



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE

Humanities

DIVISION OF RESEARCH PROGRAMS

## **Narrative Section of a Successful Application**

The attached document contains the grant narrative and selected portions of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants should consult the Research Programs application guidelines at <https://www.neh.gov/grants/research/fellowships-advanced-social-science-research-japan> for instructions. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Division of Research Programs staff well before a grant deadline.

Note: The attachment only contains the grant narrative and selected portions, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

Project Title: Beyond the Buraku: The Negotiation of Burakumin Identity in Contemporary Japan

Institution: DePauw University

Project Director: Christopher Bondy

Grant Program: Fellowships for Advanced Social Science Research on Japan

Title: Beyond the Buraku: The negotiation of *burakumin* identity in contemporary Japan

The *burakumin*, an “invisible” Japanese minority, present a paradox about Japanese life and identity today, with implications for the study of stigmatized identities more generally. Though the *burakumin*, Japan’s largest minority group, bear no physical markers of difference from majority Japanese, they continue to face discrimination and are marked as different through areas of residence and family background. My project examines how youth learn of their *buraku* background, and explores the negotiation of identity among *burakumin* from youth to adulthood. It has been over 40 years since the groundbreaking work on *burakumin*, *Japan’s Invisible Race* (Devos and Wagatsuma, 1966), during which time Japan introduced a series of affirmative action laws, known collectively as *Dōwa* (assimilation) laws, making the conditions Devos and Wagatsuma described more or less obsolete. Though these laws were terminated in 2002, this does not mean discrimination against the *burakumin* no longer exists. Indeed, most Japanese literature on the *burakumin* note that initial employment and marriage are the times where we are most likely to see the lingering effects of discrimination (Ninomiya et.al., 2003; Nishida, 2001). This project aims to see how young *burakumin* engage with identity and discrimination, at two different points in time; the first, the transition from junior high school to high school, and the second, the transition to adulthood. English language research on the *burakumin* is limited, and my work seeks to end that by providing one of the few ethnographic studies on this group, and the only one that captures this group at these crucial moments of transition, both for the individuals and for governmental and social movement actions. As such, it will find a receptive audience among both Japan specialists and scholars of comparative racism and social movements. Issues of how stigmatized identities are negotiated are of importance in social science research, and this work will add the *burakumin* to this expanding body of research, both within Japan and for a broader audience as well. How minorities are defined and treated in any society tells us a great deal about that society. Providing a study of how minorities manage a stigmatized identity broadens the audience of the work beyond Japanese studies to a wider social science audience. It also provides an empirical examination of the ways macro-level policies (of the state and social movement organizations) play out at the individual level. My work provides a micro-level study of *buraku* youth, and fills a theoretical void in meso-level interactions between social movement organizations (SMO) and community engagement. Rather than constraining action, these policies provide ample room for negotiation at the group and at the individual level.

There are two broad goals for the research project. First, I will conduct 40 in-depth interviews with the youth whom I have been following longitudinally since 2001. Second, I will use the fellowship to incorporate the findings from these interviews into the write-up of the book (outlined below). As the youth I have been following have now reached adulthood, the timing is essential to explore how they are, or are not, engaging with this *buraku* identity at points of time that can become the ones most filled with risk: work and marriage. I continue to be in contact with the youth from both communities, primarily through letters and email, but this interaction does not lend itself to in-depth discussions of how they are negotiating their social world. This longitudinal ethnographic approach is perhaps the best way to explore what it really means to be *burakumin*. In this work, I show how youth in two different communities are taught (or intentionally not taught) about their *buraku* background, and how they negotiate their social world. I argue that the combined role of social movement, community, and school act to encourage or discourage open *buraku* identities. This discussion establishes how educational policies and local social movements and communities affect identity formation and provide strategies for managing a stigmatized identity, through passing, deflecting or a selective combination, dependent on time and place. In presentations I have given, this work has found receptive audiences among non-specialists and specialists alike. This research on the *burakumin* highlights the role of how group boundaries become important, how they are negotiated at different points in time, and how state policies act to enforce or reinforce these boundaries.

I begin by looking at how schools teach the students *buraku* issues, along with the student’s response to these teachings. Beyond the school, the study turns to the two communities themselves and the two very different *buraku* social movement organizations located therein. The approaches taken by

these two organizations vary, with the *Buraku Kaihō Dōmei* (Buraku Liberation League) encouraging an open engagement with *buraku* issues and direct challenges to discrimination, while the approach taken by the *Jiyū Dōwa Kai* (Liberal Assimilation Association) is one of silence; treating *buraku* issues with silence is the very way to make discrimination disappear. The culture of each community shapes how members of the broader community engage *buraku* issues. These approaches provide the youth with lessons outside the school on how to manage this identity. The convergence of SMO and city interests intersect in their approach to *buraku* issues that, I show, build a sense of pride in community and reveal the ways organizations deliver a message of fortified legitimacy to the youth.

As the youth move beyond their junior high school experience, the end of compulsory education, they enter high school where they are faced with a choice on how to present themselves. As high schools are typically located outside their home districts, students move from the protective cocoon of their community and school and face new situations for which they must reflexively reassess and readjust their identity. This means managing their identity through passing as members of the majority society, deflecting their stigma onto another source or sharing their *buraku* background. I argue that when faced with competing identities, youth will mask, deflect or deny the potentially damaging identity, the one that would mark them as the most different. It is this aspect of the research that is central to exploring the outcomes of the approaches taken in both schools, with the respective social movement organization perspectives. As adults, the ability to return to the security of the home district is no longer the same option that it was when they were children. How then, do these young adults now engage with their *buraku* identity in the broader social world, at fateful moments when they are entering new life stages? In order to explore this, I will seek to determine the process by which they have shared their background, if they have shared it at all. Indeed, while the literature suggests that marriage and work are when individuals must engage or hide their background, it may be that, as my preliminary research has found, the young adults are behaving in more or less the same way as they have prior to these moments, through hiding, sharing or deflecting.

### **Chapter Outlines:**

The introductory chapter outlines the work and begins with a brief description of the *burakumin*. Following this, the discussion moves to theoretical issues surrounding identity formation. Here, I pay particular attention to the reflexive nature of identity, and how a protective cocoon, both structural and individual, acts to structure particular types of identities. However, at fateful moments, one must readjust one's identity to fit a particular situation. In addition, the work explores how people manage social stigma through passing or covering.

The second chapter begins by outlining the history of the *burakumin*, paying particular attention to the transition from late Tokugawa (1603-1867) through the postwar period. I highlight the rise (and subsequent fracturing) of *buraku* social movement organizations, with the post war organizations of the *Buraku Kaihō Dōmei* (Buraku Liberation League, or BLL) and the *Jiyū Dōwa Kai* (Liberal Assimilation Association) taking center stage. From this background, the chapter moves to an introduction of the two communities where the study takes place, Takagawa and Kuromatsu (each a pseudonym). Each community has a social movement organization with differing approaches and differing outcomes towards how *buraku* issues should be engaged.

The third chapter centers on school, where youth spend the majority of their structured time, and this experience shapes their initial understanding of the social world outside of their family. Because of the structure of the Japanese education system, this period of time shapes a protective cocoon, keeping interactions with outsiders to a minimum. This chapter explores the process of the construction and formation of a *burakumin* identity as it takes place within the school. It begins by looking at the national standards for how *buraku* issues are to be engaged, through national education policies known as *Dōwa* (assimilation) Education and then moves to the two local approaches and the response of the youth to these lessons.

The fourth chapter explores how community and social movement organizations work together to strengthen a collective identity and encourage passing or sharing one's identity. The approaches taken by

various social movement organizations can, and do, work in conjunction with local governments to strengthen approaches towards issues of concern to them. In both communities, because these approaches and interests coincide, they further reinforce to the youth of each community the legitimacy of each approach.

In the fifth chapter, I examine the role of social networks. Kuromatsu provided a forum outside the formal school setting for *burakumin* students to gather, though this was held as an after school study session. Because students were at after school club activities, the timing only further marked *buraku* youth as different from their classmates. The *Kodomo Kai* (Children's Club), the BLL led children's group in Takagawa, on the other hand, provided an evening forum for the students attending to develop and maintain a positive *buraku* identity while in the protective cocoon of Takagawa, encouraging them to share their experiences with those whom they know and trust, shaping how they will cope with this identity in the future.

The sixth chapter centers on the initial outcomes of this socialization, once the youth move beyond the protective cocoon that the Japanese education system structures, the end of junior high school. For the *buraku* youth of Kuromatsu, this means deflecting the violent reputation of their school on to "bad students" or a long-standing reputation of the school; for the *buraku* youth of Takagawa, this means sharing one's *buraku* background or passing, depending on time and place.

In the seventh chapter, the youth, who are by now young adults, are confronted with further dilemmas about their *buraku* identity. Many have moved beyond not just the protective cocoon of their own town, but many have left their prefecture, gone to school, are preparing to marry or are married already. How have they engaged with their *buraku* background as they have moved further away, socially and geographically from their protective cocoon? What mechanisms have these (now) young adults used to share or hide their background? To expand on this issue, I will interview them about when or if they have shared their background, and the processes that led to that decision. What made them share or not? If they have shared, what were the reactions and repercussions to this?

The final chapter examines what the implications of the structuring of identity and stigma management are for the youth from Kuromatsu and Takagawa. The Kuromatsu youth have made a more seamless transition to high school in deflecting their stigmatized identity, but what of when they are forced to engage this identity as adults. The approach of Kuromatsu can be considered a success, at this stage, but it has further delayed the point at which the youth will have to deal with this stigma. The youth from Takagawa have been told of the future they will face as *burakumin*, but this only acts to heighten the tension between how they have been socialized and the less welcoming social world beyond their initial experiences, at least at the initial stages.

Parts of Chapter 4 have been presented at Harvard University's Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies, and are under review at the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. Further, portions of Chapters 3 and 6 have been presented at DePauw University, the Association for Asian Studies, and the German Institute for Japanese Studies. Part of Chapter 3 is forthcoming in *Human Rights Education in Asian Schools*.

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