the discussion that he was not stunned by the LDP’s move towards such a theory and, consequently, towards the more concrete action of ceasing all Dowa initiatives. He seemed to show regret not so much for a system that he found impeccable or even well-functioning but for a power structure to which he had adjusted. Consequently, he explained further that what he believed to lie ahead of the *buraku* today is yet again a process of adjustment to a refurbished power structure. Araki in fact goes on to state that there are possibilities within this new arrangement and that *burakumin* are perhaps better equipped to survive and grow than is the case with other *communities* in Japan.

- ***Community Initiatives do not Simply Adjust to but Can Also Interfere with Power Structures***

A renowned *buraku* ex-journalist of Osaka who has now turned to freelance writing and enjoys quite a success in Japan, Nobuhiko Kadooka agrees with Araki that there are adjustments to be made in the present situation that affects *buraku* communities directly. In a lecture presented to the Culture Centre of Ashihara, the second community discussed in Chapter Two, however, he expresses views that stand apart from Ryoji Araki's with regard to the interpretation of *community* and *identity* today [3]. For Kadooka, what needs to be discussed and questioned most openly is the way in which the concept of minority is projected as *negative identity*. According to him, the political changes taking place in Japan, despite "screaming out loud" for independent communities and local autonomy, have not altered the negative *image* of the *buraku*. These new measures, however, provide the people affected by this *image* with the opportunity to challenge it.

Kadooka presents the new *buraku community initiative* as the key to reformulating the concept of minority. He insists that Dowa assimilation education "just conserves a sort of manufactured consciousness in *buraku* kids, nothing else" [4]. He goes on: "I am not saying here that encouraging the building of a minority consciousness is necessarily a bad thing. What's bad is that the tendency is to build upon the same dark image of the *buraku* that we are trying to get away from" [5]. In other words, Kadooka's take is that in the process of becoming autonomous and deciding how to educate, employ and support the people of *buraku* communities, it is important to first revisit and question the definitions surrounding them. He insists that these definitions should not simply be "adjusted" or changed but that they need to be opened up. For example, according to him, "burakumin" is a misleading term because "it implies a person who is of a *buraku* and who holds a *buraku* consciousness. It is, however, a term with which anyone who has had any contact with a *buraku* is being labelled today" [6]. Instead, Kadooka suggests a more ambivalent and controversial

expression, namely 部落関係者(*buraku kankeisha*) or “connected to the *buraku*”, which he perceives to be any person who shows an interest in the *buraku*. In fact, in his lecture in Ashihara, he goes on to illustrate what he means by treating the audience to some smoked horse meat and then, after most people had finished tasting it, stating that anyone who came to the talk and ate the meat would now be a *buraku kankeisha*.

This act could indeed appear to be a move towards reifying the *buraku* or even difference in general, presenting it to the public as a *thing* that can be consumed. There is, however, more to Kadooka’s suggestion. “To understand a minority, to understand discrimination, there is no need to become it or to be a victim. You can, however, become connected and related to a minority. You can decide to think about the life and issues of a minority community. I believe it is extremely crucial that as many people as possible become connected and related. This, I hope, is a meeting of connected people who are a step further towards building different kind of communities—communities open to all who wish to listen and participate, communities welcoming people who question and discuss the issues concerning them not only with each other but also and actively with the cities of which their community is a part” [7]. He thus argues that this kind of move is possible in the newly developed socio-political environment and that it can allow for the formation of local communities with more complex and potent claims to their local governments.

- Identity as a Multifaceted Concept within which Tension is Inherent

Nobuhiko Kadooka is in many ways a controversial thinker, often praised but even more often criticized for his ideas by *buraku* and non-*buraku* alike. Certainly, the way his writing and lectures are being interpreted varies widely, as do the reasons for liking or disliking his personality and theories. The following conversation is interesting for it touches upon Kadooka’s views from a number of perspectives. In a

way, the people involved in this exchange offer responses to both Ryoji Araki and Nobuhiko Kadooka while also adding more layers to the concepts of minority and identity in general.

The talk is one between the members of “Fukinotou” the most prominent community organization in Nishinomiya city’s largest *buraku* area, Ashihara [8]. Every month, members of the group gather together to discuss the organization of various activities closely linked to the research, exposure and engagement of local people with Ashihara’s history and culture. In this particular meeting, the participants were meant to discuss the events already passed since the beginning of the year, think about their impact and consider what other activities could be organized with what aims for the coming months.

The first and most significant event in the year had been the reopening of the recently renovated Osaka Human Rights Museum also known as “Liberty Osaka”. The museum was now transformed to present a wider scope of minority groups in Japan via panels exposing their ways of life through history. The opening had coincided with the closing of the assimilation projects and was thus commonly being discussed in relation to the latter. Here too, the seven members attending the meeting were connecting the way the museum was restructured to the political changes closely affecting the *buraku*. The opinions were quite varied and, in many ways, contradictory. What makes them important, however, is that they engage with questions that challenge both the practices supported by the welfare state and those propagated by the neo-liberal government.

In the case of “Liberty Osaka”, some of the voices expressed strong disapproval of the new arrangement and used the term “ruined” when discussing the exhibition. A woman explained that she felt it was “now robbed of its essence so to say, robbed of its history” [9]. She went on to argue that the stands were too numerous and that they presented only snippets of people’s lives within minority communities of Japan. She insisted that it is impossible for the show to claim to portray any of

these peoples. It seemed to me there was a sense of nostalgia in the words of this woman but I felt there was more to it than simple regret for representations lost. She later clarified that, in fact, she had disliked the previous display as well but that the new exhibit made her feel angry and offended for being “placed in an even smaller box”. A man who was at the meeting stated that for him it was precisely a matter of “feelings” and “impressions”. He called the exhibit a “children’s performance” [10]. “You go around and you are being entertained by all the flashy colours and maybe sometimes shocked by the horrible photographs”, he added [11]. Another woman, however, stepped into the conversation by saying that she disagreed and felt the display was much more comprehensible and less exclusive now. She argued that when she had gone into the museum previously, she felt bombarded by “negative” information and photographs, which made her heavy with equally negative emotions. She insisted that the exhibit was always about evoking feelings and that now, it was at least less gloomy and threatening and much more “consumable”.

Here, again, the problematic issue of thinking of the *buraku* and of difference as “consumer goods” resurfaces. Although quite distinct from Kadooka’s thoughts on the concept of *buraku-kankeisha*, the idea of rendering difference more approachable, more consumable still comes across here as well. What, then, becomes at stake is more complex than simple. The person might be driven by the newly discovered comfort in finding herself standing on equal terms with so many other people in so many different circumstances. She might just as well be pleased with the possibility of discussing her own situation and experiences with those multifaceted others who simultaneously consume and are being consumed. With mixed feelings, she might even discover herself to belong to not just one but many of the groups on the stand. There are a great many possibilities for negotiation here and their intricacy should certainly not be ignored.

The question of intricacy comes up again when thinking of the responses to the notion of accessibility of difference. The conversation

between the members of “Fukinotou” in Ashihara continues as a discussion of Kadooka’s lecture. A woman laughs and says: “He seems to be a mommy’s boy that Kadooka. How can he talk about something he never lived?!” [12]. Another one adds: “What is this whole thing about ‘the connected to the *buraku*’? He uses it as if anyone would like to jump right in and become a *burakumin*’s relative” [13]. Yet another woman argues that “he is a good spokesperson of the younger generation of *buraku* kids. They need to be able to relate to something as well. They never lived the hardest of prejudice but they still heard the stories” [14].

The discussion here is closely linked to the way history is commonly being presented in terms of generations. In this case, the “younger generation” is viewed as standing apart and thus not understanding the “true” history of discrimination. Obviously, there is the problem of essentialising historical experience here and, in many ways, the issue of moving closer to the model of nostalgic remembrance of particular moments in time is fundamental. By positing history in terms of generations, people tend to disregard individual experiences on the one hand and historical transitions and transformations on the other. In doing so, however, they also immediately highlight the ideological changes that have taken place and the impact of the new directions that are being pursued.

A similarly problematic trend is that of seeking to revive and expose heritage culture. In the same conversation, this very tendency also surfaces. A man discusses how eager he has been to retrieve documents and facts about the traditions of Ashihara and the difficulty he has encountered in doing so. “Today, it is possible to ask for these documents but they would only be available if requested and in most cases a person would need to go through a great deal of paper work explaining why they are needed to get access to them. As you can imagine, most people who asked to see these documents were people from the area” [15]. For this same man and for the majority of the people involved in the discussion, the concern appeared to be that their

community's cultural heritage and history is still being deliberately obscured.

The act of attempting to retrieve and proclaim cultural heritage, however, can limit the functions of difference politically, for once again the focus is on a fixed identity rather than on transformations and change. What has to be noted, though, is that the desire of the people expressing these concerns was not so much for "enlightening the new generation" or for presenting *buraku* heritage and history as crucial to understanding the *buraku* today but again, for rendering information and historical experience accessible to the general public. Ashihara, they said, is a community and, just like many other communities, it has a history and historical practices that might not be representative of what the area is today but should be available for examination because they are certainly steps in the process of change.

One of the women present at the meeting was a local middle school teacher who was not from Ashihara, did not live there and was not of *buraku* origin. The woman expressed her thoughts on the importance of teaching history and culture to the youth of today. She argued that for her, this was a great challenge not because she felt that she could not relate to the experiences of *burakumin* or because she thought the "new generation" incapable of understanding these experiences but because she feared that by defining a certain history and culture as *buraku* she would ignore a great many facets of individual histories, cultures and practices. Identity and difference are here seen as truly complex concepts that the teacher struggles to express and finds herself unable to define. She ends up concluding that "it is all about perception and perspective" and that what is most important today as well as in history is to face and consider multiple identities and viewpoints, which can concurrently clash and collaborate with each other [16].

What can therefore be drawn from the accounts at the Fukinotou meeting in Ashihara is that the people present found it difficult to

discuss notions like identity and community without expressing their awareness of and engagement with the innate tensions present. Their autonomy in embracing these tensions and allowing for the development of inner and outer arguments and questioning can thus lead to more complex debates and more focused negotiations. The next conversation deals with how such negotiations are being engaged in individually, within a particular community and between that same community and the local municipal government.

- **Tensions that Bring About Negotiations**

This was a conversation that took place at the house of a middle-school English teacher from Osaka who had spent his life working at schools in *buraku* areas [17]. He had invited me for dinner together with his family as well as a student of his, a woman in her 40s who had brought along her teenage daughter and her best friend, a woman from the Kami-no-Shima *buraku*. Both the former student and her friend were *burakumin* but from different communities in close proximity to Osaka City. The women had met while working together at a kindergarten located in another very different area.

This meeting was organized by the elderly teacher, who had initially given me a letter written to him by his student assuring me that she agreed to his sharing it with me. The letter seemed to be written hastily and contained a great deal of information. In many ways, it was a letter of apology to the teacher for not keeping in touch. It was also a sort of confession of the hardships the woman had gone through as an adult and of her feelings of shame for not being able to talk about them openly and face her fears with more strength.

Upon meeting the writer of the communication, the teacher advised her that I knew of her troubles as he had given me her letter. The woman laughed, stating that she felt embarrassed and uncomfortable for letting her mentor pass it on to me, but that she was also in a way happy that she had done it. She added that sharing was not her strongest skill and that sending this letter to her teacher and confessing her *buraku* origins

and her troubles in life to her friend had been very difficult for her. She went on to state that she would rather her friend tell me more about her own involvement in *community initiative* because the latter had led a much more engaged life and, according to the student, could offer me a “more interesting story” [18].

The friend seemed somewhat dissatisfied with her companion’s explanation and noted that it was not a “more interesting story” but rather an explanation of things that had happened to her and had brought her where she is now. She then gave us an impressive explanation of how she had discovered her *buraku* origins and how she had dealt with her newly discovered situation. She had in fact been called to attend a meeting in high school with a convocation letter stating that “as a *burakumin* she should present herself on such and such date” [19]. Not knowing that her family was of *buraku* origin at the time or what that meant exactly, the young woman had gone to the meeting and acted as if she was fully aware of her minority background. This incident was certainly quite traumatic for the girl then, for she was told that as of that moment her life was essentially doomed and that she would need to learn how to deal with that fact. It was then that the protagonist of that story began asking herself questions and finding all answers impossible to understand. Unsatisfied, she went on to engage in various BLL activities at university and in local *community initiatives* after that.

There are two aspects of this story that deserve some attention. First is the way in which it was presented by the former student of the teacher hosting us as “much more interesting” than her own. Second is the reluctance of the woman telling it to categorise her life experiences as a “story”. On the one hand, there is the first woman’s fear of discussing her own situation because she felt it was not exemplary like that of a social activist, which was what she perceived her friend to be. On the other, there is the “social activist” who claimed that she was no such thing and that she had no idea what that really meant. The second woman insisted that she has done what she thought right at the

particular moment and in the particular circumstances and had no set image of an exemplary or commendable *buraku* [20].

It is difficult to comprehend this from such a brief summary of a portion of a conversation, but what is at stake here is not a simple comparison between two women's stories. Rather, it is an argument first about the limits of minority identity and second about the relationship between identity and history. This argument becomes much more interesting as the conversation unfolds and goes on to touch upon the ways in which the *buraku* has been and is still being projected. The former student steps back and confesses that she was unable to become involved in activist movements because all that she had been taught—even if by the activists themselves—was that being *burakumin* was hardly a background of which one could be proud. She was told that *buraku* peoples were simple-minded and difficult to educate and thus needed to work harder to catch up with everyone else. Being an excellent student herself and having had literate—although poor and often violent—parents, she refused to believe BLL advocates who claimed that all *buraku* children were in dire need of salvation.

The daughter of the woman, who had also attended the dinner, added that in fact she too felt that even today what was being advocated and portrayed through Liberation videos at school and by BLL activists at human rights lectures where *buraku* communities were being discussed was still illiteracy, poverty and crime. The girl was angered that these “generalisations” were being used as leverage to motivate young people to join social groups and get involved in *community initiatives* [21].

So now the issue had moved away from how a “good” *burakumin* was supposed to be and towards how *burakumin* as an identity could be explained, if at all. This is where the Kami-no-Shima friend intervened to insist that she too did not believe in the common representations of the *buraku* today and felt that the community initiatives in which she had been involved had hardly changed their methods and goals since

the start of *buraku* activism. The woman went on to argue that what needed to be thought about today was the *buraku* not so much as a homogeneous community but rather as a group of people who have experienced certain things in common through history but who have lived in a multiplicity of different circumstances, have had different goals and have been and still are fighting different battles. She focused on the importance of individual histories, which have brought about individual initiatives with respect to local communities, and she stressed the need for conversing and negotiating with municipalities in order to achieve what was best not so much for the *buraku in general* but for the people living in it *particularly*. “There are many very refreshing initiatives being thought up in my *buraku* today and they are all considered and driven by community efforts, not by programme funding and instructions. It is to the city hall that we go now and with them that we discuss our problems as a neighbourhood with needs, not as a *buraku*. I think it’s an interesting time we are living in right now”.

It is thus that the problems and issues that arise from asking questions and attempting to fit within the structures and political schemes of the time become more than simply bumps on the road. In today’s troubled political situation, the questions are becoming more and more challenging and dissatisfaction with the answers is giving birth to autonomous thinkers with powerful ideas. Such individuals and local groups take up what is given to them, in this case *local community initiative*, and render it a tool fitting their circumstances and lives. These tools, as suggested by the above conversation, can be instruments of negotiation within but also outside the locality and with the larger municipal governments. This is a very different approach to the new neo-liberal politics on “machi-zukuri”, even if the general guidelines are still taken into consideration. Whether we characterise them as deprived of state support or freed of state supervision, individuals within *buraku* localities are now raising problems that affect them particularly. They are organising locally to address these issues among

themselves, but they are also organising politically to represent themselves before the larger municipal governments.

History in Motion—Movement, Change and Difference as Essential to Understanding Identity

The common trait of *buraku* communities in Japan throughout the years has been their history of discrimination. This is in fact what *buraku* activists used as the most powerful vehicle for grouping people and organising them to react and realise the many important achievements we see today. This is also however the tool utilised to justify discriminatory behaviour. History has thus become essential and fundamental to the Buraku Issue, whether it serves as a means of explaining it, justifying it or alleviating the problem of discrimination. Today, the question of whether there is a need to look at history at all or whether history is futile in understanding the contemporary issues of the *buraku* is widely discussed (Hatanaka, *Burakushi*). The importance of thinking historically when studying the *buraku*, however, cannot and should not be denied. It is hardly possible to engage in any kind of research or analysis of *buraku* without looking at historical accounts. Rather than renouncing the value of history, what is necessary is to rethink the way it is perceived, to reevaluate what kind of history makes a difference.

In the conversation discussed above, the focus was on local, individual histories. The woman from Kami-no-Shima argued that the problem of Liberation Education (開放教育, *kaihou kyouiku*) was that it was stuck on old goals and had neglected the changes in the community. In fact, what needs to be realized here is that acknowledging such changes has been virtually impossible given that “the community” is and has been a highly heterogeneous group of individuals with little in common with the exception of prejudice. As the issues of prejudice are becoming more and more difficult to detect—even if they are still present—the problems of these individuals have also become too diverse to capture. The Buraku Issue, in contrast, has remained stuck

in a historical moment and its resolution has continued to be dependent on the revelation of origins within an instant in time.

Such a perspective on the situation of *burakumin* in Japan is problematic. Even though it is necessary to seriously consider history when thinking of *buraku* and *burakumin*, it is also necessary to acknowledge that history is in perpetual motion. People's lives move on through history. Individuals within localities change and thus transform those places, which in turn also evolve in their identities. The following conversation hints at the importance of acknowledging individual histories as well as histories of *buraku* localities. It took place in Nishinomiya city at the border of Ashihara *buraku* with three women, all active members of the BLL Youth Group of Horiike *buraku*, a community in the city of Itami [22]. The meeting was hosted by two of the women, who lived in the area in an apartment that they also used as a private daycare centre during the week. The third woman was the person who had set up the meeting and with whom I had become acquainted in Asaka at a training course. She had expressed an interest in my work at the time and had consequently agreed to distribute a survey I had compiled among the members of the BLL Youth Group she was leading [23]. The two women had received and filled out the survey and were now interested to discuss it.

The conversation started out as the two daycare teachers began explaining how their business was set up and how it functioned. They had chosen the location because it was near a key train station, an important cross point where many working people changed trains to go in different directions. The women described how difficult it was for them to find the right place and how long they had looked for it. The apartment they had at present was very bright with large windows and a large living room, which was what they liked about it. They insisted that it was very important for the children to live in an environment with a lot of open space and plenty of light.

The day-care centre operated from 6:45 to 19:45 every day except Sunday and the teachers' priority was to be able to accommodate working women as much as possible. They stressed that their initial goal was to provide a service that was focused on the children on the one hand, and on the women, who had a hard time juggling work and motherhood, on the other. The desire to set up a day-care centre and help women was certainly driven by the difficulties the two partners had when working in the public sector as educators themselves. One of the women mentioned that filling out the survey I had compiled made her reflect upon her past and all the decisions she had made when moving onto private work. All three women claimed that the questions were very difficult and challenging and called for deeper reflection on their position in society.

The same woman who first mentioned that she had analysed her choice to leave her position in public kindergarten told us about her childhood growing up in Horiike *buraku*. She explained how she had become aware of her *buraku* background when a scandal broke out in connection to discriminatory behaviour against one of the elderly ladies in her neighbourhood. This was the moment from which the BLL had become more active in the area. This was also the time when parents had started encouraging their children to involve in BLL youth activities. It was how she and the third woman present, the leader of today's BLL Youth Group, had grown up. They had been exposed to Liberation Classes ever since they were in primary school and they "enjoyed these meetings". "It was really just games and sometimes help with homework. But they allowed us to be together. Our homes were not large enough to gather there, so it was a good option. We felt at home in our 'village'" [24].

Unlike the memories of the people in the conversations discussed previously, the women from Horiike expressed positive feelings when thinking back on the times they had spent in organised Buraku Liberation Education sessions. What made them so openly positive about these times, however, was the setting and the atmosphere rather

than the content of the classes. In fact, content was barely mentioned. According to the women, the space was given to children to spend time together and share their everyday experiences. They were encouraged to discuss their troubles and were supported individually. In the memories of the women, they were not strictly “educated” on the Buraku Issue as children, but it was widely discussed and they were free to take part in such discussions.

Interestingly, all three women showed interest in the reforms happening at present even if they resented the motives given and the triggers that had driven the changes. “It really is not thought out well. The community is suffering from these rushed decisions, which I think have nothing to do with the resolution of discrimination but rather with individual deals and misunderstandings between the LDP and the BLL” [25]. What they thought appealing in regards to the new situation was the possibility of focusing on the needs of the community—not so much the *buraku* as often defined in terms of an overarching uniform group, but their particular neighbourhood, the place where *burakumin* reside and work together with people from a variety of different backgrounds. “In regard to the conceptual changes, it is a very different approach to the education of children and to the functioning of our communities in general. Today we conduct our activities in the community centre and it is open to anyone who wishes to come in. Even though the people participating in the activities are mainly of the ‘village’, there are also children who are not. In one of the groups I am leading right now eight out of eleven children are of *buraku* origin and three are not. It is then for these three kids that the approach needs to change. For so long now, I have felt that it has to change” [26].

The nature of what is taught in the recently renamed Human Rights Centre in Horiike has hardly changed. It is really the way of presenting the subject matter that is now being reevaluated and transformed to fit the needs of the community as it stands. The funding is now raised and the activities are being organised locally, which has driven people to think more of the particular necessities of their children and their

children's friends. Moving towards a more comprehensive method of teaching while keeping some of the more popular activities for children, such as taiko drumming, shamisen and local dance, has attracted more young people from the neighbourhood to the centres. The educators, in turn, have more freedom to choose their approach in attempting to reach every one of their students and share with them stories of the area.

The three women agree that what is most important is allowing children to ask and to try to answer questions even if they seem difficult or too bothersome at times. Prejudice, according to the BLL Youth Group leader, is a result of people being afraid to ask questions and feeling uncomfortable about answering them. She argues that in the Human Rights Centre in which she is working, she really tries to teach children how to ask and, in turn, to answer them with well-thought-out and subjective answers rather than textbook explanations. She believes it is very important to allow young people to have an opinion and that it is by listening to other peoples' opinions that they will learn how to offer their own. The two daycare teachers add that the problems people encounter today are much more diverse than they were decades ago, when the first Buraku Liberation Classes were put in place. The goals and concerns of people have changed. They are still tackling discrimination but it has become a much more complex issue that cannot possibly be rationalised solely by their being *burakumin*. One of the hosts insists that she needs to think of herself as a person with interchanging multiple identities in order to live her everyday life. The youth group leader adds that this is in fact what all young people of her area are dealing with and that she is trying to make them feel comfortable with that idea.

Some of the activities that the youth group leader and her colleagues are working on rethinking and reformulating are the local festivals. The idea on which they are working is to cut back on the theme of *buraku* discrimination and focus more on what people in the community enjoy and practise even today. "It has a more positive feel to it. It will not

necessarily focus so much on the suffering or the experiences of discrimination, but rather on all the stuff that is good in the *buraku*. Sure, many of these things have been the result of seclusion and hardship, but they are still things we consider good and dear to us. They are what we would rather share with others” [27].

Food is one of these things. The three women get into a discussion about the importance of food in the *buraku* and how, even today, children grow up eating the meals their grandparents once prepared. These same meals were once seen as food of the *buraku*, but today most of them are just considered local delicacies. For the women, these aspects of the neighbourhood are things people should talk about more openly. “Rather than starting a conversation about how the *buraku* is strange or how the issue is difficult to understand, why not start a conversation about horse meat, or taiko drumming? It would be much more fun and it will actually get people talking. I want to talk about what’s interesting about my ‘village’ because there are many things that really are. All of these ideas are incorporated in the new project we have been thinking about” [28].

The idea of reconfiguring of *buraku* culture on the model of the food court is certainly worthy of attention. At first glance, it does appear to be a simple gesture towards the reification of the local that renders it consumable. Difference can be perceived as objectified this way, a consumer product on the global market. This model can be comparable to the *buraku kankeisha* idea of Kadooka Nobuhiko (mentioned earlier). Like his approach to the contemporary *buraku*, the food court model introduced by the three women is also criticised by the elderly, who argue that the young have no experience of discrimination and are thus more prone to present the issue lightly. Again, history appears structured around distinct generations in such arguments. Both rendering the *buraku* consumable and thinking of history in generational terms are problematic and limit the possibilities that lie in difference. It is, however, important to consider whether these

dialogues are not offering something more than simple reification of the local or of difference.

What strikes one as particularly interesting in this last conversation is the emphasis on thinking both historically and in terms of movement—the focus on change and motion rather than on moments within history. The notion of identity as multiple and transformable is indeed only conceivable when thinking in terms of malleable but material limits, in other words, when thinking of history in motion. The marketplace in this respect does not simply offer the *buraku* up for grabs as yet another locality, but rather exposes it for consideration as it stands today, affected by its movements in the past and actively transforming itself in the present.

Moving On

These were only a few of the conversations, lectures, discussions and events in which I participated. The aim in presenting the speakers here and offering them the space to open up and share their opinions was primarily to move away from flattening generalisations of the community as a homogenous group and to allow autonomous *buraku* thinkers to speak for themselves. The *buraku* is stirring and transforming itself and its people are moving in various directions, thus making categorisations increasingly difficult. What is most fascinating about the choices and actions of people in *buraku* areas today is their individuality, the growing concern with the local as well as the interest in alternative ways of perceiving history and difference. *Community Initiative* has been taken up as a new avenue for applying ideas autonomously. It has now been reformed to challenge and in many ways skew the original model simply by applying it to the *buraku*.

In the following chapter, more attention will be given to the particular *community initiatives* mentioned in the dialogues above and observed in the *buraku* areas of Asaka, Ashihara, and Kami-no-Shima. In the final section of this thesis, the focus will be on what is at stake in terms of *community initiative* and local versus national power formations.

NOTES

1. See transcript of interview: "January 2007, Conversation with Ryoji Araki, Former Director of the Asaka Youth Centre and Vice-President of the Asaka Buraku Liberation League Branch" in Appendix.
2. See note 1 above.
3. See transcript of interview: "January 2007, Lecture by Nobuhiko Kadooka, a renowned freelance writer on the *Buraku* issue, at the Wakatake Living Culture Centre in Ashihara, Nishinomiya" in Appendix.
4. See note 3 above.
5. See note 3 above.
6. See note 3 above.
7. See note 3 above.
8. See transcript: "March 2007, Conversation with 'Fukinotou' members at the Wakatake Living Culture Centre, Ashihara, Nishinomiya" in Appendix.
9. See note 8 above.
10. See note 8 above.
11. See note 8 above.
12. See note 8 above.
13. See note 8 above.
14. See note 8 above.
15. See note 8 above.
16. See note 8 above.
17. See transcript: "March 2007, Dinner at Prof. Maruyama's House in Osaka with Ms. Yuko, her Daughter Haruka and Ms. Harumi" in Appendix.
18. See note 17 above.

19. See note 17 above.
20. See note 17 above.
21. See note 17 above.
22. See transcript of interview: “Afternoon Tea in Nishinomiya with Kaoru Onoda, the Head of the BLL Youth Group of Horiike *buraku*, and her Friends, Eriko and Kyoko” of May 2007.
23. See “Survey Question” in the Appendix.
24. See note 22 above.
25. See note 22 above.
26. See note 22 above.
27. See note 22 above.
28. See note 22 above.

Chapter 5

“Community Building” Revisited

The political changes directly affecting the *buraku* communities of Japan— and more particularly the recent legislation mandating the withdrawal of funds in support of social activities linked and related to the *buraku*— have led the residents of such designated areas to reorganise their lives accordingly (Uesugi, *Burakushi*). Today, the focus is certainly less on the importance of remembering and reiterating *buraku* discrimination or on the need to re-evaluate history and dig out the “true” roots of the people in the communities as a group. It has instead shifted onto the actual needs of the local neighbourhoods as autonomous units today. Different *buraku* areas are taking up different plans of action and approaching the reintroduced concept of “machi-zukuri” or *community initiative* in a variety of ways [1]. Certainly, individual *buraku* communities do not ignore their area’s history when thinking of possible projects to be launched for sustaining and encouraging social and economic development. In fact, in the neighbourhoods in which I conducted my research and which will be discussed in detail in this chapter, history played an important role in the way *community initiative* was being perceived. It was, however, local and even *individual* history that mattered most in the formulation and organisation of activities.

Today, the term “community initiative” is being popularised once more, this time by political authorities strategically utilising its ambiguity and wrapping it up in the neo-liberal veil of “nation-building” (Abe, *Utsukushii*). It can thus seem curious to observe that the concept is employed as frequently in *buraku* communities. Further examination is certainly called upon, however, for the “community” as discussed in *buraku* areas, despite the match in configuration, stands apart from the “community” broadcasted by the party in power as it strives to enliven the nation-state ideal. Similarly, although prolifically applied both in

aggressive political campaigns and independent “village” initiatives, the “machi-zukuri” model requires thorough investigation.

Are *burakumin* simply buying into the schemes and mechanisms of the new and more aggressive nationalist—or, as one of the most prominent minority studies scholars in Japan, Michihiko Noguchi, likes to address them today, neo-liberalist advocates (M. Noguchi, *Hineoribe*)? The answer to this question can certainly not be summed up by a negation or an affirmation. In fact, what needs to first be considered is whether there is an actual intention behind the actions of people in *buraku* areas today in relation to *community initiative*. What strikes one as more important is to acknowledge the concerns and desires of individuals within local groups who have now found possibilities that, although more difficult to realise, allow them to stand on their feet and talk of their proper needs and experiences. These concerns and desires might be expressed within the structured model of “machi-zukuri”, but they could also be articulated autonomously and with an emphasis on the body of knowledge to be applied to other local communities in Japan. In other words, the crucial issue here is not whether *burakumin* are consciously fighting the system but rather, how they are living their lives within it and finding themselves curiously positioned as the authority when it comes to understanding the functions of *locality* and *community*.

Before going on to analyse the complexity of *community initiative* in contemporary Japan, it is worth pausing to clarify the inquiry that is being pursued. It might seem that a “good versus bad” model of politics is being offered in the discussion of “machi-zukuri” as a vehicle of change within and outside *buraku* communities. It should be kept in mind that what is being sought is not an example of such a relationship, but rather an emphasis on the tension between the welfare state and the neo-liberal politics of the LDP. Both the welfare state and the neo-liberal state exercise control. The difference is in how this is being done and in the positions of people within the control mechanism. In the new neo-liberal model, there are accordingly new ways of destabilising

categories such as minority, identity and nation. The control and the power exercised are greater but the tensions are much more numerous and the stakes are higher. It is in fact these tensions and stakes that this chapter in particular and this thesis in general seek to highlight.

In order to understand the tensions and conflicts arising in respect to *community initiative*, I propose to listen to the words and to examine the actions of people of three separate *buraku* communities. In order to get as much out of these studies as possible, it is important to take what people say is of interest to them as really so and to consider their actions really their interests. In other words, I am urging the reader not to doubt the words and deeds of the people but to trust them, for only by trusting would the reader be able to analyse the impact of these expressions and actions on contemporary society. Let us now look at the ways in which these three communities are tackling their recently altered economic and social situation. In the following pages, the recent “machi-zukuri” or community building initiatives in Asaka of Osaka, Ashihara of Nishinomiya and Kami-no-Shima of Amagasaki will be studied in detail. The main goal of this exercise is to examine the ways in which the people in these three *buraku* areas are organising themselves locally after having been refused further economic support by the Japanese government and after having seen a steady withdrawal of the provisions previously offered by the Buraku Liberation League. With no money and few of the public facilities seen as vital for the growth and development of the areas, the “new *buraku*” neighbourhoods are moving on, fuelled not only by people’s individual motivations and ideas but also by their rich experiences in working as a part of a “separate community”.

1. Asaka’s Colors

Asaka has been seriously affected by the aggressive measures taken by the Japanese government in regards to *buraku* areas, and more particularly Dowa designated boroughs. Money has been cut out, jobs have been lost, and two of the major public facilities, the Youth Centre

and the Home for the Elderly, have been closed down. The Leader of Asaka and the regional head of the Buraku Liberation League has remained the most respected and prominent authority in the area. From the start, however, he has been known to stray a little from the League's directives and has now taken a turn towards more self-sufficient and "community oriented" management [2].

The focus in Asaka has been on international and cultural exchanges as well as on intergenerational dialogue. This remains the case today. International conferences on community development and human rights are still being held in Asaka. Students of different backgrounds are still being welcomed and offered language classes and community support. What is different, however, is the way these activities have been organised.

Today, it is the community itself that engages in volunteer work in order to keep these events in place. The locations are improvised, the materials are self produced and the structure is not as rich, but the events are still there. Another major change that has taken place is the stress on the participants' involvement in the production and progression of the activities. Young families receiving welfare payments are welcome to move into the now converted municipal social housing in Asaka and these people are immediately encouraged to become involved in all community initiatives. The children and the elderly, who have now lost their gathering places, have been implicated in various enterprises, most of which they must organise and consequently enjoy together. This is indeed quite new, for the area for previously these two groups tended to be involved separately in the activities organised by their designated institutions. Furthermore, neither group was actively involved in the organisation of the production of the activities or in the process of decision-making in respect to what kinds of events should be implemented or how these could be introduced [3].

These changes have brought about various new developments in the community. For one, the children and the young adults of Asaka are

more exposed to the environment, lifestyle and concerns of the elderly. Certainly, for many, these people are family, grandparents, great-uncles and aunts. For others, however, they are the old folk of the neighbourhood into which their family had moved not long ago. Stories told by these aged members of the *buraku* inevitably revolve around the hardship and poverty of the area in the distant past. They might not necessarily mention discrimination, hatred and resistance as they saw them, but they would surely talk of delicious foods and games they played. They would remember the festivals or the Yamato River and the fish that could be caught around the nearby pine woods, which were now all cleared.

These are stories of Asaka *buraku*, but more importantly they are stories of the local *community* and the way people lived together in the area. In a way, the recent interest in these tales is accompanied by a general interest in Asaka's own past and present. The opportunity to discuss and decide matters autonomously has pushed the people of the community to think of their true needs and their perspectives on Asaka's development.

In 2007, Asaka's residents took chances and experimented by exposing the many colours of their "village"; the tastes, the sounds, the feelings of it were revealed in their multiplicity and variability. So, how was this done? What were some of the events that took place in Asaka? Maybe it would be more appropriate to begin with the event that did not take place. The source of greatest pride and celebration, Bon Festival, the event that had once proclaimed Asaka a revolutionary *buraku* and that signified "resistance", for the area did not take place in 2007. The reasons given to me were, on the one hand, the shortage of funds and, on the other, the new priorities of the community.

In January 2007, an international convention for non-governmental organisations was held in Asaka, with 15 people from all over Asia being hosted for four days (Yamamoto). In October 2007, a South Asia Minority Community Development Conference took place, with nearly

20 people being hosted for three days. Earlier in the year, a learning workshop was put in place for the relaxation and entertainment of work-strained middle and high school teachers. People from all-over Osaka learned how to play Taiko drums under the supervision of members of the locally renowned Youth Taiko Drum Club. In August, a Balloon Festival was organised, in which children and elderly members of the community were entertained by young men and women from both within and outside Asaka. While enjoying a comic performance, the participants were taught how to produce various shapes with elongated balloons. A two-day Taiko drum making work-shop was introduced in September, 2007. This event was followed by a Taiko drum playing workshop a week later. A local Intercultural Food Festival was organized in November to introduce the various food cultures of Asaka and the surrounding areas. Visitors from all areas of Japan were welcome to discuss or present their particular food customs.

All of these events were produced, sponsored and realised by the community. Unlike in previous years, the emphasis was much more on exchange and on mutual learning, with little if any attention devoted to the dissemination of information about the area's history of discrimination. Without a doubt, all of the events and activities were a presentation, performance and a reflection of that very history. However, the way they were advertised and perceived revealed more of an emphasis on the area and its people, their lifestyles and what they enjoyed.

The violent shouting of the Taiko drummers was introduced as a cry for freedom, a liberating expression that allowed players to release their spirits and show all that they are capable of. The workshop participants were encouraged to let themselves go and play as they felt, beating the rhythms they sensed to be close to their hearts or those they were used to from their own areas.

The fatty meat, which were once the worthless remains of an animal's flesh after it was stripped of its most valuable and saleable portions,

was offered as a precious delicacy and introduced as reminiscent of a safe home and a cheerful people. The visitors tasting it were asked if there was something of the sort where they came from and were questioned about their area's traditional meals and specialties. Recipes were exchanged, as were tastes and cheers, glances and jokes.

Before making a Taiko drum, the workshop attendees were shown a huge piece of leather, which was introduced as the skin of one grown cow. The openings for the head, legs and tail were shown and the elasticity of the material was demonstrated. The host of the event spoke on the custom of producing Taiko drums and the hardship involved in creating the instrument. He also emphasised a saying that he referred to as a "sacred rule" for the people involved in the crafting of drums, namely "All but the voice of an animal must be used if one is to kill it". "The sound of the Taiko drum signifies and becomes that voice", he said, "it is the amalgamation of the human and animal spirits that keeps the voice alive" [4]. The promotion of creativity and the value of life resounded from the man's introduction to Taiko drum making. The craft of the work was exposed and not merely its technicality or the manual skill it required. The spiritual and humane aspect of the instrument's creation was also hinted at. The work of the drum maker was situated not as an action but as a dramatic act—a performance perhaps originally meant to resonate stigma but in fact involving a multiplicity of layers that invoked exciting and unexpected possibilities for individual expression.

The history of the *buraku* was present within every one of the community events and initiatives. It is useless to deny that. However, it is equally futile to attempt to argue that the acts performed were representative of *buraku* culture in general. The "village" has moved and stirred. The people have come and gone, bringing all kinds of stories and experiences with them. Therefore, today's events are more of an amalgamation of all these stories and experiences or even a reflection of the various voyages and transformations of the community through time. The oil cakes are no longer just "oil cakes"; they are

cooked and seasoned differently to the way they were done fifty, forty or even ten years ago in the same place. The drumming is not the same, either. People play for different reasons and are influenced by different things. Customs have changed and, even though the ghost of the *buraku* lurks in them, the actual visage of that spectre has remained undecipherable. In other words, it is impossible to stray from history when looking at events and activities in the *buraku* today but it is also impossible to ignore the transformations and shifts the specific local community has gone through. What matters most is what people feel and live now, what they crave and believe in today. These feelings, cravings and beliefs might be triggered by historical events but they are also strongly influenced by specific local and individual circumstances. People act and say what they mean and what they need in the space of *community initiative* in Asaka.

2. Ashihara Shaken-up

Ashihara is such a large community that any kind of generalisation about people's interests, goals, economic and social situation, background or even ethnicity, is literally impossible [5]. Still, Ashihara has been labelled a *buraku*, an outcast community, since the Edo period, and its title remains today. Unlike other *buraku* areas, Ashihara had maintained its neutrality on the Japanese political scene through the ages. "Activism" as a concept has been rejected and traded for "community cooperation" for the sake of the social and economic improvement of the "village". In the first decade of the 20th Century a great number of volunteer organisations were gathered together to discuss and debate upon the way the area was to be managed and enhanced. In Ashihara, the concept of まちづくり (*machi zukuri*) was what the community had begun thinking about and applying more than a 100 years ago. The initiatives were termed 地域づくり (*chiiki zukuri*) or "area building". It was in 1991, however, with the foundation of the Fukinotou, the local group for community learning and dissemination of information, that "chiiki-zukuri" was taken to a different level [6]. Events

were organised with the aim of providing people with the information and tools to question the actions not only of the Japanese government but also of the powerful Buraku Liberation League. There was a degree of mistrust in the idea of affiliating with an authority that was not locally formulated. Fukinotou attempted to urge the people of Ashihara to involve themselves more dynamically in social action for the improvement and support of their own community so that they might not fall under the control of others. Still, the members of the group claimed these actions distinct from political activism and closer to social awareness initiatives.

Major projects were taken up. The first urged community members to think about the history and traditions of their area. People were questioned about different aspects of life in Ashihara in the times when the “village” was still highly segregated. The information was collected and examined, the first document coming out of this extensive research project being the “Language of Ashihara”, a dictionary compiling the specific expressions used in the area and now lost or rarely used (Fukinotou, *Ashihara*). This language used to be specific to Ashihara and many of the people residing in the neighbouring villages recognised it as a marker of the *buraku*, a sort of low-status dialect. Fukinotou, however, sought to revisit the once “shameful” expressions and remind the people of the “village” of the familiarity with which they used to interact with each other. Simultaneously, the initiative also sought to offer today’s residents some of the background they might need in order to understand certain expressions particular to Ashihara and still widely used in the present day.

Fukinotou further urged the people of the community to organise and engage in practices that the latter saw as “traditional”, “cultural” expressions of the area. Classes, or rather free gatherings in which different “traditional” customs, arts and crafts were taken up. Shako odori lessons, in which the steps and moves of the local Bon festival dance were taught, were set up. Paper craft classes—in which milk containers were used to produce decorations as well as writing paper—

were initiated. A food club was created, elderly women being gathered to exchange old-time recipes and cook “traditional” meals for the community. The older men and women were also called to participate in a singing circle in which songs of older days were to be taught to the local children.

All of these activities might never before have acted as powerful unifiers of Ashihara’s residents, but they certainly were doing so now. Still, even if most people of the area found the activities entertaining, they also found that they were lacking in engagement with issues relevant to their present lives. Indeed, many of the members of the various other groups and organizations in Ashihara had joined Fukinotou but the group was still not reaching out to everyone in the large and steadily growing community.

In 2005, Fukinotou had gained the status of the leading community organisation in Ashihara, with 250 official members—more than any other organisation had ever gathered. When one considers that the BLL has, to this day, only five members while the Zenkai-ten has three, it is clear that Fukinotou’s achievement is indeed noteworthy. What is even more noteworthy is that, as of 2002, Fukinotou’s membership had doubled and a great many of the group’s followers were self-proclaimed non-*burakumin*. Possibly due to the growing variety of people living in Ashihara and the increasing numbers participating in Fukinotou’s activities, the group had begun thinking much more tangibly about the concerns and necessities of the people from the area.

In 2007, the discussions at the monthly Fukinotou meetings were much more challenging [7]. The tendency was towards “discovering the needs of the community”, rather than recounting its “traditional” customs and history [8]. There are many more “plurals” being employed today in Ashihara. The activities are much more varied and diverse. The Korean community, seldom mentioned in previous accounts of Ashihara’s history, has now become an important part of

the area's dynamic. Mixed children, descendents of local residents and foreign, primarily South Asian and African individuals, are increasingly present at local events. The cultural and ethnic diversity of the community is commonly being addressed at *community initiative* meetings.

As in so many other local areas in Japan, Ashihara works hard to organise its Bon Festival in the summer and its 文化祭 (*bunka sai*) or Culture Festival in the fall. In 2007, the Bon Festival of Ashihara was announced to be one of the most visited and colourful local events in Nishinomiya City. People from all corners of not merely the city but the entire region had been seen to attend. After the event, the local Fukinotou members were exclaiming at how surprised they were to see so many unknown faces [9]. This year, for the first time, the festival was launched with an announcement encouraging the participants to join in and “savour Ashihara” [10]. The program incorporated Korean dances during the first evening. The children's Taiko performances as well as the Shako dances at the end of the festivities were announced not as the traditional arts of Ashihara but rather as popular practices in the neighbourhood. People of all cultural backgrounds were urged to join in the fun.

The Culture Festival was a much fussed-over activity the preparation of which had already begun in March. It was to incorporate various events and everyone in Ashihara was asked to take part in both the conception and production of the happening. There was much argument about what should be the theme of this year's event and it was finally decided that an appropriate subject would be that of “change”. “It is all about change this year, isn't it? The whole *buraku* community is living yet another adjustment with the new political reforms and I think we need to consider the way people are living it around here” [11]. These were the words of a woman, who was seriously involved in Fukinotou and particularly engaged with the Culture Festival. She was not of *buraku* background but she had moved in the community a few years prior because she had been a

teacher at the local primary school for more than a decade and wanted to be closer to her students.

The Ashihara Culture Festival was organised to present the various directions which the community had taken throughout the years. There were still panels on the linguistic progressions and cultural and artistic expressions that have been observed through time. There was a play put together incorporating some hot contemporary topics but also touching upon themes of past struggles in the *buraku*. The language used in the play was the local dialect. On the way out of the Culture Centre, a stand with home-made delicacies was assembled, with a poster borrowed from the corner butcher attached above it portraying the parts of an animal's body from which the bites were produced. What was most intriguing about the various exhibits and performances, however, was the array of questions with which they were surrounded. Question marks filled the panel boards, urging the observers to jump in and add more particular information. The food court was accompanied by a note asking samplers to enter and join in the cooking or even follow their own personal recipes. The play began with an announcer's voice stating that this was the story of one family in Ashihara and ended with the same voice encouraging the audience to tell more stories.

Throughout the Culture Festival of Ashihara, the most prominent feeling was that of desire to know more about the place. This certainly was a "change" from the usual events of this kind, where the tone has been much more subdued and the themes have largely encompassed the depressing results of an oppressive history of nationwide *buraku* discrimination. This is not to say that that history of prejudice was effaced from this last event. On the contrary, little of the past difficulties of the community had been omitted. It was presented, however, as a part of the local history of Ashihara. The highlight was on the present, on the unsurpassable and tempting inquiries, on the "where", on the "why", on the "who", and on the "how".

Whether fabricated or not, history and designated outcast origin had resulted in the experience of exclusion, which, in turn, had resulted in the development of a variety of customs and “traditions”. These had been altered with the time and the place as the communities were moving on and opening up. The “culture” of Ashihara was thus strongly and tangibly affected by the stirrings of the times and the movements of its people. All of these aspects of the area’s past and present were there in the presentations offered at the festival. The participants dramatised their perspectives on their lives, which were influenced by historical events but driven by contemporary issues. Today more than ever, the queries posed rang loud and clear. The questions appeared not only comprehensible but obvious and relevant—not just to Ashihara’s residents but to everyone who had come by and considered them. The matters addressed were indeed particular to the area but they were also applicable to the concerns of many other small communities elsewhere.

3. Who Makes-up Kami-no-Shima?

Kami-no-Shima is another *buraku* community that today resonates with questions that cannot simply be resolved. It is yet another space within which difference is thriving. People make up Kami-no-Shima and these people are deemed *burakumin* because they are residents of an area deemed *buraku*. Or is Kami-no-Shima the home of *burakumin* and thus a *buraku*? There is no reason to seek the order of things for the place *is* and its people *are*. Be it a puzzle artificially put together or a consequence of historical “truths” long ago, these conditions are today undeniably real. There are many more interesting and insightful questions that could be asked, however. Who lives in Kami-no-Shima? What do people of that *buraku* do together? How do people live today?

The area was deeply affected by the reforms of five years ago and again shocked by the most recent changes in policy in regard to *buraku* areas [12]. Despite Kami-no-Shima’s long-held resistance to joining the once-powerful Buraku Liberation League, the community’s young men

and women had gathered together and entered the League in the early 1970s. Consequently, they had also set up a regional office and slowly developed a steadfast relationship with the BLL which had in turn resulted in a variety of advantageous enterprises. It is only natural that the loss of financial support from the programs triggered and supported by the League would cause a sense of instability. The young activists of the 1970s were not only insecure about the future of the community's development but also de-motivated and unsure where to begin.

It was then, in the 1970s, that the younger men and women of Kami-no-Shima had grown enthusiastic to act on their own and come up with original ideas, which they enthusiastically termed 青年的な街づくり (*seinenteki na machi zukuri*) or "youthful community building". It must be noted that the BLL Youth Group of Kami-no-Shima was then and is now comprised of students from the age of 13 to the age of 26; in a party of 20 people, only about 6 are over 20 years old. These people began gathering every week for three or four hours each time, discussing the activities they hoped to organise. All activities are self-produced and financed and focus on the involvement of the young members of the community in a wide variety of initiatives addressing their proper interests in Kami-no-Shima.

Every Sunday for the past two years, the Youth Group comes together at 7 a.m. and proceeds to clean the local parks from litter. Once a month, an activity entitled MAPI takes place [13]. In this pursuit, the members of the group spend an entire day mingling with the youngest children of the area, playing games and tutoring them in their school work. The aim is to create opportunities for these children to interact with the older youths and thus perhaps later get them interested in participating in the Youth Group as well.

Another initiative undertaken by the members is the regular participation in regional and national events, lectures, workshops and symposia touching upon issues of human rights and the

encouragement of diversity. Attendance at these events commonly interferes with school activities. Therefore a system of rotation has been set up in which the people or person available will attend and subsequently brief the rest of the group on the proceedings of the event. Upon the return of the individual, the group will engage in an enthusiastic and highly critical discussion of the themes taken up and the conclusions made. There is an emphasis on the importance of networking during such occasions and on the exchange of opinions and suggestions after the event has concluded.

The Youth Group further engages in the preparation of and participation in local festivals. The members are highly active in the organisation of the Amagasaki City Ethnic Festival, which takes place in the beginning of August. Together with a variety of other groups from various areas of the municipality, the young of Kami-no-Shima gather community members to perform the local Bon dance, which is named Itchakora. They also present the two local music bands, which are in fact comprised of young people from the BLL Youth Group itself. In 2007, the group had started encouraging the elderly of the “village” to join them and play the shamisen for spectators at the Ethnic Festival.

Just a week after the Amagasaki Ethnic Festival, Kami-no-Shima celebrates the Obon Festival. It is a two-day event that takes place primarily in the evenings and where the parents and grandparents of the community set up shops with the local delicacies of 油焼き (*abura yaki*) or an “oil pancake”, udon noodles with pieces of grilled animal fat, サイボシ (*saiboshi*) or smoked horse meat and many other dishes. The elderly men and women play the shamisen and Taiko drums on top of a platform, showing off the mastery they have gained during the past year, while the young wildly jump with the rhythm, dancing the Itchakora around the podium. More than anything else, the Obon Festival is a great party in the backyard of Kami-no-Shima. It does not require extensive preparation on the part of the community but it certainly calls for participation. Once the dances in the park are over,

people move on to the local Community Centre, where they continue eating, drinking and talking. Some then go on to visit their friends' houses and might spend the night going from one house to another. During Obon, the doors are open in Kami-no-Shima and it is not necessary to know the host of the house in order to join in the fun. All that is expected is that you bring something small to contribute to the feast.

In October, Kami-no-Shima becomes the sight of the grandest and most popular event in the region, the local Culture Festival, which has also recently become known as the Human Rights Festival. This is a traditional festival for the *buraku*, as the residents of Kami-no-Shima insist today. It is said to be a presentation of what the people of the area view as being culturally significant to them [14]. It is a display of the area's "culture" and recently, one of the municipality's increasingly popular events. The BLL Youth Group is in the very heart of this festival, in charge of the organisation and performance of a play, an art exhibit and a variety of music concerts. The play is written by the group members and the topic is up to them. The play performed in 2007 was written by a 21-year-old university student and highlighted a conversation between two friends in a middle school setting about the meaning of the concept *buraku* and the reasons why parents still seem to fear and avoid talking about it. The middle school in question was presented as the local Kami-no-Shima school and the girls acting out the roles were both residents of the "village". One young woman was known by the community as a "*buraku* kid" and another girl was said to be of Kami-no-Shima but not of *buraku* origin. The parents of both actors were present at the play and cheering for their children.

Another sketch involved a teacher of human rights education explaining the issue of discrimination in Japan to a group of enthusiastically inquiring students. The teacher was played by a 16-year-old boy, a member of the BLL Youth Group of Kami-no-Shima and the lead singer of one of the two local bands. He was also one of the most avid representatives of the "village" youth at human rights conventions and

gatherings for high school students. The boy was also said to be of the “village” but not necessarily *burakumin*. Among the students questioning their teacher in the sketch were two girls who did not reside in Kami-no-Shima but rather in a poorer, non-*buraku* area nearby. Both girls told me that they and their families were *burakumin*.

The Culture Festival of Kami-no-Shima continues for 5 days, with the final day usually being the busiest and most important. This is when all local groups and organisations are called on to perform. On that Sunday of 2007, there were a number of shows stretching from 10 a.m. to nearly 7 p.m. These included presentations of the local Korean community martial arts club, a cheerleading dance of the children from the local daycare centre, a hip-hop performance by the primary school students and a few songs by the two local bands—one a pop music singing quartet and the other an instrumental jazz band. An opera singer from an area around Kyoto emotionally interpreted five sweet numbers. A young and successful local vocalist sang a couple of funky tunes. A disabled girl from Osaka played on an instrument known in Japan as “pianica”. The older women from the “village” did a charming Itchakora dance and were followed by an ensemble of middle-aged ladies gracefully flirting with the chords of the shamisen.

The park was filled with children and adults from all over. I saw many people I had already met at Kami-no-Shima but also spotted some young members of other distant *buraku* areas that I had visited. There were also many families who came by car and quite a number of foreign groups. The shops were set as usual with the delicious smelling specialties of the “village”. There were also shops selling straw sandals and tea among many others offering a startling variety of the usual toys and jingles that grab the attention of children.

The Kami-no-Shima Youth Group had also opened up a small counter offering drinks and “yaki soba” [15]. There were also a great number of NPOs that had set up their own stores offering all the items and foods that one could wish for at such an event. It was a great and cheerful

gathering, probably louder and more impressive than any of the local culture festivals in Amagasaki and possibly even in the surrounding towns as well. The people of Kami-no-Shima had certainly worked hard to make the event a success and it had accomplished it for the 32nd time. This time, however, it was grander and more colourful than ever before. The large sign stating: “This is the Culture of Our People. Let’s Recognize Prejudice!” was made by the Youth Group and was impossible to miss.

So, who are the people of Kami-no-Shima? What is the culture of Kami-no-Shima? Is the community “youthfully rebuilt” and if so, how? As has hopefully become apparent from the few pages above, it is very difficult to deduce who the people of the “village” are. There are people from all kinds of backgrounds, ethnicities and status levels residing in Kami no-Shima today. Distinctions are made and people are internally keeping the labels of *burakumin* or *non-burakumin*, but in most cases the adverb “possibly” precedes such declarations. When asked why certain people are named the one or the other, most answer “I am not really sure” [16]. When asking the so-called *non-burakumin* residents of Kami-no-Shima whether they are perceived as *buraku* outside the community, most answer that they indeed are [17]. *Burakumin* or not, the people of Kami-no-Shima live together and avidly participate in social life and community activities. *Community initiative*, enthusiastically pursued by the Youth Group in the area, encompasses and engages with the local history and everyday life of Kami-no-Shima’s residents.

In the past few years and in 2007 in particular, much has been done in Kami-no-Shima to address the changing needs of the community and much of that work is contributed by the youngest of the area. These teenagers and young adults are not supervised or urged to take responsibility by their parents, teachers or grandparents; they are taking their decisions and gathering together independently. They have thus become great motivators, inspiring their parents to participate and contribute in their own way to *community initiative*. Furthermore, due to

these youths' close contact and interactions with various young people from both the area and other neighbouring communities, there have recently been numerous collaborative initiatives.

Community initiative in Kami-no-Shima today is therefore an active engagement with the current reality of the people living in the area. The acts in which the people of the community involve themselves today carry the consequences of historical events in the area but are also simultaneously and primarily occupied with their present situations and preoccupations. "Difference" is now discussed openly and within the space of *community initiative* it is examined and studied as "diversity". This is being undertaken because the residents of Kami-no-Shima have dealt with and are indeed dealing with the concept of difference in its variety of forms both actively and constantly. It is a concept that reflects a particular actuality lived and tackled today as well as a particular experience of community formation developed from centuries ago.

In Conclusion

The three communities examined in this chapter were certainly distinct from one another in terms of geography, demographics, social status, economic standing and political orientation. All three also have distinct local histories. The people residing there today are involved in a variety of distinct practices and encounters. The one thing which brings the communities together is their common *buraku* status and all that has surrounded such status in respect to legislation, economic support or deprivation, social stigmas and taboos. It is impossible to regard these communities without acknowledging their common history of discrimination, but it is necessary to look at them in respect to their particular histories of struggle and community formation. *Community initiative*, as it is perceived and undertaken by the people of the three localities today, produces a movement that can very easily be dismissed or condemned as ignorantly following the strategically affirmative instructions and directives issued by structures of political

power. This is because the new configuration and formulation of difference in the communities coincidentally also fits quite comfortably into the now-popular neo-liberal model presented in the LDP political campaign [18]. The correlation appears disturbing if the concept of “machi-zukuri” (as offered by the party in power) is entirely rejected. Should however the strategic intentions of exercising control, dispensing with social projects, and deflecting finances from social activities be put aside and the proposal be considered in its structural terms, *community initiative* might just appear the right way to go.

With nothing else tangible to hold on to, organising independently and focusing on the actual needs of the people residing in the community does seem to be a worthwhile direction to follow. Indeed, *buraku* areas have existed as segregated communities, so the move towards local organisation is not so far off from what the “villages” of Japan had been experiencing up to this point. The one thing that differs is the LDP’s focus on autonomy and responsibility in the building of “micronational” enclaves. This is to say, the *buraku* communities are now offered the chance to move from a position of “subnationality” onto a position of a “micronationality”—a community free to take up the responsibility of interacting autonomously with the world and thus participating in the building of the nation that is Japan.

The problem inherent in pursuing *community initiative* and propagating “diversity” today is certainly in that it can regress into superficial generalisations and consequently into even newer models of exclusion. Presenting local communities as cultural, equally standing, consumable droplets completing the lake that is the nation of Japan is neither unproblematic nor an innocent gesture. The problems with this formula, however, are inevitably suggested when minority communities such as the *buraku* act on and within the structure offered. In this structure, communities like Asaka, Ashihara or Kami-no-Shima can in fact become models for local *community initiative* in Japan. They can act as models particularly because of their history of segregation and prejudice and their experience with local community formation.

The contemporary “machi-zukuri” projects in the areas observed are independently run community activities. If their skeleton conspicuously reminds one of the structures of the recent election crusades to enlist the Japanese population into the nationalist ideal, the flesh does not. The content of the new *buraku community initiatives* challenges from within the entire notion of “nationness”. People are being urged to speak for themselves and to look after their own needs, to look into their proper “history” and “culture” and offer it as a part of that of Japan. *Buraku* communities are doing that and they are doing it proficiently. Whether intentionally or not many areas are now showing off their local beauty, culture and traditions. Within these acts, however, inevitably linger the perhaps snickering spectres of a dark past. It is possible that the performers are indeed unconsciously feeding into the optimism disseminated through the now-refurbished and crowned neo-liberal idyll. It is also possible that the audiences are just too drunk with optimism to notice the quirks within the acts. Even if these presumptions are correct, however, there is always the chance that the sinister ghosts of deceit and ambivalence living in so many new “traditional” Japanese communities today stray and peek out of the most unexpected places. It is this possibility that begins to bestow upon the categories of national and minority identity a sense of perplexity and vulnerability. Only by allowing *buraku* communities to engage in their local histories and to rethink their local community formation on the micronational level can the stability of categories such as “nation” and “minority” be compromised.

NOTES

1. See the section entitled “Local Autonomy for the Good of the Nation: Community Initiative as an Individual Responsibility of Every Japanese Citizen” in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

2. See notes on interview with Nobutoyo Kojima and Kyoji Ota in the Osaka Human Rights Museum, July 21, 2007 (in possession of author).
3. See notes on interview with Yoshihito Yamamoto in the Asaka Youth Centre, March 31, 2007 (in possession of author).
4. See notes on workshop presentation on Taiko drum making at the Asaka Human Rights Centre, Asaka, September 22, 2007 (in possession of author).
5. At present there are more than 2500 families residing in Ashihara *buraku*.
6. See notes on interview with Juno Yamashita at the Wakatake Living Culture Centre, October 15, 2007 (in possession of author).
7. See notes on Fukinotou meeting at the Wakatake Living Culture Centre in Ashihara, August 20, 2007 (in possession of author).
8. See note 7 above.
9. See note 7 above.
10. Ashihara Bon Festival, August 11, 2007.
11. See statement of Ms. Hachio at a Fukinotou meeting in Wakatake Living Culture Centre, April 16, 2007 (in possession of author).
12. Changes include the 2002 repealing of the Special Measures Law, which provided financial support to buraku areas with the status of Douwa Chiku.
13. The members of the youth group had decided to name the activity after the computer acronym MAPI (Messaging Application Programming Interface) because the idea was to facilitate contact between the young people of the community.

14. See notes on interviews with: the Ota family, October 24, 2007; the members of the Kami-no-Shima BLL Youth Group, September 10, 2007; and Shigeki Kawanishi at the Community Centre of Kami-no-Shima, September 21, 2007 (in possession of author).
15. A type of stir-fried noodles very popular at festivals and festive gatherings in Japan.
16. See survey results from Kami-no-Shima, September, 2007 (in possession of author).
17. See note 16 above.
18. See note 1 above.

Conclusion

The Goal of the Enterprise

The purpose of this study was to allow for a shift in perspective. It was a step towards a journey into the understanding not so much of *burakumin* as a mysterious, unique, untraceable and indescribable minority but of *minority* as a way of living in the *buraku*. Moving away from trends of generalising about the *buraku* and the *burakumin* and from discourses shaping the Buraku Issue as 複雑 (*fukuzatsu*), 落着かない (*ochitsukanai*), 分かりにくい (*wakarini kui*) or complicated, awkward and difficult to grasp, I wished to rather look at the ways people within the labelled communities live their everyday lives as Japanese *citizens* today. The racial and ethnic stereotypes of the era of national formation remain in the Japanese national consciousness. This is to say, images of *burakumin* as somehow “not human” linger and function as a way of denying their citizenship or national belonging. It must be noted here that there is no doubt that contemporary *burakumin* think of themselves as citizens of the Japanese nation. The question of their status today is therefore not so much one for them of whether they are Japanese or not, but one of how they will work through their unusual position within Japan. The emphasis on citizenship is thus linked to the newly developed political situation in Japan, where *citizenship* and *nationality* are commonly employed in close relation and in parts even reminiscent of *local community*. In other words, my interest in this study was to examine how people living in *buraku* areas or minority communities today cope with and respond to being identified with the *buraku* image while simultaneously being enlisted as residents of a micronational enclave.

The Places Studied

The fieldwork I undertook in Japan focused on three separate *buraku* communities scattered around the Kansai region. In two of these communities, Asaka and Kami-no-Shima, the Buraku Liberation League had a very strong influence. In Kami-no-Shima, however, the leading and most significant fraction was the 部落解放青年部 (*buraku kaihou seinenbu*), the Buraku Liberation Youth Group. In the third community, Ashihara-cho, people were gathered together by an independent group called ふきのとう (*Fukinotou*) after the flower buds of the Japanese Fuki plant. This group was a local independent organisation focused primarily on the social development of its own neighbourhood [1]. These three communities had slightly different approaches as to how present-day issues related to the *buraku* needed to be dealt with. In all three neighbourhoods, however, people were unanimous about the importance of discussing problems and engaging in *community initiatives* locally.

In Asaka, a small neighbourhood in Osaka that was once labelled the most miserable *buraku* in Japan, the focus today is on engaging the young—who have had difficulties finding employment—and the people who had lost their jobs working in the now closed down neighbourhood Youth Centre, in local activities (Yamamoto). It is also on finding ways to house the elderly, who have lost their facilities as a result of the new laws mandating the cessation of funds to all Dowa-related projects. One of these locally organised activities consists of the maintenance of the parks and playgrounds where a great many of the area's events take place. The central garden is the most popular of these parks and it is where once stood the subway depot deliberately located there in order to isolate the community and then taken away after long years of activist protests and human rights demands by Asaka residents. It is in this garden that today stands a statue of a subway wheel commemorating the events that had contributed to the park's creation.

Another recent local *community initiative* is the establishment of an ongoing and changing open air photography exhibit. Lined up along a beautifully arranged alley in the central park, the photographs literally force one to smell the gutters and hear the loud conversations of the once-young Asaka grandmothers of today. This exhibition was organised by the elderly members of the community and administered by the dismissed employees of the Youth Centre in collaboration with middle school teachers from a group of schools in the neighbourhood. Also in the scope of the local “*machi-zukun*” projects is the development of an important activity for the community—the neighbourhood Taiko drum sessions. These have been incorporated as relaxation and energy-release therapy meetings and have become popular pastimes for professionals living around the area.

Nishinomiya’s Ashihara is located in very close proximity to the two busiest train stations in Nishinomiya—a city of 500,000 inhabitants—and consequently surrounded by large shopping malls and business facilities. The area, however, tends to calm the eye with its cared-for playgrounds and well-maintained community areas. The priority for *Fukinotou*, the local group engaged with organising all community events and encouraging community members to talk about and reflect upon their problems and needs, is to “revive” the neighbourhood [2]. Junko Yamashita, the most active and renowned member of *Fukinotou*, makes sure to gather the children of Ashihara every week so they can spend time learning how to play Taiko and shamisen—the “local instruments”—while waiting for their parents to pick them up after work [3]. These after-school sessions have become very popular and children from all over central Nishinomiya come to participate. “The Boss”, *Fukinotou*’s self-proclaimed leader (even though he refuses the title for the borrowed term リーダー [*riidaa*] has become synonymous with a head of a local BLL group), organises よいしょぶし (*yoishobushi*) evenings where the elderly can come together and sing the old wedding chants that once presented a ceremonial conversation between the bride’s and groom’s family in the *buraku*. Both children

and adults practise acting in order to prepare for the Obon and the culture fair. In fact, all of these activities culminate in these two events in which the “culture” of Ashihara is exhibited. A very important part of both events, because of its social role and because it actually funds the event, is the 食文化 (*shokubunka*), the food culture court, where people coming to the festival can enjoy the local delicacies.

In Kami-no-Shima, things have changed since the new revisions of 2002, when the state stopped funding to *buraku* areas and activities and instead allocated portions of it to human rights initiatives and organisations. The Kami-no-Shima Buraku Liberation Community Centre had now accordingly become the Human Rights Culture Centre and has opened its doors to anyone interested to partake in activities. The majority of the participants are still people from “the village”, but the approach in all activities has changed dramatically. The individuals of Kami-no-Shima are now taking up different colours and coming up with stories that reveal a multiplicity of historical and social backgrounds. “It’s a good thing!” says Ms. Eriko, a close friend of the Youth Group in Kami-no-Shima and fellow member of the BLL Youth Group in Itami [4]. “The possibility to mix with people who have not grown up in *buraku* areas gives the opportunity to talk about the everyday life of people in the community”, she says. “It makes people try to see and look for the things they themselves appreciate most and then share them with others. It gets people thinking of their personal needs and aspirations and proposing their own ideas to their friends in the community but also to the people they meet elsewhere too” [5].

Each one of the three communities in which I worked placed great emphasis on exhibiting *their buraku’s* culture, discussing *their buraku’s* social position and considering *their buraku’s* history. The significance placed on the local nature of experience was what struck me and made me impatient to further pursue my work on histories of the local within the larger national space. Indeed, the starting point of such a study was to begin thinking of spaces in time. This is how the first chapter of this thesis came to life.

Some General Reflections on Studying Buraku

In order to start thinking of *buraku* areas in terms of local communities it is important to begin by thoroughly investigating the history of outcast spaces and more precisely, the movements and transformations of these spaces in time. Beginning from prior to the Edo period, outcast spaces have been in perpetual motion, undefined relocated and split (Uesugi, *Burakushi*). Towards the end of Edo, actions were taken to classify and register not only the spaces themselves but also the people inhabiting them and, in the process of doing so, it was found that their boundaries had expanded and shrunk (Groemer). Such changes occurred even more drastically during Meiji. It was then that the most powerful delineation of the *buraku* was produced. It was also then that the concept of the minority came to life, accompanying that of the “modern nation” [6]. In the process of constructing the *buraku* and the *burakumin* as places for and people of all outcast categories, however, the localities were modified and the people were forced to reposition themselves. Often, the latter found themselves not just moving about but also moving in and out of categories [7]. Today, more than ever before, the *buraku* is shifting and its people are stirring. And more than ever before, it is impossible to follow, let alone define, these movements or people. In an era of globalization, the *buraku*, just like any other locality in Japan, has attained the status of an autonomous self-administrating community, encouraged to interact but also inevitably affecting both the rest of the communities surrounding it and the larger municipal authorities under which it stands.

Despite the history of movement of *buraku* and *burakumin*, however, definitions have been and are still being given. Unlike the spaces and the people, these definitions have curiously remained static and unchallenged in time. Vices, said to have been assigned to outcasts of medieval Japan with the aim of rendering people who were displaced from the social arena less mysterious, are today superimposed onto the *buraku* and the *burakumin*. The sole mention of these categories brings up an *image* closely linked to racial and ethnic stereotypes of the

era of national formation. This image keeps being imposed and showcased in contemporary Japanese society. This *image* continues to shape the popular impression of what the *buraku* and what its residents must be like. This is where we come to the second point that requires attention.

There are inconsistencies inherent in the representations of *buraku* throughout history. It is thus crucial to examine the life of people in actual specific *buraku* areas and to address these inconsistencies while studying the particular trajectories of transformation of space and identity over time. Only by focusing on individual communities can we engage in such transformations historically, in terms of physical and social growth, development and movement. Such an engagement further facilitates the participation in individual and collective memories of localities which in turn give light to an alternative perspective on *buraku* spaces from the representations widely broadcasted. When focusing on the particularities of local *buraku* areas in history, the more recent movements and initiatives in such areas inevitably become of interest and just as inevitably expose the discrepancies between the representations and the actual lives of peoples in the various communities. What strikes me as curious in such an inquiry, however, is the correlation between the *community initiatives* recently taken up in *buraku* areas and the まちづくり”(*machi-zukuri*) projects advertised and incorporated in political campaigns and agenda of the Liberal Democratic Party in power.

As a locally operated activity focusing on the local management and amelioration of socio-cultural and socio-economic affairs, *Community Initiative* is today a state run project. Every municipal website provides a clear outline of what exactly such initiatives of local “beautification” and “culturalization” entail and reminds the citizens of their duties, responsibilities and community consciousness [8]. A national campaign entitled “A Beautiful Country, Japan” and consequently its local version of “まちづくり”(*machi-zukuri*) were launched by Shinzo Abe and the

Liberal Democratic Party in power. Abe himself has recently published two books defining the making of “Beautiful Japan” [9].

Machi-zukuri is also a crucial and important part of community life in the three *buraku* areas discussed in this thesis. People, being deprived of state support, have now mobilised themselves to address the issues that concern them directly. Unlike the unified goals and aspirations of the *Japanese Buraku* formerly compiled by organised activist groups such as the BLL, today *buraku* communities negotiate their needs autonomously amongst themselves and in front of their municipalities. Inevitably, however, these needs, like the cultural presentations and social engagements of the people, are affected and influenced by the history of the community. Past discrimination and segregation have unquestionably marked the present-day life of all three areas. All activities, from the photography exhibit of dingy alleyways in Asaka to the culture festival in Ashihara, where tasting of what was once considered contaminated meat is encouraged, to the youth group supporting the local Youth Centre employees who had lost their jobs in Kami-no-Shima—all of these were set off within the context of *machi-zukuri* or *community initiative*. In many cases, the participants would be people who call themselves of the *buraku*. In many other cases, they would be people unsure of their background. In all cases, those who partake in *community initiative* would be people living in the communities, affected by their particular past and interested in their particular future.

When it comes to presentation, the “beautiful”, “cultural” *buraku* communities of today put up for visitors cultural exhibits that are in many ways very similar to those of any neighbourhood or locality in Japan [10]. The small village of Takebe in Okayama Prefecture will show off its hot springs and yoghurt factory. The community in Minakuchi, Shiga will boast of its castle, festival and carpentry shops. Asahikawa in Hokkaido will invite people to eat its delicious ramen and visit its famous zoo. All of these communities will invite the passerby to acknowledge the area’s and peoples’ particular history. Similarly,

Asaka, Ashihara and Kami-no-Shima participate in *community initiative* and participate in the project of “Making Japan Beautiful/Cultural” (Abe, *Utsukushii*; Shinzo Abe’s Official Website; *Jiyuu Minshu Tou*). The processes of “subjectification” and the techniques of “individualisation” underlying the project of “まちづくり”(*machi-zukuri*) or community building as it is promoted today by the leading Liberal Democratic Party of Japan, appear to be operating in the *buraku* communities in question. The regulatory framework of identification has been appropriated, yet the ways in which this has been done are what draw attention.

In other words, in order to begin understanding contemporary socio-political developments in *buraku* areas, it is crucial to analyze *machi-zukuri* or *community initiative*. It is, however, additionally necessary to do so progressively, from its emergence as an ideology, through its transformations in time to its present-day re-emergence in politics as well as in people’s everyday lives. It is also necessary to study these historical progressions of *machi-zukuri* vis-à-vis particular *buraku* communities. The process of analysing *community initiative* historically and in relation to *buraku* areas helps to unveil the complicity in the contemporary acts of decentralisation of power and transference of social responsibility. Such an enterprise helps to identify the many ways in which an ideological instrument of power affects *buraku* communities and in which these communities appropriate, if at all, and/or respond to such moves.

Once again, the particular local appropriations of and responses to regulatory procedures are significant when seeking to understand historical movements and transformations of identity. In conversations and interviews conducted in the three *buraku* communities discussed in this thesis, people spoke from their personal point of view on *machi-zukuri*, on the reasons for, on the objectives and hopes they invested in local *community initiatives* today. The autonomy in the voices of the speakers, the assertiveness in their ideas and the emphasis on the specificity of their concerns suggests more than simple reification/commercialisation of the local or of difference. The

participants in the dialogues saw their position in their community and the position of that community in the larger area of authority, namely the municipality and in turn the nation-state, as independent. People saw a necessity to intervene and negotiate on the local scene but also on the municipal one in order to achieve what they as individuals and as groups have planned or what they believe in [11].

People not only speak but also act autonomously when it comes to locally run *community initiatives*. The individual histories of spaces and peoples can be found incorporated in the contemporary *machi-zukuri* projects. These histories can also be seen in the proposals for collaborative work with municipal agencies as well as in the intervention plans suggested by local community groups. Most importantly, however, the proficiency of *burakumin* in managing localities and organising *community initiatives* strikes one as integral to the undertaking of *machi-zukuri* in general, at least on the municipal level.

The experience of segregation and discrimination and the history of local isolation have given *burakumin* the capacity to live their lives as self-governing communities. This experience comes in handy today, when micro-enclaves are being proposed as parts of and responsible for the authority of the nation that is Japan. *Buraku* communities can and do offer their know-how when collaborating with cities as local self-governing establishments. It is for their expertise but also together with the communities' own background and historical baggage that these localities can act as models for "micronational enclaves" in Japan. Thus, by actively embracing local histories of spaces and peoples and in the context of contemporary movements towards decentralization of authority, the *buraku* communities examined in this study manage to shift their positioning from the level of "subnationality" to that of "micronationality". Not only do the people of these localities stand in a position of equality with their surrounding neighbourhoods when it comes to *community initiative*; they are also capable of functioning as models of self-governance and authority.

Just like the *poiesis* in the Guatemalan festivals that David Guss describes, the building of a contemporary *buraku* becomes the stage for producing new meanings of “*Japaneseness*” and new relations to citizenship (Guss). As performed in the *buraku*, the national campaign of *machi-zukuri* and its local version become a most “powerful vehicle for the forging of new identities” and the reformulation of what it means to be Japanese (Guss 13). The cultures and histories of *buraku* communities become a part of the Japanese nation. The *imaged* and *imagined* “abnormal” characteristics of the *buraku* inevitably permeate its very own “culture” and in consequence, unexpectedly but again inevitably metamorphose identity, both national and minority. The “beautiful/cultural *buraku*”, an expression contradictory in its own core, thus appears as a deformity of national “normativity”. The *burakumin* enact the prescribed national identities performatively while simultaneously shaking up the “racialising” techniques still lurking in the Japanese popular imagination.

NOTES

1. The reason for the weak BLL presence and the existence of an independent group in Nishinomiya, the city where the Ashihara neighbourhood was located, was that the *buraku* community was very large and the home of a great number of diverse groups and social fractions. Ever since the beginnings of a *buraku* liberation movement, Ashihara has proven to be difficult ground. It was truly challenging to unite people under a single cause and, from the start of the twentieth century, the community remained much more prone to gathering under the umbrella of the “village council”. This cooperative assembly allowed all groups and associations to take part and voice their opinions for the betterment of Ashihara and its people. From the

mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, the nationally expanding Buraku Liberation League underwent a split, a tear not only in the political group but also in the buraku community as a whole. It was a period of turmoil for the BLL due to the refusal of its closest ally—the Japan Communist Party—to accept the governmental support offered. Regional buraku groups that stood behind the JCP’s idea that the social struggle needed to be prioritised and that exclusive financial support would not resolve the issue, joined the Zenkai ren (Zenkoku Buraku Kaihou Undou Rengokai) or “All Japan Federation of Buraku Liberation”. This newly formed group was led in 1976 by those social party members who had refused to vote for Matsumoto Junichiro, the all-time proclaimed father of buraku activism, when he had run for Congress and consequently won a place in the Senate. These members were rejected by the BLL for their disrespect and had taken things in hand to create the Zenkai ren and gather like-minded individuals in their struggle. Ashihara and its residents had certainly been cognizant of this project in the 1970s and certain people in the community did take part in these ructions. The Ashihara community as a whole, however, had decided to take a distance and focus their activities locally. The BLL had not managed to gain the greater support of that buraku area and, despite its official presence today, Ashihara remains primarily responsive to the lead of today’s social group that continues the role of the old “village council” in bringing the people of the community together, namely Fukinotou.

2. See interview with Junko Yamashita and Kouichirou Biwa in Ashihara-cho, June, 2007 (in possession of author).
3. See note 2 above.
4. See interview with Ms. Eriko, Ms. Kaoru and Ms. Kyoko, members of the BLL Youth Group at Horiike, Itami, May, 2007 (in possession of author).
5. See note 4 above.

6. The Meiji Period extended from 1868 to 1912. The Meiji Revolution of 1868 marks the time of the collapse of the Tokugawa Shogunate as well as the beginning of dramatic changes in Japanese history. It is also commonly cited as the period in which the ideology of Japan as a nation-state was born.
7. See section entitled “Reinventing Outcaste Spaces as a Part of the Nation” in Chapter 2 of this thesis.
8. See municipal website of Kumamoto City at <http://www.city.kumamoto.kumamoto.jp/kankyo/kuwasiku/subn2.html>
9. See the official website of the Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, which is dedicated to the “美しい国、日本” “Beautiful Nation, Japan” campaign at <http://newtop.s-abe.or.jp/>
10. See the section entitled “The LDP and ‘machi-zukuri’” in Chapter 3.
11. See Chapter 4.

Appendix

I. Questions Included in a Survey Distributed in the Three Communities Discussed in This Thesis, namely Asaka, Ashihara and Kami-no-Shima

1. 「普通」または「一般的な」日本人とはどんな人だと思いますか？

The expressions “ordinary” and “normal” Japanese are commonly used in Japan. What kind of person is “an ordinary” or “a normal” Japanese in your opinion?

あなたは自分自身を「一般的な」日本人だと思いますか？

Do you consider yourself “a normal” Japanese person?

はい	いいえ
yes	no

他の答えがありましたらお書きください。：

If you wish to add something, feel free:

2. 文化的または社会的に日本人特有の性格、性質は何だと思いますか？

Do you think there are any particular qualities specific to Japanese people? If so, what do you think these are?

3. 日本の社会は同質的な/同一民族の社会だと思いますか？

Do you think that Japanese society is a homogeneous society?

はい	いいえ
yes	no

他の答えがありましたらお書きください：

If you wish to add something, feel free:

4. 日本ではマイノリティグループ/社会的弱者が多いと思いますか？

Do you think there are many minority groups in Japan?

| はい | いいえ

yes no

他の答えがありましたらお書きください。：

If you wish to add something, feel free:

5. 「マイノリティ」/「社会的弱者」という言葉からどのようなことを思い浮かべますか？

When you think of “minority” or “a socially disadvantaged group”, what comes to mind?

6. あなたは自分自身が日本では社会的弱者だと思いますか？

Do you think of yourself as a part of a minority or a socially disadvantaged group?

| はい | いいえ

yes no

他の答えがありましたらお書きください：

If you wish to add something, feel free:

7. 前の質問に＜はい＞と答えたかた：

If you answered “yes” to the previous question:

何故そう思いますか？

Why do you think so?

8. あなたは現在、社会的弱者の多い地域に住んでいますか？
Do you today reside in a minority area?

| はい yes

| いいえ no

他の答えがありましたらお書きください：

If you wish to add something, feel free:

9. あなたの生まれた所は社会的弱者の多い地域でしたか？
Were you born or raised in a minority area?

| はい yes

| いいえ no

他の答えがありましたらお書きください。：

If you wish to add something, feel free:

10. 8 番に＜はい＞と答えた方：
If you answered “yes” to question number 8:

その地域は住み易い所ですか、それとも住みにくい所ですか？

Do you find it easy or difficult to live in that area?

| 住み易い | 住み難い

easy

difficult

なぜですか：

Why do you think so:

11. 8 番に＜いいえ＞と答えた方：

If you answered “no” to question number 8:

現在あなたが住んでいる地域は住みやすい所ですか、それとも住みにくい所ですか？それはなぜ？

Do you find it easy or difficult to live in the area you are presently residing in and why?

| 住みやすい | 住み難しい

easy difficult

なぜですか：

Why do you think so?

12. 個人的にあなた自身がこれから成し遂げたいと思っていることがありますか？

Is there anything particular you personally wish to achieve in life from now on?

あるとすればそれは何ですか？

If so, what is it?

13. あなたは個人的に日本の社会にどのような貢献をしたいと思えますか？

Do you think you would like to personally contribute to Japanese society in any way and if so, how exactly?

II. Some Interviews Conducted During Research

1. January 2007, Conversation with Ryoji Araki, Former Director of the Asaka Youth Centre and Vice President of the Asaka Buraku Liberation League Branch

(myself): Funds for the communities have been cut short and will be completely withdrawn in only two months. The Youth Centre will close down at the same time. How do you see things for yourself and Asaka in general?

(Araki): It's all a game. They say there is no more discrimination so there is no need for special measures. Discrimination has a long way before being extinguished. The stigmatised image of the *buraku* continues to follow its people wherever they go today. It's a made-up image of made-up places but it's very real and it has not ceased to be real. We here in Asaka fought to get rid of the physical boundaries that were placed. We managed to get the subway garage moved away and thought we were opening up at least one of the barriers. We thought we had achieved a lot. We achieved nothing! Our children were still pointed at when they went to play on the other side of the now "removed" barrier. From the very beginning of Yamamoto's leadership, we have been approaching the issue of discrimination differently from what we had been instructed by the BLL head office [1]. We attempted to work together with all surrounding areas for the amelioration of the city landscape. It was a "community initiative" in the real sense of it. We used the funds for "assimilation education" to teach our children that they should care for each other as human beings and that they should aim at becoming world citizens and move away from differentiating and segregating one another.

It is very unfortunate that the centre is closing. I am losing my job. That's a personal issue. I have no idea what I will be doing from now on.

But what is worse is that I as well as everyone here at the centre had worked so hard to develop the different activities and programs for the children of Asaka. All of these efforts have now been deemed useless. They are not useless, though; they are badly needed today as well. The children of the community still go out in the world and are shocked by the discrimination they encounter. They need to be given the possibility to learn about the issue that their community has been facing for centuries. They need to know how to face the world.

(*myself*): Are you or the community planning to continue these activities and how do you think it can be done? I heard about the 人権まちづくり (*jinken machi zukuri*) projects that are being discussed [2].

(*Araki*): We are now thinking of the ways we should change our approach to these activities and continue them despite the lack of space and money. It is important to move on and take our responsibilities further. Our community is losing its youth but we are also becoming more diverse. There are many people now in Asaka who have come in here for different reasons but who were not originally from the area. This tendency has become more and more prominent with the transformation of the assimilation housing into municipal social housing. It's not necessarily a bad thing. On the contrary, we need to look at it as an asset to our community. We are diversifying. This is what we need to think about when we think of how to continue our community activities. Dowa education has become human rights education now. If that's what they've chosen to do, well that's what we need to really do. We need to really focus on human rights not just fictively. Asaka is a good place to learn about human rights. We have been thinking about these issues for ages. We have been looking at other Asian countries and discriminated communities. We have been sending our children on exchanges there. We have been hosting students here in our "village" too. It is no longer about preaching to our people alone and complaining that the fault lies with those who fault us.

We need to open up and allow our youths to teach their friends and anyone who is willing to learn about the wealth of difference.

We have to continue with literacy classes for the elderly because it's been a life saving activity for these people but we are now looking at expanding it to involve also the non-buraku residents as well. It would be more of an afternoon cafe where people can also chat and play games and have an hour or so of learning too. Everyone needs to share and socialize with others. We are first and foremost a community and then a *buraku*. We should also continue encouraging our young adults to pursue their taiko drum practices. They have been enthusiastic about these from the start, already 20 and so years, so they should go on with it. It is a part of our history as a *buraku* as well but it is also an activity which has attracted young people from different areas and with different interests. They all learn about the issue of the *buraku* and they all chose to stay and have fun with their friends while playing drums and socialising.

This is what I think the new human rights “machi-zukuri” should be about. We are on our own to think about and realize what we need as a community, as Asaka. We are people of a *buraku* and we have a rich and important history which we need to remember when building our area. It's as we remember it that we should go on. We need to think of using our knowledge and appreciation of difference to encourage the creation of a new and diverse Asaka [3].

2. February 2007, Lecture by Nobuhiko Kadooka, a renowned freelance writer on the buraku issue, at the Wakatake Living Culture Centre in Ashihara, Nishinomiya

(Kadooka): Discrimination is still alive. Certainly, the situation is much better today than it was 20 years ago and yet it is not resolved. Why?

We need to acknowledge that today it has become very difficult to spot discriminatory practices, particularly in the case of *buraku*

discrimination. But what is it that makes *buraku* discrimination different?

Many people ask me why I write on *buraku* discrimination, why I keep thinking about it. In fact, I myself never really experienced discrimination. I do, however, think that it is still lurking in our society and we need to talk about it. I have a letter here with me from a woman who responded to one of my books. I received the letter a few weeks ago and thought of all the work that remains to be done. It is an honest letter. The woman shares with me how she was about to get married to a man from *buraku* origin and how her parents were very much against it. She quotes some of her parents' remarks and it really made me appalled by the brutal discriminatory language.

So, to get back to my first question, "Why is discrimination still alive?"

Marriage discrimination seems to be the most persistent one nowadays. The main argument that comes up at such occasions is that getting married to a *buraku* person is unfortunate. I personally find this quite silly. I myself am married to a non-*buraku* woman. My brother and sister are as well. I don't necessarily think my marriage was unfortunate at all. At least, I am quite happy. Maybe I should ask my wife and see whether she shares my feelings in that (laughs).

Let us think for a minute about discrimination as a concept. There are three main aspects common to the concept of discrimination. First comes "Generalisation"—grouping people together under the same common denominator. I am not sure why, but I certainly think there are many different people in the *buraku*, don't you agree? At least I know some pretty terrible people but I also know some truly great people too. There are some extremely annoying people and some really almost invisible individuals. How can they all be called the same? The second step is "Prejudice"—once having generalised the problem, people tend to grow a prejudice. Finally, the third step is "Condemning"—having developed a prejudice, people condemn.

Now, usually, people tend to go through this process of discrimination whenever they spot a difference of some sort. Yet, what is *different* about discrimination against *buraku* people is that there is no difference. There have been many attempts to create a difference but in vain. What they say is, “well there is something about that man” or “those kinds of people”. Really, it is impossible to explain the difference. What people are vaguely referring to as “difference” is only 違い幻想(*chigai gensou*), an illusion. People say they can see it, or that they get some awkward feeling when they meet a *burakumin*. But really, what is it that they see? What is it that they feel?

There is a マイナスイメージ(*mainasu imeegi*), a negative image that has been artificially created and that has never really moved away from its original middle-age box. Certainly, the look of the *buraku* has changed, life has changed, work discrimination has significantly decreased. It is also true that people of different ages and from different areas of Japan, people with different personalities, have different opinions on the problem. But it still remains a problem and it is better to talk about it rather than to try and hide from it. The negative image is still there and even though it is difficult to spot it sneaking about, it is important to look for it. Does it come out in our parents’ ranting or in them keeping quiet about things? Does it come out in teachers’ speeches and lectures? Does it come out in newspaper articles or in television reports? It is important to recognise discrimination.

I actually worked as a Dowa education teacher at university. You know what I think about assimilation education? It makes absolutely no difference whether you teach it or not. Students take the subject for easy credits (laughs). It makes really no difference. It just conserves a sort of manufactured consciousness in *buraku* kids, nothing else. I am not saying here that encouraging the building of a minority consciousness is necessarily a bad thing. What’s bad is that the tendency is to build upon the same dark image of the *buraku* that we

are trying to get away from. Talking is very important but the way of talking is what needs to be addressed. There are many different ways of approaching the subject and many different ways of presenting it.

In one of my classes, I had brought some horse meat to treat my students. One of the girls had brought in her boyfriend that day hoping that he would get up and admit he comes from a *buraku*. Everyone tasted the meat. I told them that one way to look at it is in seeing it as a different food culture as something contributing to society in general.

(As he is telling the story, Kadooka takes out some horse meat from his bag and begins cutting some for his audience that evening as well.)

(Kadooka): Kids today don't know about food culture, so they are excited to learn.

(Once he has finished slicing it, Kadooka passes the smoked horse meat around.)

(Kadooka): As you can see, I have also brought you guys some different food culture. It really is a pity that we're not allowed to have beer in the community hall *(laughs)*.

Not everyone today experiences discrimination but still it needs to be talked about.

(He writes a few words on the black board):

掛け替えのないもの (*kakegae no nai mono*)—a precious thing.

(Kadooka): When you think of something precious or irreplaceable, what comes to mind?

(People in the audience go on to enlist a bunch of things they find precious: children, life, parents, etc.)

(Kadooka): For me, what is most precious is myself . . . and all that makes me who I am, all that surrounds me, life, children, parents, partners, etc. There are two things in life most important for me:

1. Remembering that there are many different people in the world;
2. Remembering that no one has the right to kill for any reason.

(Kadooka then draws a tree with a few leaves on it.)

(Kadooka): This is the tree of discrimination—差別の木(*sabetsu no ki*). *Buraku* discrimination is a leaf in that tree and not its root. *Buraku* discrimination is an important issue that needs to be addressed just like other issues of discrimination that need to be addressed. One thing that needs to be talked about more openly is the terminology. Certain terms have become taboo, others have remained. What is it that makes one term politically correct and another a painful insult? I, for instance, do not like the term *burakumin*, which is an accepted and widely used one. It implies a person who is of a *buraku* and who holds a *buraku* consciousness. It is, however, a term with which anyone who has had any contact with a *buraku* is being labelled today. For instance, I think it is incorrect to call the children of my brother who is married to a non-*buraku* girl and lives in a different city in a non-*buraku* area “*burakumin*”. Rather, I would call them 部落関係者(*buraku kankeisha*) or “connected to the *buraku*”, which is more of a taboo expression today. But what is so bad about being related to the *buraku*? Maybe it is the imprecision of the concept, or its ambivalence. Being connected or related does not necessarily prove either in or out. This is, however, a very real situation. Many if not most people of the *buraku* do find themselves in it. This is not negative. It is a very positive movement. I think it would be great to have more and more people “connected to the *buraku*”. Wouldn’t that be a positive thing? Oh, by the way, I forgot to tell you that anyone who tasted the delicious horse meat I brought in today instantly became “connected to the *buraku*”. Sorry! Did you already taste it? Well, how silly of me. I should have told you that before, shouldn’t I?”

(People laugh.)

(Kadooka): In conclusion, I wanted to tell you that I lied to you initially. I said that I had not experienced discrimination, but in fact I have. I was not discriminated against myself, but I did discriminate against other minorities in Japan in my young age. This is actually what led me to think about the concept of discrimination. I became interested in discrimination. I needed to go further and understand it. Many people would say that in order to understand a minority and to understand discrimination you need to be it and to have suffered it. I disagree. To understand a minority, to understand discrimination, there is no need to become it or to be a victim. You can, however, become connected and related to a minority. You can decide to think about the life and issues of a minority community. I believe it is extremely crucial that as many people as possible become connected and related. This, I hope, is a meeting of connected people who are a step further towards building different kind of communities—communities open to all who wish to listen and join in and are able to question and discuss not only with each other but also and actively with the cities of which they are a part (Kadooka, *Young*).

3. March 2007, Conversation with “Fukinotou” members at the Wakatake Living Culture Centre, Ashihara, Nishinomiya

(Junko): It is very good to see you! I didn't think you would come. Okay, as I already told all of you, Rositsa will be joining our meetings from now on. She is working on the *buraku* issue and she wants to learn more about our activities here in Ashihara.

(Hachio): This is great! Where are you from?

(myself): Well, I was born in Bulgaria but I have been studying in Canada for the past 10 years.

(Ikuko): Very international! And now you come here to us. Are you sure you want to know what we are doing? It's not really all that exciting, you see.

(They all laugh)

(Junko): Okay, let's begin with what has been going on until now. How about we start with the changes to Liberty Osaka?

(Ikuko): Good idea. They ruined the place. If it could ever be made completely ridiculous, well they succeeded in doing it.

(myself): Why do you say that? What is it that you do not like about the new exhibit?

(Katsumi): What is there to like? It's become a puppet show.

(They all laugh)

(Junko): There are now too many stands, too many panels and very little on the *buraku*. The museum was initially built by the *buraku* community and so it now seems robbed of its essence so to say, robbed of its history.

(Koichiro): It's not so much the essence that has been taken away, I think. It's more what it was turned into that is the issue. It is like a children's performance now. You go around and you are being entertained by all the flashy colours and maybe sometimes shocked by the horrible photographs.

(Junko): I agree. It's become very much about what you feel. I guess it's supposed to make you understand better. But how on earth can anyone understand the *buraku* issue by touching different patches of leather or looking at a guy shooting a cow? I don't know. It really makes me feel sad to see what they have done.

Maybe we should stop complaining, though, and go on. The second event was the visit and presentation of Mr. Kadooka. What did you all think of it?

(Ikuko): Too "sweet"! He seems to be a mommy's boy that Kadooka. How can he talk about something he never lived?!

(Junko): He said it himself. He never was discriminated against. He shouldn't make it sound so simple. What is this whole thing about "the

connected to the *buraku*”? He uses it as if anyone would like to jump right in and become a *burakumin*’s relative. I think he just hasn’t been hurt or has but tries to put it back and neglect it. It’s much more complicated.

(*myself*): Don’t you think that it is still a good thing that he is encouraging all of the younger people who have not necessarily “suffered” or “experienced” the hardships of the *buraku* to think about the issues still present? I thought his talk was refreshing.

(*Hachio*): I think it’s a good thing. I think that he is a good spokesperson of the younger generation of *buraku* kids. They need to be able to relate to something as well. They never lived the hardest of prejudice but they still heard the stories.

(*Junko*): Let’s move on. The third event for last month was our visit to Henomatsu. Rositsa, Henomatsu is a *buraku* in Sakai city. Today it’s known as Kyowa-cho. It’s where Sankichi Sakata was born. I don’t know if you’ve heard of him before but he was a *burakumin* who became a famous player of “shogi” or Japanese chess. We went there on a sightseeing trip with a guided tour. Or at least it was supposed to be guided.

(*she smiles*)

(*Ikuko*): Yes, there was a young guide, you see. It was his summer part-time job, I think. He was no more than 20 years old, I bet. He didn’t really know anything and kept excusing himself saying that he has only just started working there.

(*Junko*): He only knew the script and if anyone wanted to know more than that he would just get nervous and say he has no idea.

(*Hachio*): I was really shocked to see so many assimilation houses, though. There were also very many Dowa residences that they were separated into three groups - the southern, northern and middle blocks. That was one huge housing project.

(*Tatsuko*): Did you see though that some of the buildings were newer and some were older. This means that there were recent constructions as well as older ones, right.

(*Katsumi*): I remember how when the Dowa housing units were built in Ashihara, people didn't really like the buildings because they found them too high.

(*Koichiro*): Yes, it's true. After the first two buildings were put up, people started getting scared and asked if the rest could not be built smaller so that people can talk to each other from their balconies. It was the communication that people missed most of all. They needed to be close to each other as they were before. This is maybe when the people of Ashihara started thinking of the culture of their town and how it seemed to be fading away.

All this makes me think how I was all eager to find out more about the history of Ashihara at the time. I kept asking the City Hall to let me have some of the older maps and documents but in vain.

(*myself*): But I thought that there are quite a few maps here in Wakatake and that there is a good archive of documents.

(*Koichiro*): There is now, after we all managed to retrieve things piece by piece. But still there is much more at the City Hall, you know. Today, it is possible to ask for these documents but they would only be available if requested and in most cases a person would need to go through a great deal of paper work explaining why they are needed to get access to them. As you can imagine, most people who asked to see these documents were people from the area.

(*Katsumi*): I have seen some of these hidden ones. The majority are contracts and money deals. I also found a newspaper called 芦原新聞 (*ashihara shinbun*). That was unexpected really. The articles in it were mostly advertising someone's wedding or how expensive it was and how money gifts at weddings should be gotten rid of or at least reduced.

(*Hachio*): Really? That is very interesting. Do you know from when was that newspaper?

(*Katsumi*): It was from the Taisho period, if I remember correctly.

(*Junko*): In any case, the main thing is that these documents, whatever they contain, whether it is trivial or not, are not easily available. The history of the *buraku* is very difficult to trace or study because the records are taken away and put aside.

(*myself*): It seems to me that you are all feeling a sense of loss here, a sense of a need to protect the history of *your buraku*. Am I completely wrong? If not why do you feel that?

(*Katsumi*): It is not really the protection of our history that we seek. It is not that people want to keep their history of privation and be reminded of it. Rather, I think these historic mementoes, objects, reminders should be available not so much for people from the *buraku* as for people from outside the community. *Buraku* history is not something that we can simply remove from sight. It's there and some of it is even interesting. Maybe that is what the authorities keeping it under key are afraid of. Maybe it's not all that "scary", you see.

(*Everyone laughs*)

(*Junko*): We've been talking about history but let's move to the present now because we have very little time left. The next event was the "Students' Presentations" at the local middle school. What can we say about those? I personally feel that these were very difficult to assess.

(*Ikuko*): They were. I don't really know what to think about it. The headmaster is always very interested in continuing the activity every year and I think it's a good thing. But I also feel that many of the children feel simply obliged to write something so they would not lose face and marks. They were all so shy and even embarrassed to talk.

(*Koichiro*): You should not forget that one third of these kids are really of the *buraku*. The rest have no idea. And the local kids are not much

more ahead in the material. Now that most activities have been cancelled and also with the parents being more and more reluctant to engage, it's hard to know what the kids are thinking or feeling.

(*Katsumi*): It is very vague nowadays. You can't even say that one third are local kids. They are all local, if you ask me. There are so many families that have moved into the social housing units now. They come to all our activities and participate in the life of the community. Most of them know well that this is a *buraku*. They still take part. I think these people are local and that their kids should also think about these issues even if now they are shy about it or unsure what to say.

(*Hachio*): I agree. Things have changed greatly. The area is different now and life is very different. We cannot ignore it. We have to keep up with it.

(*Tatsuko*): Yes. It's true. Even the housing units, I remember when they were first built. People depended on each other. Now it's a very different story. Everyone is busy and everyone has a very separate life.

(*Hachio*): But I do think that many of the people still rely on the community centre and all the social gatherings organized. It's no longer the living quarters or the shacks and barracks that keep people together but rather the activities that we are all working on.

(*Junko*): I think it's true in a way. You say that people have become distant. Yes, we used to be more reliant on each other because we felt safer that way. We had our own way of speaking, our own expressions, our own jokes. This is all changed now but I was really shocked to see how many people were interested to buy the "Language of the *Buraku*" book when we put it together.

(*myself*): I find the initiative of assembling a dictionary of the once-particular language of Ashihara very intriguing. Why did you all feel the need to put together a book like this? Wasn't this language or vernacular stigmatised and wasn't it one of the specificities of the community that revealed it and exposed it as *buraku*? Also, I heard that

kids today have lost this vernacular but are still using the “bad words”. Why do you think that is?

(Katsumi): I think swear words remain because they are words of feeling, expressions of emotion that come out when one does not want to think before speaking. The entire language was indeed once labelled “bad” and “dirty” and it was that effort to label the language as improper and to hide it away that made Fukinotou resist and make a dictionary. It is not about preserving history, you see, but about not putting it behind our backs and hiding it away. It is ours and we have lived it. We are living it today. It’s all we have to show to people. It’s our community. There is no need to make it anew. It’s here already.

(myself): In regards to history, I keep being told that Ashihara is independent, that it is not led by the BLL. Can you explain to me more about that?

(Katsumi): Well, it is a very complicated matter. Nishinomiya was from the start more focussed on the amelioration of the living conditions and community life whereas the BLL always took a more militant position. In time they shuffled-up their ideas and even reconciled with the government. There was a major philosophical difference between the BLL and Ashihara. The Zenkai-ken split from the BLL at the end of the 60’s and did turn to us for support as well as had the Suiheisha originally and the BLL in consequence. Ashihara was never really interested in organized militant activities. The community was still well organized, however, and following all the changes in politics concerning the *buraku*. There was always a community organisation in the “village” that defended the interests of Ashihara. But the main goal always has been to improve life for people and support them in their struggles. Today, that’s what we do at Fukinotou. I can’t deny however that much of the philosophical differences were also closely related to personal issues between our people and some of the activists in BLL.

(myself): How about the young people of Ashihara? Are there any younger members of Fukinotou today? Do they get involved in the discussions and decision-making?

(Junko): It's very difficult to get young people to join our discussions. Most of them are really busy with their work. Many do not live here and find it too much to come in for our meetings. But really, what is the main reason for their reluctance to participate is that they no longer see an urgent need to get involved. It's more of a passive participation. They would come to the events and enjoy them but they would not commit to taking part in the preparation. The life and concerns of the young today are very different from ours.

(myself): Do you mean that the young adults of Ashihara are not interested in continuing the activities (活動—katsudou [4]) of Fukinotou?

(Junko): They are interested in the outcome but not in the doing. But we are not involved in "katsudo" ourselves you know. What we are doing is community volunteering. We are a group for the promotion of learning. We just offer people information. That's all. We do not go further than that. We just dig out what appears to be restricted and let people have a look.

(Katsumi): That makes me think of the recent talk about the family registers. Did you hear about the ideas of revising the laws in regards to family registers [5]? I think they will never get rid of the system. Whatever legislation they come up with, it's all just a cover-up of all the underground routs through which they still get what they need.

(Ikuko): In any case, I think that even though the younger adults do not get involved, children are very much engaged with all the activities we have provided them with. And these children are the young adults' children. This means that these people want their sons and daughters involved in the community. We should continue to talk to them and we should keep on thinking about what is necessary for them today.

(*Hachio*): I agree. I teach at the local junior high school and I see that children need to be encouraged to think for themselves. They need to learn how to ask questions and not to fear asking them. They need to learn to talk to each other. My school is the one with the largest concentration of *buraku* children in Nishinomiya. Kids are together all the time. They need to be able to share with each other and question each other without worrying about who is listening and whether it's appropriate or not.

I was trying to figure out how to introduce the topic of discrimination in my class without sounding too stiff and disconnected. I asked my students what they thought discrimination means. They answered that it is an act of prejudice, a negative action towards someone who has not done anything bad. Then I gave them a few examples and asked them if these were cases of discrimination. The first one goes as follows: "A young boy who wears glasses and is cross-eyed sits to eat lunch at a table in the school cafeteria. A bunch of boys from his class come in and scream at him saying that he looks like a broken doll and that he is a loser. They are extremely offensive to him and finally they turn out his tray and spill all his food onto him." All students agree this is discrimination.

I give them another example: "A girl of Chinese origin falls in love with a boy from her class. He finds out about it and, since he too likes her quite a bit, decides to ask her out. He shares his feelings with a friend who advises him against it, saying that Chinese people are dirty and savage and if the rest of their friends find out about it, it would be a great shame for him. So instead, they plot a plan to make a laughing stock out of the girl which would be, according to the friend, a dignified way to get out of the situation." All students agree this is discrimination.

Finally, I give them one last example: "A boy in a basketball team is a very aggressive player. He is very good at his game but is pushy and wants to have a hold of the ball at all times. The team decides that he should be kicked out because he disturbs the members and for the

sake of the health and prosperity of the team, he should be excluded. The boy is kicked out of the team with no explanation.” Students insist that this is not discrimination because the boy was bad and so he deserved to be kicked out.

I then go on to try and introduce the idea that the boy himself never understood why he was taken off the team since they had been winning all games and not without his help. He never thought he was aggressive, just motivated and he thought that was what the team needed. My students are confused and unsure what to think. What I meant to teach them through all this is that the issue is not always about who is bad or good but how we perceive people. It is all about perception and perspective. So, it is very important that people talk to each other and resolve their differences instead of keeping their negative feelings to themselves. I really think this is what we should all focus on. Try to encourage our children to express themselves and to not be afraid of approaching difference or asking different questions.

(Junko): It’s very important to really get them to almost feel obliged to ask “why”. I really believe it. We were taught to listen and never question or doubt but it really is the questioning that people need to start doing. I think maybe we can take this up in the Culture Festival this year. I think many people are looking forward to it and there are so many people who have just recently moved into Ashihara and who are trying to socialize. It will be an excellent opportunity for people to mingle. Maybe we could go for a game of sorts that gets people talking to each other and asking each other questions.

(Koichiro): This is a very good idea. Let’s talk about it again next time we meet. It’s already late and we have to all go but let’s all think about it and maybe give suggestions as to how we could do it next time.

4. March 2007, Dinner at Prof. Maruyama's House in Osaka with Ms. Yuko, her Daughter Haruka and Ms. Harumi

Before going to this dinner, Prof. Maruyama had given me a letter written by one of his students from 20 years ago. He had consulted with her previously and she had allowed him to let me read the letter and use it for my research. The dinner in question was an opportunity to meet with the author of the letter, Yuko, and discuss it further. She had, in turn, offered to bring in her daughter, Haruka, and her friend, Harumi.

The following is a translation of Yuko's letter to Prof. Maruyama.

"Ever since I left Kashima after graduating from middle school I have been feeling happy to have gotten away but also extremely guilty about something I never really understood. Meeting all my friends yesterday at the reunion and being able to speak freely about myself and my problems was really such a relief. I never thought that all I needed was to just go back.

I remember being forced to go to all Liberation Activities but I hated those all through. When my parents decided to leave the community, I was truly happy. Yet life proved even more difficult on the outside. I never spoke about Kashima. I hid it and wanted to forget it. But I could not. It came to haunt me at the time of my marriage when my future father-in-law stood strongly against my relationship with his son. Even though I had doubts that it could be because of my past, I denied it even to myself. When I first got pregnant with my son, my father-in-law refused to come and see him, refused to have anything to do with him or his son's family. My husband was getting more and more frustrated with the situation. Soon after the first child was born, his father got sick. He had a stroke and needed to move into our house where I had to take care of him in every way possible.

My father-in-law began his recovery while I was once again pregnant. It was then that I found out the man had been silent not because of the stroke but rather because he did not want to speak to me, who cared for him every day. I was working, taking care of a child and a new born baby and of a sick old man who hated me. My husband did not help at all and when I complained he hit me and kicked me for it. I had to go to work the next day telling people that I had fallen on the stairs. It was such humiliation!

I asked for a divorce but my husband refused because he needed me for his father. I was taking the old man to different hospitals and rehabilitation centres. He was improving but then getting sicker still. He died two years ago. The final year of his life he was in a vegetative

state really. He stayed at the medical facility throughout the year and came home only for the Obon festival and New Years.

Ever since my father-in-law died, my husband became more and more aggressive, accusing me for his father's death. He kept screaming at me that I am stupid and uneducated and that I should not speak a word in his parents' home. He treated me like a lowly woman. I always wondered whether it was because of my buraku origin but never really dared to ask or confront him.

At work, I was supposed to help raise children without prejudice and yet one of the guardians at the kindergarten accused me of only being capable of raising "wild buraku kids". I was angry and hurt but I could only speak about my troubles after 15 years of work at the place to one of my coworkers.

At the time there was a middle-school reunion at Kashima, I felt really scared to go and needed some courage to meet my old friends whom I had ignored and left behind for more than 22 years. Yet if I did not go, I would be keeping a huge burden to myself so, I did. I got drunk and acted stupid but I met my friends and felt that I am back home again. We chatted and talked and I felt like the trauma of 25 years was now lifted from me. I could come back to Kashima, my home town.

Soon after my father-in-law died, my husband asked me for a divorce. I was shocked. I felt that all he needed me for was to take care of his father. I was angry. I screamed and shouted and broke some glasses. Then, I left the house I had built myself without getting anything at all, no money or belongings. I just took my children and ran.

Now I am working hard to make money for my children's education. At first I lived with my parents but recently I managed to move out and get my own apartment. I feel that my life has been difficult but I also feel that I am now in control and that I can speak up. I can speak to myself but I can also speak to others."

(Yuko): Hello. We are very sorry we are late. It took us such a long time to find your place Prof. Maruyama. I always get lost around here. Oh, wait. We haven't introduced ourselves. I am so sorry! I am Yuko and this is my daughter Haruka and my friend and colleague Harumi.

(Harumi): I am very happy to meet you all and Prof. Maruyama, I am sorry for intruding like this.

(Maruyama): Please, please, come in and sit down. It is so great to have you all over. How about we have a drink and some crackers

before we begin the more serious discussions or should we just get right into it? Oh, wait. Rositsa, you have not introduced yourself.

(*myself*): That is true. My name is Rositsa Mutaftchieva. This is my husband, Pierre Serge, and my daughter, Rayia. It is a true pleasure to meet you and I am very grateful to you Yuko for allowing me to read your personal communication to Prof. Maruyama and for agreeing to come and meet me here tonight.

(*Yuko*): Oh, please, not at all. I am very happy to meet you. But Prof. Maruyama, I really don't know why I let you give Rositsa my letter. I am so embarrassed now. I am grateful, though, for having done it but you know, I think I was completely drunk when I wrote it.

(*Maruyama*): Don't be embarrassed. I think more people should have the chance to read letters like this. It opens up the traumas many people like you are living today. I never really understood why you hated the Liberation Meetings so much. If you had come to more of those you would have probably felt more confident.

(*Yuko*): I hated the children's meetings so much. I didn't feel things needed to be talked about so much, you see. Or maybe, I didn't like the way the teachers were addressing it all. I did skip most activities and generally tried to avoid all kind of direct conversations with the teachers. But my life is really not worth talking about. This is why I brought my friend, Ms. Harumi, here to tell her story. I am sure it will be much more interesting. She was the one I first shared my worries with at work. To my great surprise, she told me that she herself was born and lives to this day in a *buraku*. But she has been much more active and I admire her so much for it.

(*Harumi*): I don't think my story is more interesting. I think we just have very different stories, you and me. I also don't think that I have been very active. I got involved because I wanted to know more about my background. I had absolutely no idea that I came from a buraku family, you see. My family did not live in a *buraku* when I was a child. We did

live close to one though and I remember going to visit my grandparents there. I liked it very much and enjoyed staying with them. I had no idea it was a *buraku* at the time but I do recall children from my class asking me why I went to this scary neighbourhood. I never thought about it all until I was in high school. During my last year, I received a letter saying that I, as a *burakumin*, need to present myself at a meeting on such and such date. I was really shocked. My friends kept asking me what the letter said and why did I get one. I felt strange and did not want to tell them. I did, however, share with my best friend on the way home after school. She was also astonished and kept asking “But how come?! You don’t even live in a *buraku*! You never grew up in one!” I was just as surprised. But I never really shared it with my parents. I did talk to my sister about it and she seemed to know already. Mom and dad had told her to never mention the area where her grandparents lived at school. I thought it was because my sister went to a private school and so kids there were richer and usually much more snobby. They probably only wanted to protect her.

I did go to the meeting I was asked to attend but never really mentioned to the organizers or attendees that until this point I had no idea I was of *buraku* origin. I just stood there as if I had known and participated with everyone else. What really frustrated me most, though, was what I learned there. I was told that it might be difficult for me to get married or to get a job; that I would be discriminated against. I felt like there was no future for me and really thought that stupid and unfair. I felt like I just woke up after living my life as a normal person and found out I was an outcast!

I decided there and then that it will not work this way for me. I got involved in all sorts of Buraku Liberation activities. When I entered into university, I got involved in a Buraku Liberation Club, where I learned a lot and became even more interested in working against *buraku* discrimination. A friend once asked me what club I was in and I had said 部落検 -ぶらっけん (*burakken*) or the Buraku Club. She misunderstood it, however, because of the similar pronunciation and

thought I was a member of the Brazil Culture Club. Then, she asked me what we did in the club and I said we were studying issues related to 同和教育 (*dowa kyoiku*) or comprehensive education. Yet, once again, she misunderstood me and thought the club members were studying 童話教育(*dowa kyoiku*) or the use of Brazilian fairytales in education. I didn't go into any more details. I just left her to think what she wanted. From then on, however, I got involved in all sorts of activities related to Buraku Liberation and comprehensive education.

(*Yuko laughs*)

(*Yuko*): We are so different, you see.

(*Maruyama*): That is true and it is such a good thing that you are friends. Yuko, I really think you should try and take part in some of the activities. You know now the new local activities are much less aggressive and much more inclusive. You should maybe join your friend in her neighbourhood some time.

That school in Kashima was a tough one, I should say.

(*Yuko*): It was. It was wild.

(*Maruyama*): There are many people like Yuko though, you know. At the school too, there were many children who avoided anything that had to do with the *buraku*. Why did you avoid it, Yuko?

(*Yuko*): Well, anytime I went to these classes, kids were always scolded for their bad average or for their inability to study. I just felt really bad and I never thought it was exactly true.

(*Maruyama*): It was true. *Buraku* children were always at the bottom. The activists were really set out to raise that average and maybe they were just a little bit too hard-hitting. It is also true that not all *buraku* were all that bad at school. Yuko was, for instance, an excellent student. The reason why the average of *buraku* children was low however was mainly because their parents didn't really feel the need to

push their kids to study. This was why the League saw it as necessary to take action.

(*Yuko*): I just felt all negative whenever I went to those classes and this is why I never really wanted to go.

(*myself*): Haruka, how did you feel at school? Did you have to participate in Dowa classes or Human Rights Education?

(*Yuko*): You know, I am glad that Haruka came with me today. We have not really discussed the issue at length before and I thought that I need to expose her to discussions like that.

(*Haruka giggles a bit*)

(*Haruka*): Well, before I knew that mom grew up in a *buraku*, I had heard about the *buraku* issue at school and I just felt really strange about it. I then watched a video in high school after mom had already told me and I really felt the video was very old and completely wrong about things. It presented *buraku* people as a different class all together, as people who could not read or write. My mother and my grandmother were literate and there was nothing different about them from any other parents I knew. Well, maybe they were a bit louder.

(*She laughs*)

I really felt that the story was very much skewed though.

(*myself*): You know, the issue of illiteracy is still pertinent in many *buraku* communities. There are still many elderly men and women who feel that literacy classes are saving their lives.

(*Maruyama*): That is absolutely true. These videos were probably old and maybe not as relevant. It is a problem that children are made to watch them and they draw conclusions out of them. Before, most schools, particularly in the Kansai area, were required to offer Dowa classes. Some teachers did not want to deal with it and simply showed children the videos they had left over from the '70s. It was an easy way

out. But that is actually better than nothing, I think. Even though they are old, some of the issues still remain, you see.

(*Haruka*): I don't know. I still felt that I was being told an ancient tale that did not need to be told in the way it was.

(*Yuko*): I agree with Haruka. I understand what she means. It goes back to the whole issue of negative representation. At the "village" BLL Liberation Classes, we were taught that we are lesser than the "normal" Japanese and that we need to work harder. This is what children keep hearing from these videos today as well. They hear that *buraku* people are somehow less developed, less cultured. It's what disturbs me most.

(*Maruyama*): The community had issues they needed to resolve in order to be able to deal with discrimination. This is why those issues which you call negative were addressed.

(*Yuko*): I do not think those issues were necessarily issues of the majority of *buraku* people as we were told. I think it was a personal matter whether one was interested in school or not. Children who were motivated and interested in school did go and did study.

(*Maruyama*): It was not just about personal initiative, you see. It had a lot to do with the environment and the family. The family needed to be taught that they should encourage their children to study and get a better education and this is why the League needed to fight the resistance of the older generation to get involved.

(*Harumi*): Well, I must say that I also think there is a need to approach the issue differently today. Maybe at the time Yuko was a child, this rougher style of getting people to act-up and catch-up was necessary, but today, the story is very different. There isn't even Dowa education any more. For better or worse it's Human Rights Education now. That is a much wider scope and in a way, as much as I disagree with the LDP on the Buraku Issue, I think we might have needed to widen our scope a bit in the community. Ever since, people saw themselves forced to act on their own, without the BLL behind them, they seem to

have really livened up. There are many very refreshing initiatives being considered in my *buraku* today and they are all driven by community efforts not by program funding and instructions. I think it's an interesting time we are living in right now.

NOTES

1. Yoshihiko Yamamoto is the current leader of the Asaka *buraku* and the head of the Asaka BLL chapter.
2. Human Rights Community Building Initiatives.
3. See notes on interview with Ryota Araki at the Asaka Youth Centre, January 29, 2007 (in possession of author).
4. 活動 or *katsudou* is a term with a variety of meanings in Japanese. It literally means “activity” but it is also often used to signify an “activist movement” or “militant action”. It can, however, simply refer to “community activities” or even just “social club gatherings”.
5. In Japan everyone was required to provide information on their family register when applying for work or school or even renting an apartment. The information used to allow the enquirer to research the candidate's family history. This is someone would, for instance, find out about someone's *buraku* origins and consequently discriminate in the selection process. In 1974, it became illegal to request family register details. Some companies still have access to this sort of information through various channels, however. Constantly updated copies of the *koseki* lists have been distributed and some marketing companies also send out questionnaires asking for some private information in return for money. The latter practice has been very successful at university campuses as young people who

are struggling financially and are oblivious to the actual goal of the survey find this to be an easy opportunity to make money.

III. Ethics Certificate

McGill University

ETHICS REVIEW RENEWAL REQUEST/FINAL REPORT

Continuing review of human subject research requires, at a minimum, the submission of an annual status report to the REB. This form must be completed to request renewal of ethics approval. If a renewal is not received before the expiry date, the project is considered no longer approved and no further research activity may be conducted. When a project has been completed, this form can also be used as a Final Report, which is required to properly close a file. To avoid expired approvals and, in the case of funded projects, the freezing of funds, this form should be returned 3-4 weeks before the current approval expires.

REB File #: 218-0507

Project Title: The Burakumin Myth of Everyday Life: Reformulating Identity in Contemporary Japan

Principal Investigator: Rositsa Mutafchieva

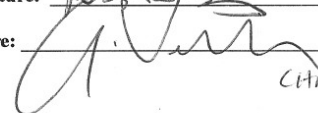
Department/Phone/Email: East Asian Studies/+359 885 802846/rositsa@gmail.com

Faculty Supervisor (for student PI): Thomas LaMarre

1. Were there any significant changes made to this research project that have any ethical implications? ☐ Yes ☒ No
If yes, describe these changes and append any relevant documents that have been revised.
2. Are there any ethical concerns that arose during the course of this research? ☐ Yes ☒ No. If yes, please describe.
3. Have any subjects experienced any adverse events in connection with this research project? ☐ Yes ☒ No
If yes, please describe.
4. ☒ This is a request for renewal of ethics approval.
5. ☐ This project is no longer active and ethics approval is no longer required.
6. List all current funding sources for this project and the corresponding project titles **if not exactly the same** as the project title above. Indicate the Principal Investigator of the award if not yourself.

Principal Investigator Signature: 

Date: 18-04-08

Faculty Supervisor Signature: 
(for student PI)

Date: May 12 2008

CHAIR OF EAST
Signed for Prof. T. LaMarre

For Administrative Use


REB: ☒ REB-I ☐ REB-II ☐ REB-III

☐ The closing report of this terminated project has been reviewed and accepted

☒ The continuing review for this project has been reviewed and approved

☒ Expedited Review

☐ Full Review

Signature of REB Chair or designate: 

Date: May 15, 2008

Approval Period: June 12, 2008 to June 11, 2009

****NOTE NEW MAILING ADDRESS****

Submit to Lynda McNeil, Research Ethics Officer, 1555 Peel Street, 11th floor, fax: 398-4644 tel: 398-6831

(version 12/07)

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