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On the Invention of Identity Politics: The Buraku Outcastes in Japan

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Abstract: Using 14 national censuses and a wide variety of first-hand accounts, I trace the creation of a largely fictive identity for Japan’s putative outcastes and the transformation of their nominal human rights organization into (on several crucial dimensions) a heavily criminal extortion machine. Scholars have long described the outcastes – the “burakumin” – as descended from a pre-modern leather-workers’ guild. Their members suffer discrimination because their ancestors handled carcasses, and ran afoul of a traditional Japanese obsession with ritual purity.

In fact, most burakumin are descended not from leather-workers, but from poor farmers with distinctively dysfunctional norms. Others may or may not have shunned them out of concern for purity, but they certainly would have shunned many of them for their involvement in crime and their disintegrating family structures.

The modern transformation of the buraku began in 1922, when self-described Bolsheviks launched a buraku “liberation” organization. To fit the group within Marxist historical schema, they invented for it the fictive identity as a leather-workers’ guild that continues to this day. Bitter identity politics followed. Within a few years, criminal entrepreneurs hijacked the new organization, and pioneered a shakedown strategy that coupled violent accusations of bias with demands for massive amounts of money. Selective out-migration and spiraling levels of public subsidies ensued. The logic follows straightforwardly from the economic logic outlined by Becker and Hirschman: given ever-larger amounts of (expropriable) subsidies, burakumin with the lowest opportunity costs faced ever-larger incentives to stay in the buraku and invest in criminal careers; given the virulent public hostility that this strategy generated, those burakumin with the highest legitimate career options abandoned the community and merged into the general public instead.

Keywords: ethnicity, extortion, organized crime, discrimination

JEL Numbers: H30, I26, I38, J49, K14, K38, K42

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I Introduction

According to most accounts, the Japanese “burakumin” trace their ancestry to a guild of seventeenth century tanners and leather-workers.¹ By Japanese religious strictures, these ancestors had worked within a ritually unclean world. Given the pervasive but rarely articulated Japanese obsession with ritual purity (these conventional accounts explain), modern Japanese continue to discriminate against their present-day descendants. Centuries later, they still shun marriages with the burakumin and avoid hiring them when they can.

The “burakumin” (i. e. people of the “buraku”) do not differ visually from other Japanese. They do not speak a separate language. They do not worship a private deity. Solely out of this centuries-old concern for ritual purity, we are told, secular and educated Japanese continue to shun the group. For intellectuals in modern American universities, it seems a story tailor-made to confirm the eternal plasticity of culture and the boundless human capacity for bias, exclusion, and ethnic cruelty.

In fact, the ancestors to most burakumin did not tan animal skins or work in the leather trade. They did not work in a guild. Instead, most burakumin trace their ancestry a loose collection of unusually self-destructive poor farmers. The nineteenth and twentieth century buraku were dysfunctional in ways that track under-class communities the world over. Like (to take but one example) the “crackers” among the poor whites in the U.S. south, many (obviously not all) of the poorer burakumin were quick to take offense, quick to escalate any quarrel to dangerous levels, and quick to avoid costly investments in work or education. They formed communities with astonishingly high levels of crime. And only haphazardly did they invest in their own marriages and families.

The hostility between buraku and non-buraku followed from economic development. Trade, travel, and migration increased exponentially over the last decades of the nineteenth century. As they did, contact between mainstream Japanese and burakumin followed. And with the contact came cultural conflict.

Matters reached a head in the early 1920s. These were years of revolutionary ardor for intellectuals. In 1922, young men from the buraku upper class launched for themselves a “liberation” movement. Their commoner friends were creating Bolshevik and Anarcho-Syndicalist cells. They created one for their own still largely inchoate communities. Marxist historians were characterizing the earlier Tokugawa period as feudal, and in *German Ideology* Marx had placed feudal

¹ The politically correct term in Japanese is “dowa”; the standard English language term seems to remain “burakumin.”

workers in guilds. For their own group, the young burakumin intellectuals dutifully invented a fictive ethnic identity as a leather workers' guild.

[Correction added after online publication 6 November 2019: In this article, I explore the way that self-appointed leaders of the Japanese “outcaste” burakumin in 1922 invented for their group a fictive origin in a premodern leatherworkers' guild. The most powerful of the early leaders were Bolsheviks (one of the founders secretly travelled to the Soviet Union where he joined the party and served on Comintern). They invented this origin, I explain, in part to fit their group within the historical framework that Marx had outlined. Given that Marx had placed guilds at the center of the premodern economies, they invented for their own group a predecessor guild.

In explaining this history, I referred to Marx's discussion of guilds in *German Ideology*. As one reader noted, this reference is incorrect: although Marx and Engels wrote *German Ideology* in 1846, the work was not published until 1932, long after their deaths. Note, however, that guilds figure prominently in a wide variety of Marx's documents. Most obviously, they appear in the *Communist Manifesto* – on which in part the early buraku leaders modeled their own 1922 manifesto.]

Over the course of the ensuing decade, these young intellectuals and the criminal entrepreneurs who followed them began to couple accusations of bias and discrimination with credible threats of serious violence. In the process, they began to extort ever-increasing amounts of money from local governments. The ensuing identity-politics-based shake-down strategy would last eight decades. Consistently, it generated government subsidies that buraku leaders (under the guise of their human rights group) found easy to divert.

The resulting transformation follows the basic economic logic to non-market behavior pioneered by scholars like Gary Becker. Necessarily, the subsidies shifted the relative returns to legal and illegal careers. In the process, they increased the incentives for buraku men with the lowest opportunity costs to crime to drop out of school and invest in criminal skills. Many of them then stayed within the community, joined the organized crime syndicates, and leveraged their collective pressure to induce the government to increase transfer payments still further. Yet more young burakumin left school to join the syndicates; the now higher criminal pressure (and lower buraku educational achievements) induced the government to raise transfer levels even higher; and so it went. An unholy spiral ensued.

Through this identity politics, the buraku leaders (acting still through their nominal human rights group) thrust their community violently into the public eye. Massive public hostility ensued, of course. Before the 1920s, the buraku had constituted nothing more than a set of loosely identified, indigent communities

whose poorer residents followed often dysfunctional norms of behavior. Those burakumin who chose instead to behave by broader Japanese social norms often did well, but chose not to leave. Instead, many opted to stay within the community and build its social and economic infrastructure instead.

The virulent public response that the buraku leaders incited during the 1920s, however, inaugurated a distinctly selective out-migration. Given the lack of any identifying cultural or physical attributes, burakumin faced (to turn to Hirschman's [1970] term) a low-cost "exit" option. Those burakumin who perceived a comparative advantage in criminal careers stayed to divert the government subsidies to their private accounts. Increasingly, those with the best options for careers in the Japanese mainstream abandoned the community instead.

After the war, the extortion steadily picked up pace. During the early post-war years, the buraku leaders and organized crime syndicates began to work together to extract funds from local and prefectural governments. Starting in 1969, they began to collect from the national government – and the extraction dramatically picked up pace. In Ramseyer and Rasmusen (2018), Eric Rasmusen and I describe this later process in detail. Not until 2002 did the government stop the subsidies. But when it did, it effectively shut down the extortion machine. With lower returns to criminal careers, burakumin boys stayed in school. They left for universities, and never returned. The identity politics that the Bolshevik leaders had inaugurated – had invented – in the 1920s finally collapsed.

As a group, the burakumin have received substantial attention in the West – whether from scholars broadly concerned with questions of inclusion and bias, or from public intellectuals like Kristof (1995). The burakumin are also, however, a group that these scholars and intellectuals profoundly misunderstand. Fundamentally, they misunderstand it for reasons that trace themselves to a basic unfamiliarity with the economics of social behavior pioneered by scholars like Hirschman and Becker, and expanded by the hundreds who followed.

This article builds on Ramseyer and Rasmusen (2018), but corrects its account of the historical roots to the buraku. In that earlier study, Rasmusen and I described the collapse of identity politics during the first decades of the twenty-first century; in the article that follows, I explain how this phenomenon came to be. In this article, I explore the dynamic logic to the social transformation of this group during the twentieth century: (i) to the spiralling descent of the burakumin with the lowest paying legitimate options into organized crime and ever-higher levels of government extortion; and (ii) to the selective migration of those burakumin with the highest paying legitimate job options out of the buraku and into mainstream society.

After surveying the English-language literature on the buraku (Section II), I summarize its modern connection to organized crime and shake-down politics

(Section III). I then describe its roots in the seventeenth-nineteenth centuries, and note its tenuous connection to the leather industry (Section IV). I discuss the increasing contact between the buraku and other Japanese communities in the late nineteenth century, and document the conflict that ensued (Sections V, VI).

In Section VII, I turn to the pivotal moment: to the creation in the 1920s of the buraku as a sharply defined ethnic group, and to the inauguration of violent identity politics. In 1922, fringe-left burakumin redefined the buraku as a leather workers' guild. The history they created was largely fictitious, but its creation constitutes the invention of the identity politics that would last through 2002. (Section VII). Public hostility followed, and with it a selective out-migration as burakumin hoping for mainstream careers left the group en masse (Sections VIII, IX).

II Buraku scholarship

A Premodern

Japanese scholars tell accounts of the pre-modern buraku that differ fundamentally from those they tell of the modern buraku. On the buraku's pre-modern history, scholars have compiled an increasingly sophisticated and intellectually independent corpus of work. It was not always thus. Mid-century scholars were overwhelmingly Marxist, and often mechanically so.

By the last few decades of the twentieth century, buraku historians began to exhibit a refreshing thoughtfulness. Apparently, mob-affiliated leaders in the buraku left historians largely alone. Perhaps they thought heterodoxy in seventeenth and eighteenth century history posed less of a threat than in scholarship about the 20th. Whatever the case, over the past half century historians have compiled a complex and sophisticated body of work. Economic historians like Akira Hayami, Osamu Saito, and Masanori Takashima brought modern social science to a field once locked in nineteenth century ideology. To the history of the buraku itself, scholars like Toshiyuki Hatanaka, Midori Kurokawa, and Takashi Tsukada brought their own brand of independence.

Working from the resulting body of work, several recent Western historians have produced careful studies of the pre-modern buraku. Ehlers (2018; forthcoming) examines the "hinin" communities in Fukui prefecture along the Japan Sea. Abele (2018) studies the nineteenth century transformation of a suburban Osaka buraku that would become the center of the slaughterhouse industry. McCormack (2013) draws particularly on work by Hatanaka to detail the buraku transition from late Tokugawa to early Meiji.

B Modern

This is not the way buraku history once was, and it is not the way modern-buraku studies are today. Work on the modern buraku by serious Japanese scholars barely exists. The reason is simple, and lies in the leadership of the Burakumin Liberation League (BLL). The BLL presents itself as the human rights champion for the buraku, but from time to time has also maintained deep ties to the organized crime syndicates. Against scholars who would deviate from its own declared orthodoxy, it takes a ruthless approach.

Serious scholars have better things to do than to quarrel with the BLL and the criminal syndicates. Writers tied to the Japan Communist Party (JCP) can and do turn to the party for support against the BLL. Say what you will about the Marxist premises, these JCP scholars do at least ignore the orthodoxies announced by the BLL. Those who insist on intellectual independence from both the JCP and the BLL typically find other things to study instead. Put most crassly, most non-JCP scholars who do write about the modern buraku produce entirely predictable work of at-best dubious veracity. Japanese routinely dismiss them as crude *goyo-gakusha* (“at-your-service scholars”).

Unfortunately, Western scholars rarely do much better. Whatever the reason, Westerners seem routinely to start their research with stints at either the BLL or one of its affiliated research groups. UC San Diego anthropologist Hankins (2014) recently published a book based on his University of Chicago dissertation. In the course of researching the study, he interned for a year and a half with a BLL-affiliated organization. The BLL, he enthusiastically tells his readers, seeks tirelessly to integrate the burakumin cause into the international human rights movement and to shift Japan to a more “multicultural” vision.

McLauchlan (2003:113) wrote his book after interviewing 21 burakumin selected for him by the BLL. The 21 seem to have convinced him that the “BLL is clearly the champion of the Buraku [X].” It has, he declares, “unquestionably worked tirelessly to improve the circumstances of the buraku residents ...”

Sociologist Bondy (2015:3) spent “twelve months of participant observation” in two communities. For one of the two, he obtained his access through the BLL. They “welcomed” him, he assures his readers (2015:156.). And about that “silence” on the part of mainstream scholars and journalists, he concludes that the “media are agents that silence public exposure to buraku issues” and cause “both symbolic and literal marginalization” (2015:4).

Of the Western scholars of the buraku, senior Oxford historian Neary (2010:1) remains the best known. He began his own studies in Japan as an exchange student at Kyushu University, where he joined a study group on buraku history (2016:xx). He continues to participate in BLL-affiliated study groups to this day

(Teraki and Kurokawa, 2016:1–2). In his biography of BLL godfather Jiichiro Matsumoto, he effuses that Matsumoto “campaigned against the prejudice and discrimination that he and his fellow Burakumin encountered in their daily lives.”

C Other evidence

Of the rampant BLL corruption and buraku crime, the evidence has been there for anyone with an inclination to look. The prefecture-level data on buraku density, crime, and family deterioration that I use below is public data. It has long been available through a wide range of libraries. The first-hand accounts of the buraku that I quote have similarly been accessible to anyone willing to search. To be sure, the BLL and its predecessor Suiheisha worked hard to block books that tell accounts contrary to their preferred narrative. The way they killed the re-release of buraku community organizer Toyohiko Kagawa’s 1915 ethnography may be the best known story.² Yet even Kagawa’s book has always been available in university libraries.

Of the BLL’s ties to the organized crime syndicates, the evidence has appeared prominently in the journalistic world since the close of the twentieth century. At that point, the police began to arrest BLL senior officers. The prosecutors started to press charges, and networks and mainstream newspapers gave the cases high profile.

Simultaneously, thoughtful journalists – some of them born into buraku communities themselves (e. g. Kadooka) – began to publish books detailing their own experiences within the mob-dominated buraku. Mainstream journalists began describing the way mob-connected BLL leaders massively diverted government subsidies to their private accounts – though (reflecting the violence the BLL could wreak) several of them did choose to publish pseudonymously: e. g. *Asahi shimbun press* (1982); *Ichinomiya and Group K21* (2007, 2012, 2013); *Terazono, Ichinomiya and Group K21* (2004).

Western scholars almost entirely missed (or chose to ignore) these accounts of BLL corruption. Few mention the crisis at all. Neary (2010:298 & n.5) cites several books in a closing footnote to his biography but insists that the BLL manipulated the allocation of the government subsidies in order “to ensure that the funds were used to the maximum benefit of Buraku communities It would,” he continues (2010:239) “be a research project in itself to review and assess these allegations” of corruption. Absent “any independent analysis it is

² Discussed in Section VI.B., below. Similarly, the Suiheisha violently attacked the police for allowing the publication of Sansai Kikuchi’s 1922 study, and caused it to ban the book. A Suiheisha leader later intervened to cause the police to rescind the ban (Kikuchi 1966:3).

difficult to tell whether the amount of corruption has been greater (or less) than that which is normal in Japan ...” Others (e. g. Rankin, 2012) simply dismiss the accounts of the mob-BLL ties as “distasteful insinuation.”

D The conventional account

Reflecting the strong ties that the BLL maintains with Western scholars, most of these scholars tell a remarkably consistent story about the buraku. During the Tokugawa shogunate (1600–1868), the predecessors to the modern burakumin worked within a guild that skinned animal carcasses, tanned hides, and crafted leather. They called themselves “kawata,” and others sometimes called them by the pejorative “eta.” Because they worked with dead animals, others treated them as ritually unclean and forced them to live apart. Commoner peasants might refuse to let them engage in other work, to marry outside the group, or even to dress like other peasants. Writes legal scholar Upham (1988:79), the kawata “were forbidden to marry commoners, to live outside their designated ghettos, or even to serve as commoner’s servants. They could not eat, sit, or smoke in the company of commoners, dress their hair in the conventional manner, wear geta (wooden sandals), or cross a commoner’s threshold.”

These biases had religious roots, continue Western writers. The prejudice “derived from concepts found in the Shinto or Buddhist religions,” biographer Neary (1989:2) writes. Granted, explains historian Howell (1996:178), many Tokugawa kawata “had little everyday engagement with ‘unclean’ professions,” but still the community “generally engaged in occupations that were considered to be unclean, especially those that entailed the pollution of death.”³ After all, observes historian Ooms (1996:244), in Japan, “notions of purity and pollution have historically functioned as powerful categories of ritual classification.”

Western scholars place this buraku within (and below) a class-based Tokugawa order. As Amos (2011:3) put it, the government rooted its social order in a “[Neo-] Confucian ideology stressing rigid hierarchical relations,” and fashioned “a highly stratified social structure reminiscent of a caste system.” Within this world, it created four occupation-based classes: samurai, farmers, artisans, and merchants. The burakumin it placed below this order as a group not even quite human. “The more than 250 years of internal stability during this [Tokugawa] period,” explains Upham, “rigidified a formerly

³ Note that Hatanaka (1990), McCormack (2013), and Ehlers (2018) all carefully describe the way that the notion of the burakumin changed over time, explore the lack of continuity within the buraku community over time, and note the changing character of bias and discrimination.

somewhat fluid occupational and feudal hierarchy and led to the legal delineation of the outcastes as a separate segment of society ...”⁴

In 1868, samurai from several outlying domains engineered a coup (called the “Meiji Restoration”), and three years later officially “liberated” the burakumin. Yet the liberation was, many western scholars claim, at best a mixed blessing. For one, the burakumin lost their occupational monopoly in the leather trade. Legally emancipated, they would now face competition in work they had earlier controlled as a monopoly (e. g. Upham, 1988:79–80). For another, they would pay taxes. As outcastes, they had avoided any tax liability. Now they would owe taxes like everyone else (e. g. Hankins, 2014:21).

At the close of the nineteenth century, some burakumin worked in the tanning sector or the newly created butchering industry, but even those working elsewhere faced discrimination all the same. Mainstream Japanese forced them into crowded and unsanitary urban ghettos. They barred them from their firms. They refused to let their children marry them. Isolated by this pervasive bias, the burakumin eked out their lives on the social periphery.

In the early 1920s, continues this conventional account, a courageous group of outcastes – now numbering 3 million – organized themselves into the “Suiheisha,” or “Levellers.” They adopted a policy of collective denunciation (*kyudan*). Faced with an expression of prejudice, they would together “denounce” the perpetrators. Through their united pressure, they would force the speakers to come to terms with their own privilege. They would insist that the local governments recognize the systemic and institutional bias, and their moral responsibility to rectify the structural inequities that they had created. They would demand the water supplies, sewage, fire truck access, and schools that the brutally discriminatory state had denied them.

World War II came and went, and in the new environment the Buraku Liberation League inherited and continued the Suiheisha’s pioneering mission on behalf of equality and inclusion. Mainstream Japanese still discriminated. Yet by relentlessly attacking expressions of bias through group denunciation, the BLL largely eliminated open prejudice from polite discourse. From the local and eventually national governments, it extracted the infrastructural investments enjoyed by other Japanese. It recovered the collective identity of the buraku community, and fostered its pride. In time it would come to work with its international counterparts in the United Nations and elsewhere to promote Hankins’ (2014) more broadly inclusive and “multicultural Japan.”

Still, insist Western writers, systemic and institutional bias persists. As New York *Times* columnist Kristof (1995) put it, the burakumin are “discriminated

4 Upham(1988:79); see Howell (2005:34); Ooms (1996:244).

against simply because they were the descendants of people whose jobs were considered ritually unclean, like butchering animals, tanning skins, making leather goods, digging graves and handling corpses.” And to carry out this discrimination, modern Japanese identify the burakumin by residence. A burakumin is a person who lives (or whose family once lived) in an identifiable buraku ghetto.

Given that Japanese discriminate by residence, a burakumin ought logically to be able to escape the bias by moving. Yet that simply “has not been the case,” insists Howell (1996:179). As anthropologists George de Vos and Hiroshi Wagatsuma (1967:241) put it, a burakumin can do so only by abandoning his “identity”:

If he seeks this, a complete loss of former identity, he must stop all overt contact with family and community by means of geographic as well as occupational mobility. He has to forge for himself an entirely new identity and in some cases fabricate a past so that he will not be disadvantaged by his lack of ancestry.

Burakumin who attempt this feat, continue de Vos and Wagatsuma (1967:242) live in “constant fear of exposure.” They (1967:252) recount one informant who had “a friend who had tried to pass as a government officer but had somehow failed, left his job, and though a university graduate, is now running a store in a Buraku.” He had tried several times to pass, but each time he had returned. Each time, “[t]he friend would somehow let those around him know about his background ...” Haunted by his past, “when drunk, he would hint in various ways about his outcaste origin, or he would confide in someone whom he had no cause to trust.”

III The modern buraku

A Introduction

As a description of the modern buraku, all this badly misleads. The burakumin number about 1 million, and have since the 1930s. They live primarily in a few prefectures in western Japan. Although they tend to be poor, their poverty does not – and never did – distinguish them. They do not reside in the poorest Japanese prefectures, and are not the only poor residents of those prefectures in which they do reside.

Yet many burakumin do live profoundly fractured lives. Non-marital child-birth is far more common than among other Japanese. Drug use is more widespread. Crime is more virulent, organized crime is primarily a buraku phenomenon, and the ties between the BLL and the mob run deep.

The BLL’s famous denunciation sessions were not just about fighting discrimination, if they ever were much about that at all. They were about shaking

down local governments for cash. Through their aggressive attacks, buraku leaders kept their threat of violence central and credible, and used it to obtain massive government transfers. Through their systematic corruption, they then diverted large amounts of those funds to their personal accounts.

B Numbers and locations

1 National totals

Over the last one-and-a-half centuries, the Japanese government – either alone or in collaboration with several affiliated organizations – has compiled at least 14 censuses of the burakumin population. I give the national totals in Table 1.

Table 1: Burakumin national population.

National Population			
1868	492,409	1958	1,220,157
1907	799,434	1963	1,113,043
1921	829,675	1967	1,068,302
1922	836,568	1971	1,005,129
1935	999,687	1975	1,119,278
1942	550,213	1987	1,166,715
1946	1,004,528	1993	892,751

Sources:

1868

Yoshikazu Akisada, *Meiji shoki no “senmin” tokeihyo ni tsuite* [Regarding the Statistical Table of “Poor People” of the Early Meiji Period], *Buraku kaiho kenkyu* v. 2: 55–75 (1974).

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Shigeru Kobayashi & Yoshikazu Akisada, *Buraku shi kenkyu hando bukku* [Handbook on Research on History of the Buraku] (Tokyo: Yuzankaku shuppan, 1989), p. 288.

1907

Buraku mondai kenkyu jo, *Buraku mondai shiryō*, vol. 1 (Kyoto: Buraku mondai kenkyu sho, 1980), pp. 296–99.

Shigeru Kobayashi & Yoshikazu Akisada, *Buraku shi kenkyu hando bukku* [Handbook on Research on History of the Buraku] (Tokyo: Yuzankaku shuppan, 1989), p. 291.

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1921

Naimu sho, *Buraku ni kansuru shotokei* [Statistics Regarding the Buraku] (Tokyo: Naimu sho, 1921). Reproduced in San’ichi shobo, ed., *Nihon somin seikatsu shiryō shusei* [Collection of Materials Regarding the Japanese Poor] (Tokyo: San’ichi Shobo, 1980).

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Chuo yuwa jigyo kyokai, Zenkoku buraku chosa [National Survey of Buraku] (1936), pp. 335–36.

Nei Hasegawa, Suihei undo narabi ni kore ni kansuru hanzai no kenkyu [A Study of the Suihei Movement and of the Crimes Related to It], Shiho kenkyu, vol. 5 issue 4, 1927.

Kobayashi & Akisada (1989).

Kenkyu Jo (1980).

1922

Teikoku chiho gyosei gakkai, Chiho gyosei nenkan [Regional Administrative Annual] (1922).

Reproduced in Yoshikazu Akisada, et al., eds., Kindai burakushi shiryo shusei 10 [Collected Materials on Early Modern Buraku History, vol. 10].

1935

Chuo yuwa jigyo kyokai, Zenkoku buraku chosa [National Survey of Buraku] (1936) (labeled Top Secret).

Zenkoku Buraku (1998).

1942

Zenkoku Buraku (1998).

1946

Sengo buraku no sabetsu jotai no haaku ni tsuite [Regarding Grasping the Actual Circumstances of Discrimination Against the Buraku], p. 30. Publication information not given, but posted at: http://www.blhrri.org/old/info/book_guide/kiyou/ronbun/kiyou_0082-15.pdf

Zenkoku Buraku (1998).

1958

Zenkoku Buraku (1998)

1963, 1967

Kenkyu Jo (1980).

Zenkoku Buraku (1998).

1971

Zenkoku Buraku (1998).

1975

<http://douwachiku.com/wiki/zenkokunodouwachiku>. The source attributes the survey to the Naikaku sori daijin.

Zenkoku Buraku (1998).

1987

Senichiro Shiomi, Do nakusu? Buraku sabetsu [How to Eliminate Buraku Discrimination?] (Tokyo: Ryokufu shuppan, 2012).

Kobayashi and Akisada (1989).

Zenkoku Buraku (1998)

1993

Somu cho, Heisei 5 nendo dowa chiku jittai haaku to chosa [Survey to Grasp the True State, Etc., of the 1993 Buraku Districts] (Tokyo: Somu cho, 1995) p. 18.

Senichiro Shiomi, Shin: Buraku sabetsu wa nakunattaka? [New: Has Buraku Discrimination Disappeared?] (Tokyo: Ryokufu shuppan, 2011).

Shiomi (2012).

Zenkoku Buraku (1998).

Except for the 1935–36 census, the government has kept all data below the prefectural level rigidly confidential. The neighborhood-level data from that 1935–36 census has apparently been available for some time to researchers affiliated with either the BLL or the JCP. The data briefly surfaced in late 2015 (and were used in Ramseyer and Rasmusen, 2018), but only because a buraku activist fighting the League posted the census on the internet (see Ramseyer and Rasmusen, 2018:221–22).

Readers should take the numbers with caution. No one offers a precise definition of the “burakumin” – or anything close. Nor could they. As the discussion below elaborates, the term has always been a loose identifier for what simply amounts to a dysfunctional under-class. A Japanese on the down-and-out (even in the Tokugawa period) who moved into a buraku neighborhood could always slide into the group. An ambitious burakumin who adopted mainstream norms and left the neighborhood could always slide out. Given this context, definitional disputes are inherently pointless.

Although some detectives may try to trace a person’s ancestry back to the late nineteenth century (Ramseyer and Rasmusen, 2018), most people just ask whether someone comes from a family with long ties to an identifiable buraku district. One journalist asked a detective how he decided whether someone was a burakumin. They are burakumin “if their parents were burakumin,” he replied, “or if they came from a buraku.” After all, he explained, “if they’re currently living in a buraku, then they’re burakumin” (Kadooka, 2005:50). A 2005 Osaka survey asked the same question. Of the respondents, 50.3% replied that they looked at a person’s address, 38.3% that they looked at the person’s recorded home (i. e. registry) address, and others looked at the address of a person’s parents or grandparents (Tominaga, 2015:35).

Qualifications aside, Table 1 outlines the general pattern. From a total of about 500,000 at the outset of the Meiji era (1868–1912), the number of burakumin (as counted by the various census-takers appointed by the national or local governments) climbed to about 1 million by 1935. It rose to 1.2 million in the late 1950s, but climbed no further. By the 1990s, it had fallen back below 1 million. The 1942 numbers are an obvious outlier: most likely, they reflect either wartime disruption or badly flawed census-taking procedures.

The BLL itself claims that the burakumin number 3 million. From time to time, scholars have given credence to the number. Yet the number is not a modern calculation. In fact, it is not a calculation at all. It dates instead from the founding of the BLL’s predecessor in 1922. The organizers had begun the group – called the Suiheisha – in March. Already by that April, they had included the number in a manifesto, and soon were adding it to their anthems

besides (Keiho kyoku, 1922:54, 68–69). The best-known of their hymns to liberty proclaims:⁵

Shouldering the burdens of mission and light,
Three million brothers break the shackles of slavery ...

Ethnographer Honda (1991:14) recounts how the number came to be. As the Suiheisha organizers met in 1922, they wondered how many burakumin there might be. The government had just counted them for the 1921 census, and found 830,000 burakumin in 4900 districts. Reasoning that it must have missed some burakumin, Shoken Hirano – at the time a self-declared anarchist, but one whom the organization would soon expel (nominally for spying for the police for money), and who would transform himself into a right-wing nationalist by the end of the decade – suggested off-hand that they adopt “6,000 districts, 3 million people.” The number has remained an article of faith ever since.⁶

2 Migration

Over the course of the last 150 years, burakumin have moved. Japanese have moved generally, of course, and so have the burakumin. To explore the regional shifts, in Table 2 I report the prefecture-level totals for each of the 14 censuses.

Note parenthetically that Tokyo has several buraku. It never had many, but has claimed since the 1950s that it has none. The claim reflects municipal politics rather than demographic change.⁷

To facilitate comparisons over time, I index the prefectural totals by the 1921 census. To facilitate comparisons across prefectures, I include the absolute numbers for the 1868, 1921, and 1993 censuses. Obviously, the indexed numbers are most reliable for those prefectures with large numbers of burakumin. Where a prefecture has fewer than 10,000 burakumin, the census takers can cause large percentage changes just by missing a few districts. Following standard Japanese practice, I list the prefectures roughly from the northeast to the southwest.

⁵ Kaihoka [Song of Liberation], <https://ehime-c.esnet.ed.jp/jinken/09kaihouka.pdf>.

⁶ Western scholars give the number much more credence than it deserves. For example, Hankins (2014:3) writes that “the BLL extrapolates a number from historical records, tracing lineages of “outcastes” from the Tokugawa period ... The BLL’s standard is one of lineage and residence and sits within the imperatives of liberation ...”

⁷ Put more charitably, the Table 1 numbers are not “censuses,” but rather a tally of the people to whom the government planned to distribute its subsidies. Because the Tokyo government decided to allocate the money by industry (e. g. tanning) rather than location (see Hankins, 2014), it did not report the number of burakumin in the prefecture.

Table 2: Burakumin prefectural population.

A. 1868–1958										
Prefecture	1868 Number	1868 Index	1907 Index	1921 Index	1921 Number	1922 Index	1935 Index	1942 Index	1946 Index	1958 Index
Hokkaido	0				0					
<i>Tohoku region</i>										
Aomori	563	302.7	51.1	100	186	120.4				
Iwate	189									
Miyagi	1,138									
Akita	534									
Yamagata	1,189	118.9	12.3	100	1,000	125				
Fukushima	1,583	127.7	99.7	100	1,240	93.6	80.5	80.5	60.1	
<i>Kanto region</i>										
Ibaragi	3,527	80.8	132.6	100	4,368	94.7	122.0	124.7	165.9	
Tochigi	4,493	34.3	76.3	100	13,114	97.0	121.0	68.4	133.4	124.7
Gunma	15,627	63.7	79.6	100	24,516	90	122.4	116.2	94.5	94.5
Saitama	8,599	30.6	82.9	100	28,139	101.3	116.8	85.3	116.8	169.0
Chiba	9,579	370.1	149.4	100	2,588	100.3	136.5	145.4	57.1	
Tokyo	5,124	66.9	109.1	100	7,658	95.9	94.7	40.7	81.5	
Kanagawa	7,412	130.0	113.1	100	5,712		94.5	45.0	94.5	
<i>Chubu region</i>										
Niigata	3,581	122.3	122.7	100	2,929	12.9	149.0	56.7	197.4	
Toyama	1,430	17.4	106.7	100	8,242	103.0	98.7	85.6		
Ishikawa	11,740	251.4	87.0	100	4,670	86.1	57.2	40.8	49.5	
Fukui	2,242	96.7	126.8	100	2,318	97.1	124.8	127.2	124.8	164.4

(continued)

Table 2: (continued)

A. 1868–1958											
Prefecture	1868	1868	1907	1921	1921	1922	1935	1942	1946	1958	
	Number	Index	Index	Index	Number	Index	Index	Index	Index	Index	
Yamanashi	3,908	224.0	137.2	100	1,745	95.5	104.2	91.2	331.4		
Nagano	6,080	31.6	91.5	100	19,263	104.5	124.8	78.5	115.4	171.9	
Gifu	975	21.0	95.6	100	4,634	106.9	96.2	77.5	96.6	100.6	
Shizuoka	7,709	53.3	75.9	100	14,476	80.0	111.4	100.8	127.7	149.2	
Aichi	11,128	160.7	128.0	100	6,927	121.3	196.2	145.5			
<i>Kinki region</i>											
Mie	13,388	34.9	89.4	100	38,383	99.7	109.2	101.1	109.9	126.8	
Shiga	12,501	48.4	91.9	100	25,819	108.3	109.6	88.6	141.8	156.6	
Kyoto	24,444	58.0	171.2	100	42,179	101.5	119.9	10.7	119.9	135.0	
Osaka	24,265	50.7	72.8	100	47,909	108.3	217.8	97.3	128.5	250.8	
Hyogo	46,189	42.9	89.2	100	107,608	101.5	119.9	10.7	119.9	165.9	
Nara	14,962	45.8	84.4	100	32,678	102.5	114.6	76.0	114.6	169.8	
Wakayama	29,696	82.3	91.3	100	36,072	103.2	134.8	103.5	140.1	145.7	
<i>Chugoku region</i>											
Tottori	4,599	24.2	88.3	100	19,022	97.2	115.7	104.1	132.7	150.0	
Shimane	9,283	143.0	140.9	100	6,492	155.6	120.1	53.9	121.6	110.6	
Okayama	24,278	56.6	87.9	100	42,895	98.8	112.9	74.9	112.7	137.6	
Hiroshima	28,123	70.1	110.6	100	40,133	102.7	118.8	39.2	97.8	118.0	
Yamaguchi	14,174	71.3	117.0	100	19,878	110.5	109.4	65.6	78.0	184.0	
<i>Shikoku region</i>											
Tokushima	19,232	86.1	93.6	100	22,343	108.9	114.5	114.3	170.5	317.2	
Kagawa	8,649	87.7	104.7	100	9,867	102.6	74.8	68.7	86.6	114.1	

Ehime	27,414	59.6	99.1	100	46,015	102.5	112.9	87.2	176.8	136.7
Kochi	16,894	50.7	83.1	100	33,353	96.9	103.7	70.2	109.4	151.4
<i>Kyushu region</i>										
Fukuoka	32,597	47.0	87.7	100	69,345	96.9	103.7	70.2	109.4	121.0
Saga	760	30.3	151.8	100	2,508	98.1	94.3	27.0	94.3	59.3
Nagasaki	3,989	158.4	158.4	100	2,519	112.8	126.6		42.3	
Kumamoto	7,267	54.9	91.7	100	13,240	88.7	110.4	8.2	63.1	150.5
Oita	7,989	112.5	106.9	100	7,099	141.3	134.7	86.4	143.6	351.4
Miyazaki	1,191	45.9	107.8	100	2,590	92.9	40.7		40.7	
Kagoshima	5,940	74.2	90.6	100	8,001	111.8	124.2	56.7	124.2	131.0
Okinawa	0				0					

B. 1963–1993

Prefecture	1921 Number	1963 Index	1967 Index	1971 Index	1975 Index	1987 Index	1993 Index	1993 Number
Hokkaido								
<i>Tohoku region</i>								
Aomori	186							
Iwate								
Miyagi								
Akita								
Yamagata	1,000							
Fukushima	1,240	21.4						
<i>Kanto region</i>								
Ibaraki	4,368	127.7	108.7	25.8	80.04	156.5	105.4	4,604

(continued)

Table 2: (continued)

Prefecture	1921 Number	B. 1963–1993										1993 Number
		1963 Index	1967 Index	1971 Index	1975 Index	1987 Index	1993 Index					
Tochigi	13,114	127.3		159.8	165.6	80.1	10,508					
Gunma	24,516	148.0	133.8	123.9	126.6	127.7	111.2					27,249
Saitama	28,139	147.5	118.0	130.7	141.8	143.5	124.2					34,946
Chiba	2,588	168.2	130.4	130.1	123.3	125.8	87.5					2,264
Tokyo	7,658											
Kanagawa	5,712	25.1	29.1	31.6	66.1	53.7	3,065					
<i>Chubu region</i>												
Niigata	2,929	71.7	61.9	33.6	28.7	35.9	24.7					724
Toyama	8,242	11.0	40.2									
Ishikawa	4,670	8.3										
Fukui	2,318	156.5	151.9	152.5	152.5	113.7	2,636					
Yamanashi	1,745	135.5	40.1		20.1	16.8	293					
Nagano	19,263	120.6	105.8	99.3	116.0	116.2	82.3					15,849
Gifu	4,634	89.5	88.0	93.8	92.8	92.8	83.9					3,888
Shizuoka	14,476	124.6	25.1	86.7	76.1	76.1	50.0					7,238
Aichi	6,927	153.9	126.7	95.7	88.9	147.4	128.8					8,922
<i>Kinki region</i>												
Mie	38,383	125.7	111.1	111.1	111.8	111.9	93.5					35,905
Shiga	25,819	151.3	141.3	136.5	139.3	140.3	136.6					35,277
Kyoto	42,179	131.9	124.4	117.2	122.2	123.0	96.2					40,561
Osaka	47,909	186.0	274.5	278.6	299.1	299.1	182.4					87,385

Hyogo	107,608	152.0	151.3	138.9	142.2	142.4	109.0	117,297
Nara	32,678	171.8	182.9	186.5	190.3	190.6	155.9	50,933
Wakayama	36,072	128.4	131.3	13.4	130.1	131.8	115.0	41,465
<i>Chugoku region</i>								
Tottori	19,022	149.4	134.7	127.5	129.7	132.2	123.9	23,562
Shimane	6,492	97.5	100.8	74.5	83.1	92.4	49.6	3,221
Okayama	42,895	136.8	115.2	112.7	130.2	132.2	97.9	41,986
Hiroshima	40,133	110.6	75.7	99.6	106.9	107.2	82.0	32,898
Yamaguchi	19,878	125.7	114.7	104.6	99.9	102.7	69.9	13,898
<i>Shikoku region</i>								
Tokushima	22,343	159.2	128.2	131.7	142.8	149.4	134.7	30,103
Kagawa	9,867	104.1	97.8	93.3	85.5	86.2	7.6	752
Ehime	46,015	97.1	96.3	90.1	94.8	97.8	71.6	32,923
Kochi	33,353	130.6	121.1	117.9	126.8	133.0	105.1	35,061
<i>Kyushu region</i>								
Fukuoka	69,345	165.1	175.9	176.7	191.6	196.1	161.2	111,784
Saga	2,508	55.7	50.6	60.6	60.3	63.9	50.8	1,273
Nagasaki	2,519	13.9	13.9	4.8	14.2	11.6	292	
Kumamoto	13,240	9.4	88.5	94.8	90.5	95.3	85.4	11,308
Oita	7,099	130.3	63.7	92.7	94.8	321.2	125.9	8,935
Miyazaki	2,590			194.4	28.2	729		
Kagoshima	8,001	127.2	109.4	98.0	84.4	103.4	78.0	6,244
Okinawa	0					0		

Notes: Actual populations for 1868, 1921, and 1993 (in bold). Intervening populations indexed at 1921 = 100 (in Roman).

Sources: See Table 1.

The buraku have long been a regional rather than national phenomenon, but the shifts since 1868 have concentrated the burakumin population still further. When the Meiji government took power in 1868, burakumin tended to live in the west. From 1868 to the founding of the Suiheisha in 1922, the number of burakumin grew massively in Kyoto, Osaka, Nara, and Hyogo (site of Kobe), in the inland-sea-adjacent prefectures of Okayama, Hiroshima, Ehime, and Kochi, and in the northern Kyushu prefecture of Fukuoka. Since 1922, the buraku have grown more spectacularly still in Osaka and Fukuoka. In 1868, 29% of the burakumin lived in the five prefectures of Osaka, Nara, Hyogo, Okayama, and Fukuoka. By 1993, 46% of the burakumin lived in these five.

3 Implications of the location-based definition

That Japanese define burakumin primarily by residence has two straightforward preliminary implications. First, burakumin can and do exit the group. Theirs is the classic case of Hirschman's (1970) easy exit. When scholars insist that burakumin cannot, they simply capture an artifact of sample bias: a person who researches the subject by interviewing buraku residents will not meet many who left and never returned.

For in massive numbers, Burakumin leave. As Figure 1 shows, they have been leaving the buraku since the 1930s. From 1921 to 1993, the Japanese general population increased from 56,665,900 to 124,937,786 – a growth of 124%. During the same period, the number of burakumin grew from 829,675 to 892,751 – a growth of 7.6%. Suppose the buraku grew at the same rate as the rest of the Japanese population. After all, first-hand observers usually note a higher-than-average birthrate among the buraku, not lower. If the buraku birthrate tracked that of the rest of Japan, by 1993 its population would have reached 1,862,141. In effect, over the intervening 72 years at least 1 million burakumin had vanished into the general population.

Second, the buraku will necessarily include farmers and exclude professionals. Farmers invest in land, and land is obviously location-specific. Should a farmer want to leave the buraku, he can do so only by liquidating his business. By contrast, an upper-middle-class professional will have little choice but to leave a buraku. The phenomenon does not turn on the strength of any Japanese bias. It simply turns on the group's location-based definition. Whether in the U.S. or Japan, university-educated professionals have mobile careers. To exploit their educational investments, they follow the jobs. Whether in the U.S. or Japan, virtually no professional lives within ten blocks of his natal home. If a burakumin moves more than those ten blocks, however, he ceases to be a burakumin.

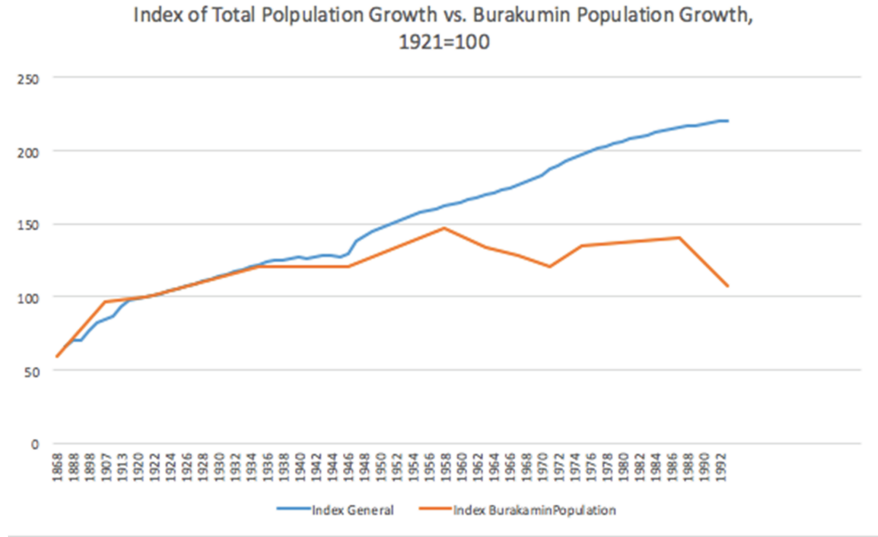


Figure 1: Index of total population growth vs. Burakumin population growth 1921 = 100. Note: 1942 Census omitted because an outlier. Source: See Table 1.

C Dysfunction

1 Slums

Visitors to the modern buraku have every right to express surprise. Given the standard western accounts, the most notable aspect of the modern buraku is how notable they are not. They are not impoverished. They are not dirty. They do not lack in-door plumbing, adequate space, fire protection. They are not distinctive at all. Given the accounts, a visitor might expect a slum. Primarily only in Osaka – and only in one spot in Osaka – will he find one.

The infamous Japanese slum lies in the Kamagasaki district of Osaka’s Nishinari ward. Euphemistically renamed Airin in 1966 after a series of violent riots on hot summer nights, the district contains day laborers, flop houses, homeless alcoholics, and drug addicts. With 20,000 to 30,000 heavily burakumin residents, it serves as the center for mostly male day workers. Several organized crime syndicates locate their headquarters there. Contractors recruit clean-up crews for the Fukushima reactors.

Visitors should pause to note that Japan has very few non-buraku slums either. When critics detail the way mob-affiliated BLL leaders diverted massive

amounts of government subsidies (see Subsection 4, below), writers sympathetic to the BLL reply that at least the subsidies eliminated the worst of the buraku slums. In fact, however, most of the non-buraku slums have disappeared too. They received none of those targeted subsidies, yet vanished all the same. Japanese slums did not disappear because of government subsidies. They disappeared because Japanese incomes grew.

2 Incomes

Prefecture-level data suggest that modern burakumin tend to be only modestly poorer than other Japanese. For want of any burakumin population figures below the prefectural level (other than for 1935), I use prefecture-level data. The risk of ecological fallacy is obviously real. With that caveat, however, consider the correlation between the fraction of burakumin in a prefecture and several indices of personal welfare. For burakumin concentration, I use the most recent of the 14 censuses – that from 1993 (Somu cho, 1995).

I construct the following prefecture-level variables:

Burakumin PC, 1993: The number of burakumin in 1993 (Somu cho, 1995), divided by total population.

Density, 1993: Total population in 1993, divided by area (100 sq. km)

Prefectural Income PC, 1993: Total prefectural income (*kenmin so shotoku*; Naikakufu, 1994), divided by total population.

Sewage rate, 2010: Number of people served by sewage facilities in 2010 (Nihon gesui, 2011), divided by total population.

Poverty rate, 2007: The fraction of households in 2007 living below the minimum cost of living. Tomuro (2016) calculates the number by first estimating the minimum cost of living per prefecture, and then assessing the number of households with income below that measure.

HS-College Rate, 2010: Students proceeding to college in 2010, divided by total number of high school graduates (Monbu kagaku sho, 2011a).

Life Expectancy, F 2010: Life expectancy of women, 2011 (Kosei, 2011b).

Height, Grade 5 F, 2010: Average height of girls in 2010, grade 5 (Monbu kagaku sho, 2011b).

Infant Mortality, 2010: New born deaths in 2010, divided by total births (Kosei rodo sho, 2011b).

I include selected summary statistics in Table 3. For the convenience of the reader, I repeat these and all later variable definitions in Table 4.

Table 3: Selected summary statistics.

	n	Min	Mean	Median	Max
Burakumin PC					
1868	44	0	1.182	0.840	4.862
1921	46	0	1.605	0.912	5.750
1993	46	0	0.957	0.335	4.289
Density, 1921	46	2859	24,803	16,574	174,998
Pref income PC, 2009	47	2.006	2.606	2.579	4.486
Crimes PC					
1920	47	0.005	0.013	0.011	0.037
2010	47	0.005	0.011	0.010	0.019
Welfare rate, 2010	47	0.007	0.024	0.021	0.054
Illegitimacy rate					
1920	47	0.005	0.081	0.072	0.159
2009	47	0.013	0.022	0.021	0.040
Taxpayers PC, 1923	47	0.009	0.030	0.028	0.059
Exogamy, 1921	42	0	0.067	0.025	0.500
Suiheisha BO, 1933	46	0	7.457	0	45
B pref'l voters, 1921	42	0	0.017	0.016	0.037
Murder rate, 1920	47	4.98e-6	0.00003	0.00003	0.00007
Buraku agri ratio, 1935	41	0	0.530	0.537	0.979
Buraku size, 1921	42	41.2	211.9	168.2	798.5
Subsidies PBC, 1963–66	37	0	0.735	0.294	7.263

Sources: See text and Table 1.

Table 4: Variables used.

Anti-liberation riots: 1 if the prefecture experienced any riots against the 1871 liberation edict, 0 otherwise.

Buraku agricultural ratio: Number of burakumin households engaged in agriculture, divided by the number of burakumin households.

Buraku crime rate, PBC (per burakumin capita): Number of burakumin committing a crime, divided by the number of burakumin.

Buraku illegitimacy rate: Non-marital burakumin births, divided by total burakumin births.

Buraku prefectural voters PBC: The number of burakumin eligible to vote in the prefectural elections (suffrage depended on income), divided by the number of burakumin.

Buraku public assistance, PBC: Number of burakumin on public assistance, divided by the number of burakumin.

Burakumin PC: The number of burakumin, divided by total population.

Chest circumference: Chest circumference of of boys and girls at age 7.

Crimes per capita: Number of Criminal Code violations, divided by total population.

Density: Total population, divided by area (100 sq. km)

(continued)

Table 4: (continued)

Divorce rate: Number of divorces, divided by number of marriages.

Dysentery rate: Number of deaths from dysentery, divided by the total population.

Exogamy: Number of marriages between burakumin and commoners, divided by all marriages involving burakumin.

Height, Grade 5 F: Average height of girls, grade 5.

Height: Height of boys and girls at age 7.

Hinin fraction: Fraction of hinin among the 1868 burakumin.

HS-College Rate: Students proceeding to college, divided by total number of high school graduates.

Illegitimacy rate: Number of non-marital births, divided by total births.

Infant Mortality: New born deaths, divided by total births.

Kyudan rate: The number of denunciation sessions, divided by the number of burakumin.

Life Expectancy, F: Life expectancy of women.

Meth crimes per capita: Number of crimes involving methamphetamines, divided by total population.

Murders PC: Total murders for given year, divided by total population.

Population growth: fractional growth in total prefectural population since 1884.

Poverty rate: The fraction of households living below the minimum cost of living. Tomuro (2016) calculates the number by first estimating the minimum cost of living per prefecture, and then assessing the number of households with income below that measure.

Prefectural Income PC: Total prefectural income (*kenmin so shotoku*), divided by total population.

Sewage rate: Number of people served by sewage facilities, divided by total population.

Shirayama shrines: The number of Shirayama shrines (said to have been a marker of the traditional location of burakumin communities).

Subsidies PBC: The amount of the prefectural subsidies targeting burakumin (in 10,000 yen) over a given time period, divided by the number of burakumin.

Suicide rate: Number of suicides, divided by the total population.

Suiheisha BO: The number of branch offices of the Suiheisha.

Taxpayers PC: Number of taxpayers, divided by the total households.

Total crime PC: Total crimes for given year, divided by total population.

Tuberculosis rate: Number of deaths from tuberculosis, divided by the total population.

Weight: Weight of boys and girls at age 7.

Welfare dependency: Number of households on public assistance, divided by number of households.

Notes: Obviously, these values changed over time. As relevant, I identify the year involved in the text and in the tables below.

First, at the prefectural level (a coarse measure to be sure) burakumin concentration does not significantly correlate with reported per capita income (to the extent burakumin work in illegal industries, my income figure understates their real income) in simple pairwise correlation, but does correlate with the fraction of the

population living below the poverty line. To explore this and other questions of correlation (obviously not causation), in Table 5 I hold constant population density and prefectural income. Importantly, the fraction of burakumin in a prefecture does correlate with the fraction of households below the poverty line (Table 5, Panel A, Regression (2)). Even with population density and per capita income held constant, prefectures with more burakumin do have a higher fraction of people in poverty.

Table 5: Modern Buraku.

A. Social Welfare						
Dependent variable	(1) Sewage	(2) Poverty	(3) HS-CollRate	(4) Life Exp F	(5) Hght Gr5F	(6) Inf Mort
Buraku PC 93	-2.888 (1.845)	0.00016** (6.52e-5)	130.421** (56.224)	-1.9995 (5.106)	-11.849 (8.454)	-0.0022 (0.033)
Density 93	5.90e-7* (2.98e-7)	-1.32e-12 (1.05e-11)	5.59e-7 (9.08e-6)	-5.33e-7 (8.25e-7)	7.01e-7 (1.37e-6)	1.03e-8** (5.37e-9)
Pref Inc PC09	0.092 (0.083)	-9.86e-6*** (2.92e-6)	13.739*** (2.520)	0.0402 (0.229)	-0.3698 (0.3789)	-0.0074*** (0.0015)
Adj R ² :	0.27	0.38	0.56	-0.05	-0.00	0.36
B. Indices of Dysfunction						
Dependent variable:	Crimes	Meth Crimes	Welfare dep	Illegit	Divorce	
Buraku PC 93	0.0822*** (0.0295)	0.00156*** (0.0005)	0.2585** (0.0987)	0.1292** (0.0574)	0.7269** (0.331)	
Density 93	1.11e-8** (4.77e-9)	2.87e-10*** (8.68e-11)	8.05e-8*** (1.59e-8)	3.05e-8*** (9.27e-9)	9.17e-8* (5.36e-8)	
Pref Inc PC09	0.00296** (0.00132)	0.00002 (0.00002)	-0.0184*** (0.0044)	-0.0110*** (0.0026)	-0.0762*** (0.0149)	
Adj R ²	0.43	0.40	0.38	0.30	0.44	

Notes: *, **, ***: Statistically significant at the 10, 5, and 1% levels, respectively. n = 46, 47. OLS regressions. Correlation coefficients, or regression coefficients followed by standard errors. All regressions include a constant term.

Sources: See text and Table 1.

Second, far more non-burakumin live in poverty than burakumin. Where Tomuro (2016) estimates a 2012 national poverty rate of 18.3%, by the 1993 census only 0.71% of all Japanese were burakumin. Consider Kochi, the rural prefecture with the highest fraction of burakumin – 4.3% of households, or 13,800. With a poverty rate of 23.7%, 76,300 of the households live in poverty.

Even if all Kochi burakumin lived below the poverty level (which they do not), the great majority of the poor would not be burakumin. Or consider Fukuoka, an urban prefecture with a relatively high fraction of burakumin – 2.3 %, or 48,500 households. With a poverty rate of 20.6 %, 435,000 households are in poverty. Again, even if all burakumin lived in poverty, most of the poor families in Fukuoka would not be burakumin.

Third, none of the other regressions in Table 5 suggests that burakumin live poorly. As an index of public infrastructure, take sewage: centralized sewage facilities are more widespread in the cities than in rural villages, but population density held constant, burakumin are not associated with lower access to sewage lines (Part A, Reg. (1)). Neither – in unreported regressions – are they associated with less access to running water. As an index of educational access, take university education: burakumin are not associated with lower rates of college attendance. They are actually associated with significantly higher rates (Reg. A(3)). As an index of public health, take life expectancy: burakumin are not associated with lower life expectancy for women (Reg. A(4); the adjusted R^2 is not even positive). Neither are they associated with lower life expectancy for men (unreported regression). They are not associated with lower heights for 5th grade girls (Reg. A(5); again, the adjusted R^2 is not even positive). Neither are they associated with lower heights for boys (unreported regression). They are not associated with higher infant mortality rates (but rural villages do have higher mortality rates; Reg. A(6)). Neither are they associated with higher unemployment rates (unreported regression).

3 Troubling markers

a Summary statistics

Other data, however, suggest a troubling picture. In Table 6, I examine the social structure of the burakumin community more directly. In Table 5, I explored that social structure indirectly through the correlation between burakumin concentration and social phenomena at the prefectural level. In this Table 6, I report summary statistics that compare various rates directly between burakumin and non-burakumin, again at the prefectural level. I take the statistics from the government survey that yielded the 1993 census (Somu cho, 1995), and additional material published by the BLL (Zenkoku Buraku, 1998). The survey was at least nominally national, but compiled from prefecture-level sub-surveys. The burakumin are not a nation-wide phenomenon, of course (see Table 2), and on most of the measures only about half of the prefectures submitted reports.

Table 6: Social welfare, Burakumin and Others, 1993 (summary statistics).

	n	Burakumin				Others			
		Min	Median	Mean	Max	Min	Median	Mean	Max
Welfare depend	36	0.34	3.055	4.028	25	0.20	0.645	0.684	1.85
Single mother HH	20	0.8	2.15	2.09	3.7	0.8	1.15	1.113	1.3
Own home	24	24.8	66.3	69.13	98.6	47.9	67.2	69.25	76.5
Lot size	24	160	243	271.6	532	119	278	265.1	420
Home size	23	22.8	32.1	32.66	42.1	25.3	33.7	34.02	42.6
Sewage	36	0	13.7	21.94	71.1	4.4	28.35	31.89	77.1
Unemployment	22	3	5.35	5.58	12	3.5	4.75	5.05	7
Wages									
Under 1 mill	23	10.7	21.7	21.2	28.3	12.7	15.2	15.23	17.9
Over 7 mill	23	1.5	2.9	3.47	7.2	4.5	7.2	8	13.3

Notes: Figures in bold where means of prefectural averages differ significantly at 1% level. On other details, see text.

Sources: See Somu cho, Heisei 5 nendo dowa chiku jittai haaku to chosa [Survey to Grasp the True State, Etc., of the 1993 Buraku Districts] (Tokyo: Somu cho, 1995); Zenkoku buraku kaiho undo rengokai, Zenkoku dowa chiku no nenjibetsu gaikyo chosa narabi ni 1993 nen genzai no fukenbetsu gaikyo chosa kiso shiryō [Survey of Circumstances by Year for All Buraku Districts, Together With the Basic Material of the 1993 Prefectural Circumstances Survey] (Tokyo: Zenkoku buraku kaiho undo rengokai, 1998).

According to Table 6, burakumin are poorer than the general public. Burakumin are more likely to be on welfare. Despite having much the same percentage of workers in agriculture (8.43% of the burakumin, 8.42% of the general public), they have less access to municipal sewage networks (a point that did not appear in Table 5). They are more likely to be earning very low income, and less likely to earn high incomes. Consistent with the data on illegitimacy in Table 5, burakumin are also more likely to raise children in broken homes.

b Correlations

What is more, the fraction of burakumin in a prefecture is associated with several indices of dysfunctional behavior. I use the following variables:

Crimes per capita, 2010: Number of Criminal Code violations (Keisatsu cho, 2011), divided by total population.

Meth crimes per capita, 2011: Number of crimes involving methamphetamines in 2011 (Keisatsu cho, 2011), divided by total population.

Welfare dependency, 2010: Number of households on public assistance

in 2010 (seikatsu hogo; Kosei, 2011a), divided by number of households.

Illegitimacy rate, 2009: Number of non-marital births in 2009, divided by total births (Kosei 2010).

Divorce rate, 2010: Number of divorces in 2010, divided by number of marriages (Kosei, 2011b).

In simple pair-wise correlation, the concentration of burakumin is significantly associated with the number of methamphetamine crimes per capita, the fraction of the population on public assistance, the fraction of non-marital births, and the divorce rate.

In Table 5 Panel B, I hold constant population density and per capita income, and use simple OLS regressions to explore these associations (again, not causation) further. The concentration of burakumin is correlated – statistically significantly – both with the total crime rate (Panel B Reg. (1)), and specifically with the rate of methamphetamine crimes (Reg. B(2)). Methamphetamines are the drugs most widely abused in Japan, and ones whose distribution is heavily tied to the organized crime syndicates. The burakumin concentration rate is also correlated significantly with the fraction of people on welfare (Reg. B(3)), with the rate of children born to unmarried parents (Reg. B(4)), and with the divorce rate (Reg. B(5)). The actual magnitudes are modest. Consider an increase in the fraction of burakumin from 0.5 % (roughly the fraction in the suburban Tokyo prefecture of Saitama) to 1 % (the fraction in Osaka). The coefficient on burakumin concentration of 0.0822 suggests an increase in the crime rate of 0.0004 on a prefecture-level median of 0.0103. It suggests an increase in the non-marital birth rate of 0.0007 on a prefecture-level median of 0.0210.

4 Crime and corruption⁸

a Intimidation

For years, Japanese editors and reporters kept quiet about the corruption within the burakumin leadership. They avoided the issue out of simple self-interest: the risk of virulent retaliation was just too large. Under the rubric of “denunciation,” buraku leaders responded to criticism with tactics that were both brutal and violent.

When a question involving burakumin arises, many mainstream Japanese instead defer comment with the simple “burakumin are frightening” (*dowa wa kowai*). In 1989, for example, a Matsuzaka city council representative observed

⁸ For a much fuller account, see Ramseyer and Rasmussen (2018).

that many residents objected to buraku subsidies (detailed below) as “reverse discrimination” but were “too frightened to say anything because they were afraid of being harassed by burakumin.” “I’m frightened too,” he added.

To BLL activists, the representative was perpetuating the “stereotype that the burakumin are ‘frightening’” (Miyamoto, 2013:91–96). With no apparent sense of irony, they marched into city hall and demanded he be punished. The city council meekly convened a disciplinary committee, and declared the comment about being frightened “discriminatory.” Thereupon, the representative duly thanked the burakumin for doing what they did. “If this problem had not occurred, I do not believe I would have had the opportunity to study the buraku problem,” he explained. “From now on, I would like to study the buraku problem as intently as possible, and to dedicate my life to the realization of the goal of ‘Matsuzaka: The city that protects human rights.’”

To justify their brutal control over speech, BLL activists rely on two principles. Postwar BLL leader Asada (1979:251) articulated the first as a formal proposition at the 1956 BLL annual meeting: “Every day-to-day problem that arises in the buraku – everything disadvantageous to burakumin – results from discrimination.” The second principle is not one the BLL ever formally adopted, but plays an equally central role and is similarly attributed to Asada: only a burakumin has the authority to decide what constitutes discrimination (Fujita, 1988, 1987:57). The relentless accusations of discrimination and violent denunciations follow.

b Corruption

Crime has been a crucial marker in the modern buraku, and the BLL has played a central part in that crime. Through its shake-down strategies, the BLL induced the national government to distribute to burakumin 15 trillion yen (\$125 billion at the 2002 exchange rate) over the course of 1969 to 2002, mostly as construction projects. Through at-best thinly veiled threats of violence, it then arrogated to itself the power to allocate the money as it wished (described in detail in Ramseyer and Rasmusen, 2018).

The BLL awarded the construction contracts to firms that joined its Buraku Construction Association (BCA). In return, the firms paid the association 0.7% of the contract amount. To some BLL leaders, the firms paid tribute beyond the 0.7% fee. One prominent burakumin, for example, apparently demanded 3 to 5% of the contract (Kadooka, 2012:96; Mori, 2009:78, 180).

Nominally, only burakumin firms joined the BCA. In practice, mainstream firms vied to join as well. Profits on the government-funded buraku construction contracts were so high, in other words, that mainstream firms paid to become

burakumin firms. Sometimes a firm hired a well-known burakumin leader to serve as president; other times, it simply paid a bribe (Mori, 2009:180–83).

Routinely, BLL leaders sold the government the land for these projects at massively inflated prices. They also routinely diverted construction funds to themselves through shell companies. To do so, they first formed a corporation. That corporation joined the BCA and partnered with a mainstream construction firm. The two firms bid on the government contract together, and upon winning the bid the shell corporation took its cut and left the mainstream firm to do the work (Ramseyer and Rasmusen, 2018).

c Organized crime

The flamboyant corruption surrounding the buraku subsidies made clear what many Japanese understood but rarely said in public: the mob was a creature of the buraku. “The great majority of the minority groups earn an honest living,” writes burakumin journalist Kadooka (2012:28). “But most men in the organized crime syndicates are members of minorities like the Koreans or the burakumin.”

Incendiary as Kadooka’s statement may seem, members of the burakumin community, the syndicates, and the police consistently report that burakumin men comprise a majority (most estimates put the fraction at 50–70%) of the syndicate memberships (discussed in detail at Ramseyer and Rasmusen, 2018). The most troubling aspect of this overlap – so inflammatory that academic accounts never mention it – lies in the fraction of burakumin men who chose to join the mob. The size of that fraction during the years of the targeted subsidies discloses an enormous diversion of young talent – a diversion from life in the legal sector into fundamentally criminal behavior. At the height of the mob in the late 1980s, 20% of the 20–29 year old burakumin men would have been part of the mob, and 25% of men in their 30s. “The buraku,” as Kadooka (2012:20) put it, was “for a long time ... the hotbed of the mob.”

IV Pre-modern antecedents

A Introduction

The social disintegration within the modern buraku suggests a series of related questions: Most basically, how did this come to be? When did crime and family collapse become so central to the buraku? When – and why – did the group’s nominal human rights leadership start to overlap with the membership in the organized crime syndicates?

Modern historians of Tokugawa (1600–1868) agricultural villages make clear where the roots of the problem do not lie: they do not stem from any concern with ritual uncleanliness or occupation-linked status in Tokugawa Japan. The pivotal fact is this: the vast majority of the ancestors of the modern burakumin never dealt with dead animals at all. Instead, they farmed. As Usui (1991:20) put it in his study of Hyogo prefecture:

In Hyogo, the business of the buraku was agriculture. Overwhelmingly, the members of the buraku did the same work as the other townspeople and farmers.

The pre-modern antecedents to the buraku were not a guild of leather workers. Neither were they a guild of tanners. They did not handle dead horses or cattle. And they were not a guild at all.

Instead, the ancestors to the modern burakumin were farmers. The “earlier theory,” as historian Seisuke Fujisawa (Higashi, 2018:115) put it, is “clearly wrong.”

B Kawata and hinin

Most of these Tokugawa ancestors to the burakumin described themselves as “kawata” in western Japan, “chori” in the east, and faced the pejorative epithet of “eta.” A smaller distinct group went by the term “hinin” (see Ehlers, forthcoming). In some communities at some times, itinerant beggars, peddlers, and entertainers went by still other terms. Aside from kawata, chori, and hinin, historian Watanabe (1965:101, 338) catalogs nearly forty different names for the various lower-class communities.⁹

Conventionally, mid-twentieth century historians of the outcastes focused on the kawata and the hinin. The kawata skinned dead cattle and horses and worked in the leather trade, they wrote. The hinin policed villages, manned the jails, and carried out punishments. The kawata were born into their group; the hinin could fall into the status out of poverty or be sentenced to it as criminal punishment. The hinin sometimes exited their status; the kawata never could.¹⁰

In practice, the distinctions were far less clear. To be sure, many hinin did not inherit their status. Although some did, others either found themselves assigned the status as criminal punishment or descended into the status as

⁹ See generally Saito and Oishi (1995:52, 62); Ehlers (forthcoming); Ohnuki-Tierney (1989).

¹⁰ E. g. Minegishi (1996:44–46, 56); Watanabe (1977:135, 335); Tsukada (2007); Hasegawa (1927:10). On the hinin more generally, see Ehlers (2018); Tsukada (2007).

vagrants. And under specified conditions, some of the hinin could return to the status of ordinary peasants.¹¹

Yet, commoners could acquire kawata status too. Some joined the group by happenstance. They were poor, moved to the city, rented rooms in a kawata neighborhood, and found a job with a kawata employer. In time, they and their descendants became kawata. Other commoners became kawata by choice. Sometimes, industries controlled by kawata in an area became very profitable. When they did, some commoners deliberately adopted kawata status in order to enter the industry.¹²

And some kawata exited their status and became commoners. Sometimes and in some communities, kawata could apply for a formal change of status. More commonly, they simply acquired the skills and economic means to thrive outside the kawata community. They left their homes, and moved to a new city. Upon arrival, they rented rooms in a commoner section of town, and took jobs with a commoner firm. They and their descendants were now commoners.¹³

C Farming

1 Income

Among farmers, the kawata tended to approach the poorer end of the spectrum. The data being what they are, historians of the kawata generally focus on one or several villages at a time. In the course of their essay, they detail village land-holdings. Generally, they find that most kawata were among the poorer villagers. The kawata sometimes supplemented their farm income with by-employment, though rarely in the leather industry (Watanabe 1977:106). But they were not the very poorest farmers in the village. Instead, they earned incomes that substantially overlapped with those of their commoner peers.

For example, historian Ozaki (1982:89–92) assembles records of rice production in a Nagano village in 1736. The village contained 27 kawata and 23 commoner families. They produced (one koku equaled 180 liters):

¹¹ Ishii (1994:91); Tsukada (2001:3); Kikuchi (1961:444); Ozaki (1982:154); Takayanagi (1979:20); Minegishi (1996:129–30).

¹² Hatanaka (1997:110–11). And in other places, hinin became kawata over time, or no one distinguished the two groups at all (Watanabe, 1977:63, 127; Hatanaka, 1997:110–11).

¹³ Watanabe (1977:127); Hatanaka (1997:69–80, 110–11); McCormack (2013:53).

	Less than 1 koku	1–3 koku	Over 3 koku	Total
Kawata	11	12	4	27
Others	10	3	10	23

Historians have compiled a wide variety of these village land-holding and rice-production surveys, but they almost always tell the same story: the average kawata farmer was poorer than the average commoner, but the wealthiest kawata could be rich even by commoner standards.¹⁴

2 Land sales

Note that peasants could, and did, buy and sell their land. Although the Tokugawa government eventually purported to limit land transfers, it tried to do so only during the second half of its rule, and never effectively (Yamamura, 1981:343–44).

When the late Tokugawa government did try to stop transfers, farmers simply negotiated transactions that circumvented the limits. Saito (2009:171; ital. orig.) explains how they did this:

Tokugawa peasants were not allowed to sell land if the sale were made “in perpetuity.” This ban on the permanent sale was interpreted by contemporaries to mean that peasants were allowed to sell a parcel of land for a limited period of time, which in practice meant ‘pawning’ (shichiire).

3 Landownership

Successful kawata routinely owned much of the land they farmed.¹⁵ Claims by historians to the contrary, explains Usui (1991:22), stem from “two or three [Tokugawa] bakufu decrees and assorted domainal edicts.” Commoners routinely transferred paddies, and so did the kawata.

¹⁴ E. g. Hatanaka (1990:84); Teraki (1996:75, 111); Usui (1991:162, 176–77, 285); Minegishi (1996:30–31).

¹⁵ Usui (1991:20); Hatanaka (1997:10); Kyoto buraku (1995:305); Minegishi (1996:32, 330).

An increase in a kawata's land holdings could cause conflict over the village commons, but not because of the kawata status itself. Rights to the village commons mattered because they brought access to fertilizer, firewood, and water. The conflicts arose when kawata developed new land, and increased the demands on those village resources. Commoners did not object if a kawata who had owned land for generations used the village commons. They complained only when those who constructed new paddies wanted access too (Kyoto Buraku, 1995:393).

4 The disposition of dead animals

Within a farming village, typically one or several households held the right to skin the horses and cattle that died within a designated area.¹⁶ This skinning right did not inhere in the kawata as a group; instead, it constituted a transferable property right owned by a few. Farmers bought, sold, and pledged the "shares" (kabu) giving the holder a right to the proceeds of the skinning. In most villages, the farmers who held the shares tended to be among the wealthier kawata. Some acquired shares when a borrower defaulted on a loan. Some bought them outright. And the shares could be – and occasionally were – transferred to commoner villagers.¹⁷

The men who skinned the dead animals rarely tanned the hides. Few farmers had the expertise or equipment necessary for the task. Those who held the shares entitling them to participate in the skinning instead sold the hides (and other byproducts) to specialty tanners in neighboring towns. These were the men who had invested in the skills and equipment necessary to turn the skin into leather. Some of them were indeed kawata. Others were not.¹⁸

5 Leather industry

Although most kawata farmed, a few did work in leather. Even there, they did not have a monopoly. Instead, in many leather-related sectors (e. g. leather-backed sandals), they competed with commoner firms. Buyers regularly switched their orders between kawata and commoner sellers, and workers

¹⁶ Watanabe (1977:104); Mae (1975:217–18, 225); Saito and Oishi (1995:67, 72).

¹⁷ Watanabe (1977:114, 304); Matsuoka (1975:19–20, 24–25); Mae (1975:204, 225); Saito and Oishi (1995:120); Usui (1991:205).

¹⁸ Minegishi (1996:226); Watanabe (1977:191); Saito and Oishi (1995:124).

themselves migrated among the two types of firms (Minegishi, 1996:120; Matsuoka, 1975:16, 41).

D Migration

Those burakumin without land to till could, and did, move. In doing so, they joined their commoner peers. During the Tokugawa period, the population grew. From 17 million in 1600 to 34.5 million in 1874, over the Tokugawa period as a whole the Japanese population doubled (Saito and Takashima, 2015a:8).

And as the population grew, Tokugawa peasants migrated. Daughters and second or third sons without a farm to inherit left their villages. Some apprenticed themselves to a trade. Some left for distant villages with unclaimed land. Bands of poorer farmers left en masse to build new paddies and start new villages.

The government did not stop this movement. Mid-twentieth-century scholars sometimes claimed the contrary. In making the claim, they quoted Tokugawa decrees banning migration. Yet in fact, the decrees did not bind. Explains distinguished economist Saito (2009:184–185):

[The a]ctual policies taken by domain lords varied from province to province and also from period to period, but the administrations' attitude became unmistakably permissive towards individual mobility. ... [T]he incidence of out-migration increased over time and, ... the rural-urban flow of people became substantial in the latter half of the Tokugawa period.

Like their commoner peers, many kawata left their villages for the urban centers. Indeed, they migrated to the towns and cities in massive numbers. As Watanabe (1977:154) put it, “the movement of people into and out of the unliberated [i. e. kawata] villages during the late Tokugawa period was enormous.”¹⁹

As peasants (both commoner and kawata) migrated, first metropolitan centers and then secondary rural towns grew and flourished. During the first half of the Tokugawa period, farmers moved to the large cities like Osaka and the newly established political capital of Edo (i. e. Tokyo). During the second half, the farmers moved to smaller regional centers. Estimates demographer Hayami (2009:102), “perhaps 70–80 thousand people were pulled to the cities each year” during the seventeenth century. From 60,000 in 1600, by 1721 the population of Edo had reached 1.1 million. By then, “Osaka’s and Kyoto’s populations had each reached 400,000.”²⁰

¹⁹ See, e. g. Kyoto Buraku (1995:364–67); Tsukada (2001:11, 14–15, 30); McCormack (2013:51).

²⁰ See Saito and Takashima (2015a:7, 16); Takashima (2017:192–93, 198); Hayami (2009:102).

E Regulatory legislation

1 Class hierarchy

Some of the confusion over the status of the kawata follows from confusion over the role played by the government's neo-Confucian advisors. Mid-twentieth century historians (both Japanese and Western) described Tokugawa society as a world structured by a rigidly hierarchical neo-Confucian four-plus-outcaste class structure: samurai, farmer, artisan, merchant, and eta-hinin.

In fact, conclude modern Japanese historians, their mid-century predecessors took far too seriously the philosophical treatises by these advisers. The Tokugawa officials themselves said virtually nothing about any four-class hierarchy before the mid-eighteenth century. They never pursued it at a more than superficial level. And they never even purported to regulate "outcaste" behavior until 1778.²¹

What is more, continue social historians Saito and Oishi (1995:32–33), the Tokugawa government never used the four-class formula with an "eta-hinin" suffix anyway. The first reference to this ostensibly Tokugawa phrase instead appears in 1874. For half a century thereafter, it rarely reappeared. Only in late-1920s history texts did the "four-plus-outcaste" formula begin to appear widely (Saito and Oishi, 1995).

2 Sumptuary decrees

On the advice of their neo-Confucian advisers, late 18th and early nineteenth century Tokugawa elites did periodically order the kawata to live lives befitting a low status. In fact, they issued a wide variety of sumptuary decrees. Through the decrees, they purported to regulate what people would wear and what they would do.

Most commonly, the Tokugawa elites targeted wealthy merchants. These successful men and women were badly out-of-step with their newly theorized social status below farmers and artisans, and government officials tried to restrain their conspicuous consumption. Wealthy kawata were out-of-step with their theorized status too, and from time to time government officials tried to curb their conspicuous behavior as well.

²¹ See Saito and Oishi (1995:20); Watanabe (1977:6–7).

Over the course of the regime's last century, Tokugawa elites became increasingly desperate in their kawata-targeted decrees. When they issued these orders, they did not issue them out of an excess of repressive power. They issued them in a last-ditch attempt to slow the pace of social change.

In truth, the decrees reflected the wealth of the more entrepreneurial kawata. Assigned by the official neo-Confucian philosophers to the bottom of the social structure, they lived lives entirely out of step with their theorized role (Watanabe, 1977:126; Kyoto Buraku, 1995:376–79). Had merchants lived impoverished lives, no government official would have bothered to tell them to live modestly. Had kawata lived immiserated lives, no government official would have bothered to tell them to live modestly either. According to the Kyoto Buraku History Research Institute (1995:384):

At first glance, these [decrees] look like the strengthening of discrimination. In truth, however, they arose from the fact that kawata were breaking through the barriers of status. The bakufu was trying to drag the world back to the old order.

3 Burakumin land ownership and taxes

The late-Tokugawa bans on kawata land ownership reflect the same phenomenon. As historian Hatanaka (1997:11) explained it, the government tried to ban kawata from owning land precisely because the kawata owned it on so a wide scale. Not only did ordinary kawata farmers own their own farms, the more successful kawata owned extraordinary amounts of land.²² Some had acquired their land from other kawata, but others had acquired it from commoners. Some had operated as village financiers, and others had made their fortune in industry and commerce. Whatever the source, they channeled their wealth into large-scale landholdings (Kyoto Buraku, 1995:375). As Watanabe (1977:156) put it:

Large landlords emerged within the buraku. ... This emergence of the large landlords is because of their involvement in commerce and high-interest lending.

On what they raised, kawata paid taxes. Again, scholars and buraku activists have routinely claimed the contrary. In truth, the kawata paid taxes on their harvest.²³ They paid these taxes at the same rates as everyone else.

²² Watanabe (1977:189); Saito and Oishi (1995:156–58); Usui (1991:22); Uchida (1975:310).

²³ Hatanaka (1997:10); Watanabe (1977:189); Minegishi (1996:330); Kyoto buraku (1995:275); Usui (1991:22).

F Making sense of kawata

As this account makes clear, most burakumin do not trace their ancestry to people who specialized in ritually unclean jobs. Most do not trace their lineage to tanners, executioners, or leather workers. A few do, but not most.

Most burakumin instead trace their ancestry to poor farmers. Since the 1920s, Japanese historians of the kawata have usually interpreted the “kawa” to refer to leather. The Japanese term for leather is indeed “kawa,” so when writing “kawata” these scholars have used the Chinese character (*kanji*) for leather. Yet “kawa” also refers to river. The characters assigned to leather and river differ, of course, but homonyms are common in Japanese and seventeenth century peasants rarely wrote. For them, “kawata” was not a written term; it was spoken.

Historian Watanabe (1977:257–58) explains the more-likely etymology.²⁴ Suppose, he writes, that several Tokugawa-era impoverished families decided to leave their homes. They would have relocated near a village with unclaimed land. During the first half of the Tokugawa period, large swaths of potential paddy land remained undeveloped (Watanabe, 1977:120).

At their eventual destination, the migrants would have settled on the unused parcels. Because of the risk of floods – particularly during the typhoon season – farmers often left land along the river undeveloped. Migrants looking for unclaimed land near a town or village would have found it on the river banks. There, they would have settled and built their paddies. And indeed, modern burakumin often still live along a river. They live there because when their impoverished ancestors migrated to the area, the available (cheapest, if not free) land lay by the river.

As the migrants settled in the dry river bed (called *kawara*) or along the river banks, they became “kawara mono” – people of the river bed.²⁵ Because “ta” refers

²⁴ The genesis of the derogatory “eta” is unclear. Some writers (e. g. Takahashi 1927:85) have suggested that it might be a corruption of “etori,” meaning those who scavenge through cadavers for pet food (contra Yanagida, 1913:99). The conventional wisdom – declared by the BLL, and followed almost uniformly by western scholars – is that it instead means “great uncleanness.” The character used for “uncleanness” and read (using the Chinese reading for the character) “e”, however, is a rare and complex 18-stroke character that does not even fall within the standard 2200 characters taught through 12th grade. Japanese encounter it – if they encounter it at all – only in university readings. The notion that semi-literate seventeenth century peasants would have used the Chinese reading of an obscure 18-stroke character to invent a derogatory term for other peasants is implausible on its face. See generally Kida, 1919:80).

²⁵ Watanabe (1977:122); Usui (1991:63); Saito and Oishi (1995:64–66).

to rice paddies, once they built paddies by the river they became “kawata” – farmers with paddies along the river (Hasegawa, 1927:28).²⁶ Some poor farmers migrated not to another farming village but to a more urban area. Again, however, they would have settled along the river at the outskirts of town. There, they would have taken the least attractive jobs. If only because of the foul smells, tanning jobs would have been among those undesirable jobs. For that elementary reason, some of these recent arrivals became tanners.

V The transitional decades, 1868–1922

A Introduction

In the wake of their 1868 coup, military leaders from the winning coalition installed the Kyoto-based emperor as titular head of state, and governed directly from Tokyo. Upon taking control, they ran a census and counted 439,000 “eta” and 53,000 “hinin” (Table 1). They voided these categories as legal distinctions three years later, and in 1872 counted 34,806,000 total citizens (Ohsato, 1966:12).

Coups being what they are, residents in several areas remained uneasy. During the first few years, some rioted over the changes. They rioted over taxes, the draft, prices, school tuition. In some places, they rioted over the 1871 eta-hinin edict as well (Takayama, 2005:27; Kobayashi, 1985:297).

Within a few years, the term kawata disappeared from popular usage. Eta remained its pejorative alternative. In polite speech, people used either “tokushu buraku” (special village) or simply “buraku” (village).

B Demographics

From 1868 to 1921 the number of burakumin grew in tandem with the rest of the population. In Figure 1, I index the number of burakumin and of the general population by 1921 values. Over the course of these five decades, the two

²⁶ Some kawata lived in kawata-only villages (Usui, 1991:39). For the most part, these were villages that had been newly created in the Tokugawa period. There, they exploited new paddies (Usui, 1991:144–45, 354–56). Enough land had remained unfarmed at the start of the Tokugawa period, notes Watanabe (1977:120) that the kawata who created these paddies sometimes acquired very fertile land.

populations increased at roughly the same rate. From 1868 to 1921, the number of total burakumin grew by about 70% to 830,000. From 1872 to 1921, the general population grew by 60%.

Apparently, few burakumin abandoned their status during those five decades. To be sure, some commoners joined the buraku and replaced those who left. But that caveat aside, the fact that the aggregate number of burakumin grew at the same rate as the general population suggests – as a first approximation – that people born burakumin tended to stay in the community.

Japanese moved during these five decades. They moved from the countryside to the towns and cities during the Tokugawa period too, but the pace accelerated massively during the half century from 1868 to 1921. In the urban centers, they found (what were for them) well-paying jobs in a thriving economy. In 1878, they had faced per capita income of 11.5 yen. By 1921, that figure (in constant yen) had soared to 199 yen (Ohsato, 1966). Some of the people who arrived in the cities found jobs in the enormous and diverse universe of small firms. Others worked in the massive new textile factories. In 1898, 30.5 million people (71% of the population) lived in towns of fewer than 5,000 people. By 1920, only 27.1 million still lived in towns that small, and the number constituted but 48.9% of the population. Of the 85,000 factory workers in Osaka city in 1925, fewer than 20,000 had come from within Osaka prefecture (Suzuki, 2016:37).

Burakumin moved in parallel with the rest of the population – from the countryside to the cities, and from the farms to the factories.²⁷ Some burakumin found jobs at smaller firms owned by other burakumin. Belying claims of pervasive employment discrimination, others worked in the enormous new factories (Watanabe, 1977:168; Bahara, 1984:138). The most prosperous built homes in comfortable neighborhoods and ran thriving businesses. The poorest settled in city slums.

Many burakumin did extremely well during these Meiji (1868–1912) decades. Crucially, they did well without jettisoning their buraku identity. If (as noted above) the buraku population increased in tandem with the overall population, those burakumin who did well must have mostly stayed within the buraku even as they amassed their wealth. By choosing to identify with the community, these most successful of the burakumin helped to create and maintain the social and economic infrastructure that the group would have needed to thrive.

In Kyoto, prosperous buraku merchants created the Yanagihara Bank in 1899, and continued to run it until 1927 (Shigemitsu, 1991). In the Nishihama buraku of Osaka's Minami ward, burakumin in the leather industry grew enormously wealthy. Of the 120,000 households in Minami ward as a whole, only 130 (0.1%) had incomes high enough to hold first-class voting rights (Uesugi,

²⁷ Watanabe (1977:168); Suzuki (2016:27); Nara ken (1970:102).

2010:101–02; Anon, 1918). Of the 1500 buraku households there, nine had those rights (0.6%). A burakumin served on the Tsu city council in 1918 (Anon, 1918). Shotaro Yoneda, a burakumin from Nara, sailed to the U.S. to study first at the Anglican General Theological Seminary in New York (1895), and then the Columbia University graduate school (1898). Returning to Japan, he joined the faculty of the Kyoto Imperial University (Torigai, 1988:70).

C Contact and conflict

1 Introduction

As the economy grew, so too did inter-regional travel, trade, and migration. With this increased movement came contact between buraku communities and the rest of Japan. And with the increased contact came tension, rooted in the different codes of conduct between the two worlds.

To mainstream Japanese, the very poorest burakumin seemed to live by a code unto themselves. They seemed quick to take offense, wrote contemporary observers. They seemed eager to escalate disputes to dangerous levels, reluctant to invest time and effort in difficult tasks, prone to crime, dishonest. They treated family commitments cavalierly in the extreme.

The buraku norms that mainstream Japanese described were norms that remain common among a wide variety of under-class groups across the world, of course. The groups subsist in part through predation on more mainstream communities, and – to the extent that they do so – the norms serve them passably. Obviously, however, the norms did not mix well with the more broadly shared Japanese standards of behavior. As contact between the two communities increased, so did hostility.

2 Mergers

The Meiji government precipitated the first major collision between buraku and commoners in 1888. Tokugawa era towns and villages had been small collections of households, and as of 1888 there remained 71,000 of them. Of these municipalities, 800 had no residents at all, 2,800 had 1 to 10 households, and another 12,000 had 11 to 30. Nearly 70% of the 71,000 towns and villages had fewer than 100 households.²⁸

²⁸ See Yokomichi (2007:2), Kitagawa (1940:267, 275).

For these municipalities, the Meiji government intended a wide range of administrative tasks. Many of the 71,000 simply could not bear the cost of their new responsibilities (Nakajima, 2013:4, 21). Some villages were too small. Others, even if large enough, were too poor.

To resolve the problem, the Meiji government decided to merge villages up to efficient size and serviceable wealth. By 1889, it had merged the 71,000 into 15,800. In doing so, however, it precipitated vehement resistance across the country. No one objected to merging with a small but prosperous village. Everyone objected to merging with a destitute one. The mandated new administrative services entailed high costs. If a rich village merged with a poor one, it would – inevitably – bear a substantial cost of the services for the poorer village. At root, these mergers were about economic redistribution, and wealthy villages fought mergers with poorer villages the country over.²⁹

Given that the buraku villages tended to be poor, prosperous villages fought mergers with these villages as well. Some of them also may have objected to merging with the village because of its buraku status, but the question was massively over-determined. Wealthier villages fought mergers with poorer villages everywhere, buraku and commoner alike.

To buraku villagers, though, these rejections represented pure bias. In May of 1922, the Suiheisha would hold the first of its Nara denunciations (*kyudan*) in the village of Taisho (Naimu sho 1922:62). In 1889, neighboring villages had rejected mergers with Taisho, and to the BLL “the reason was extremely simple.” They had refused because Taisho was a buraku.³⁰ Never mind that in one of the other buraku villages that would merge, a substantial number of households were delinquent in their taxes (Naramoto, 1955:66–67). Forty years later, the perceived insult remained raw. As the official BLL publishing house would write in 2009 (Asaji et al., 2009:43; see also Amagasaki, 1988:229), “it was because the burakumin were nakedly excluded” through these mergers in 1889 that they “rose up to in a movement to improve the buraku.”

3 Schools

The differing codes of behavior in the buraku and mainstream communities precipitated battles over schools as well. From the nineteenth century into most of the 20th, children from the buraku tended to lag far behind their non-buraku peers in academic achievement. At the outset, Meiji-era villages (both mainstream

²⁹ See Kitagawa (1940:275, 280); Takayose (2006:150–51, 154–55).

³⁰ See Naramoto (N.D.:71); Naramoto (1955:2); Higashi (2018:293).

villages and buraku villages) had maintained small schools for their own children. As the government merged the villages and raised the educational standards it expected of the schools, local governments began combining the schools. The burakumin schools they merged into the larger schools serving the new, expanded municipalities.³¹

Once burakumin and commoner students began attending the same school, tensions rose. In first-hand accounts from the period, observers detail some of the many problems. Buraku children only haphazardly attended school, these observers often complained. According to a 1910 writer in the University of Tokyo law journal, most students from the Nara buraku communities came only 10 to 15 days a month. An observer in Amagasaki city (Hyogo prefecture) noted a similar problem in the 1880s; so did another writer in 1912. In Osaka's Kamagasaki slum in 1919, over 70% of the buraku children did not attend any school at all. Even if buraku children went to school, they did not do their homework. They did not review their lessons at home. If a teacher visited a student's parents to urge them to encourage their child to study, the parents refused to cooperate.³²

When they did come to school, buraku children routinely disrupted class. They were more likely to get into fights. If a teacher kept children (who had fallen behind after skipping classes) after school to review the material, their fathers or older brothers came and berated the teacher. In Nara, one teacher faced several students with trachoma. Given the risk of contagion, he separated them from the others. In fact, however, they were all from the buraku. They called the new seating arrangements discrimination, and launched a boycott.³³

One can try to attribute these contemporaneous observations to poverty or anti-buraku bias. After all, many burakumin were poor, and the Suiheisha did accuse other Japanese of venomous prejudice. Yet one cannot attribute burakumin truancy to any bias the students might have encountered at school; after all, burakumin children had skipped school at their smaller primarily buraku schools as well. Neither can one attribute the truancy to any buraku poverty; after all, many burakumin were poor, but so were many of their non-buraku neighbors.

³¹ E. g. Aoki (1982:34–35, 47); Naramoto (1955:98–99); Higashi (2018:294).

³² See Kohara (1910:1452–54) (Nara); Amagasaki (1988:250, 357, 380) (Amagasaki); Kiso (1986:77) (Osaka); Endo (1912:277) (1912 observation).

³³ See Kohara (1910:1440:1452–53).

4 Crime and the discovery of the buraku

And as inter-regional contact grew, government officials – in historian Kurokawa’s (2016:68) words – “discovered” the burakumin. Most prominently, they noticed what they considered appalling levels of crime. In 1907, the powerful Home Ministry launched a program to reclaim the buraku from their dysfunctional state (Kurokawa, 2016:69). The ministry focused first on the crime and secondarily on the widespread trachoma (Kurokawa, 2016:71). “Because of the prevalence of criminals within the buraku,” noted the governor of Mie Prefecture in 1907, “the communities cannot avoid the wariness with which the rest of society views them.”

VI The turn-of-the-century buraku

A Introduction

For a closer sense of the turn-of-the-century buraku, consider a mix of first-person accounts (Section B) and prefecture-level data (Section C). The observers tell a remarkably similar story. Some are police or journalists, to be sure – people from whom one might expect bias. Yet one observer was a decidedly sympathetic community organizer. Others were burakumin themselves.

What is more, the story these observers tell fits the evidence from a wide variety of prefecture-level regressions. When the n is small and partitions coarse, the empirical results are necessarily suggestive. One can – and should – worry about a wide range of obvious qualifications. Crucially, however, the empirical results match exactly the substance of the first-person accounts.

B First-person accounts

1 Kagawa

Several writers left careful first-hand accounts of the late 19th and early twentieth century buraku, but the most perceptive was probably Toyohiko Kagawa. Born in 1888, Kagawa found himself orphaned at a young age, and raised by foster parents who would go bankrupt before he turned adult. As a child, he contracted tuberculosis. In 1909, he moved to a large buraku slum in Kobe to

work as a Christian minister and community organizer. There, he would in time marry and settle into an eight square meter apartment.³⁴

Steadily, Kagawa acquired a national reputation as a champion of the poor. When militant burakumin set out to organize the liberation movement that would become the Suiheisha, they met in Kagawa's home. They admired him, and so did other burakumin. Among the possible founding leaders for the new organization, Kagawa enjoyed strong popular support (Torigai, 2002).

Yet Kagawa did not join that Suiheisha founding leadership, and broke with it almost immediately. From the start, the new group adopted a "denunciation"-based extortion strategy. Kagawa was appalled. "I'm preaching a gospel of love," he complained. "You're teaching a gospel of hate" (Torigai, 1988:126). The Suiheisha responded in kind. Sadakichi Takahashi had been one of the group's earliest organizers, and served as a secret representative to the Comintern. Kagawa, he declared in 1927, might as well be "telling laborers to work hard and become capitalists" (Takahashi 1924:236). He was nothing but "a running dog for the ruling class."

Half a century later, the publishing house Kagawa had founded decided to reprint his life works. The BLL hit hard. Under no circumstances, it declared, should the publishing house reprint his 1915 account of the Kobe buraku uncensored. It was flagrantly "discriminatory." The publishing house duly capitulated, censored Kawada's writings, and expressed remorse for having published the "discriminatory text" at all. Henceforth, it penitently announced, all of its employees would join in "addressing the problem of buraku discrimination."³⁵

In the uncensored version of his 1915 study, Kagawa had made three sets of observations relevant here. First, his burakumin neighbors were "quick to anger." They routinely claimed to have been "wronged." They "often lied." And because they so often lied themselves, "they never trusted anyone" (Kagawa, 1915:100, 300–02, 361).

Second, crime infested the buraku. Theft was everywhere. Gambling was ubiquitous, and run by gangs controlling discrete territories. Rape was common, and incest was rampant. In Wakayama prefecture, he noted, the crime rate among the burakumin was three times the rate among other Japanese. And in Hyogo, the burakumin rate was a third higher than among the prefecture as a whole. Although urban crime attracted the most attention, crime rates in the rural buraku were higher than among comparable farm villages as well.³⁶

³⁴ See generally Torigai (1988:21–22, 48–51).

³⁵ Kirisuto (1991:1; see also pp. 2, 25–26); Torigai (1988:6, 2002:160–61).

³⁶ See Kagawa (1915:101, 223, 323, 359, 364–65, 563–68); Kagawa (1919, 467–68) (Hyogo rate is for 1917).

Third, family structures in the buraku had largely collapsed. Husbands and wives routinely deceived each other. “Wives would work as prostitutes,” observed Kagawa, “and lie about it to their husbands.” Prostitution was common. At one point, he recalled, the woman living in the apartment across the alley ran outside yelling, “Hey! Won’t anyone buy me?” Even a woman who did not work as a prostitute might have 10 to 13 sex partners over the course of her life.³⁷

Reflecting the combination of widespread crime and family disintegration, parents sometimes (Kagawa suggested often) killed their babies. They did so by transferring their infants (called *moraigo*) to specialists. Those specialists might then sell the children among themselves several times, but usually the babies eventually died (Kagawa, 1915:637–43). Wrote Kagawa (1915:639):

[The specialists] just dissolve rice flour into water and wait for them to die. Needless to say, they never give them milk. But sometimes the babies don’t die. They just get sick. They cry. The adults can’t call a doctor, but it’s embarrassing just to wait. After 100 days, the babies shrivel up like prunes. Its so tragic one can’t even watch.

Kagawa did not always watch. When he heard that the police had arrested one of the old women who killed babies for a fee, he rushed to the police station. He found an infant who was still alive, and raised the girl himself (Torigai, 1988:54–56).

2 Other observers

a Introduction

Kagawa was not the only observer to document wide-spread hyper-sensitivity, violence, crime, and promiscuity within the buraku. Already by the late nineteenth century, a large range of scholars and journalists had described the same characteristics. For all the viciousness with which he attacked Kagawa, even Suiheisha leader Takahashi – himself a burakumin – seemed not to disagree on the empirics. Burakumin “are suspicious, and display *eta konjo*” (see Section b., below), wrote Takahashi (1924:223–24). “They have no inclination to save, and are always broke. Many are criminals. By instinct, they act as a group and resist social pressure. Unless these characteristics change, others in society will obviously dislike burakumin.”

³⁷ Kagawa (1915:301, 312; see pp. 101, 294).

b Culture

Contemporaries (like Takahashi himself) identified among the burakumin of the late 19th and early twentieth centuries a style of behavior they freely called “eta konjo” – an “eta essence” remarkably like the “cracker” culture of nineteenth century southern poor whites: an unwillingness to invest long hours in strenuous effort (whether employment or schooling); an apparent eagerness to take offense; and a tendency to escalate any quarrel to dangerous levels and beyond.³⁸

Of the students of buraku culture, the most prominent was easily University of Tokyo professor Kunio Yanagida. Widely celebrated as the most perceptive student of rural Japanese villages on the cusp of the transition from Tokugawa to modern, Yanagida noted in 1913 that the burakumin brought a fundamentally “antisocial approach” to community life (Yanagida, 1913:93). When his novelist friend Shimazaki Toson described life in the buraku as a world of pervasive oppression from which burakumin could escape only by emigrating to the U.S., Yanagida (2017:242 [1906]) dismissed it as wildly exaggerated:

[Shimazaki Toson’s] distinction between the general commoners and the new commoners [i. e. the burakumin] is overstated. I’ve not specifically studied the eta of Shinshu [Nagano]. But in the other areas where I have made some observations, disputes this extreme do not exist ... Following the customs of the past, the commoners probably did have a bit of a distaste for the new commoners. But that general aversion would not have caused a dispute as extreme [as Toson described].

Late nineteenth-century writers routinely complained about how eagerly burakumin fought. “There are many reasons” burakumin find themselves excluded from society, wrote another observer in 1889 (Toson, 1889:78–80; not Shimazaki Toson). “Of those, if we list simply the most basic, ... they are violent.” Indeed, he continued, they rape. Journalist Gennosuke Yokoyama similarly reported in 1898 that burakumin were hot-tempered and quick to take offense (Yokoyama, 1898). In 1910, Shinzo Kohara explained in the University of Tokyo law journal that when burakumin find themselves injured, they exaggerate their injuries, demand compensation, and turn violent. They are, he concluded, suspicious, unreflective, and unrestrained (Kohara, 1910:1440). House of Peers member Ryukichi Endo reported in 1912 that burakumin could be extremely jealous (Endo, 1912:272). “Even the most minor matters” they treat as slights. “Quickly, they use their imagination to take offense.” And the Kyoto police reported in 1924 that burakumin had traditionally been “quick tempered,” “uncooperative,” and “violent” (Kyoto, 1924:258).

³⁸ See generally McWhiney (1988); McDonald and McWhiney (1980).

Observers similarly complained that burakumin would not exert effort. If hired, claimed Endo, they promptly quit (Endo, 1912:277). If per chance they did not quit, they did not work. One factory owner who had hired several burakumin discovered they seldom worked for more than 20 or 30 minutes at a time. Concluding that a two-hour stint of work was never going to happen, he dismissed them all within a month (Kohara, 1910:1441).

c Crime

By virtually all contemporaneous accounts, turn-of-the-century burakumin were heavily involved in crime. The crime could be serious. Take the massive nationwide arson and extortion in 1918 (Section D, below) or the murder and attempted murder tied to Suiheisha chairman Jiichiro Matsumoto (Section E, below). Or it could be petty. When a 16 year old insulted a burakumin child, reported the Kyoto police chief (Nakano 1923:178–79), a burakumin crowd beat him up. When a policeman intervened, they beat him up too.

Theft, declared journalist-social-reformer-banker-politician Umeshiro Suzuki, 1888, Sec. 10) in 1888, was “one of the traditional occupations” among Osaka burakumin. They operated in rings, he explained, under the direction of a boss (Suzuki, 1888:29). More generally, during one seven-month period in 1886, (Suzuki, 1888, Sec. 10) police arrested 603 residents of Osaka’s Nago slum for theft – this at a time when only 5,100 people 15 or older lived in the entire district. In Aichi prefecture (home of Nagoya) in 1928, 14% of the burakumin in the prefecture (25% of the men) had a criminal record (Aichi, 1928:79).

d Family

Family structure, in turn, had collapsed. Wrote journalist Bungo Sakurada (pseudonym Koji Taiga) in 1893 (Sakurada 1893:14), men of the Osaka buraku “regularly abandoned their children, left their wives, and moved on – several times over the course of their lives.” Conversely (Sakurada, 1893:36), if a husband went to prison, his wife promptly took up with another man and moved in with him. “Promiscuity is rampant,” reported Suzuki (1888:35) “Of ten couples, seven or eight will freely have sex with other people.” It all began early, noted Kohara (1910:1438). “Already by age 12, many girls understand sexual passion. Promiscuity and adultery are common everywhere, and no one seems to consider either to be morally wrong.”

C Regressions

Turn-of-the-century observers tell a consistent story. Whether Suiheisha founder Takahashi, community organizer Kagawa, journalist Sakurada, or the local

police chiefs, they describe the buraku as a place of impulsive violence, crime, and disintegrating family ties. That said, self-appointed burakumin leaders spent the last 80 years of the twentieth century accusing other Japanese of virulent prejudice. Bias is thus an obvious possibility.

To check the credibility of these first-person accounts, consider some prefecture-level data. According to simple regressions on this data, early twentieth century burakumin did indeed live within a brutally violent world. By 1907, the association between these poorer burakumin and crime reached statistically noticeable levels. In Table 7, I regress 1907 total crime rates (Panel A) and murder rates (Panel B) on burakumin density (in percentages; **Burakumin PC**)

Table 7: Buraku and crime, Pre-World War II.

		A. Total Crimes, PC							
		Dependent variable: <i>Total crime PC</i>							
		1886		1907		1922		1935	
		OLS	OLS	2SLS	OLS	2SLS	OLS	2SLS	
		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	
Burakumin PC									
1858		3.126e-4 (6.91e-4)							
1907			0.00272*** (7.79e-4)	0.00190** (8.95e-4)					
1921					0.00127** (5.35e-4)	0.0099* (0.00059)			
1935							0.00271* (0.0015)	0.00390** (0.0017)	
Density									
1884		5.60e-8 (5.93e-8)							
1907			4.78e-7*** (7.72e-8)	4.69e-7*** (7.26e-8)					
1921					1.02e-7** (4.08e-8)	1.00e-7** (3.77e-8)			
1935							1.18e-7 (8.48e-8)	1.13e-7 (7.89e-8)	
Exogamy		0.0132* (0.0071)	0.0424*** (0.0130)	0.0389*** (0.012)	0.0180** (0.0084)	0.0162** (0.0079)	0.0185 (0.026)	0.0251 (0.0248)	
Taxpayer, PC		0.3632*** (0.105)	-0.0217 (0.213)	0.0311 (0.202)	0.1564 (0.138)	0.1645 (0.128)	0.7026* (0.411)	0.6880* (0.382)	

(continued)

Table 7: (continued)

Population Growth								
1884–1908		-7.78e-4 (0.0070)	-0.0021 (0.005)					
1884–1921				1.87e-5 (0.0032)	-8.27e-5 (0.0030)			
1884–1935						0.00306 (0.0064)	0.00380 (0.0060)	
n	40	40	40	38	38	40	40	
Adj R ²	0.36	0.70	0.69	0.28	0.27	0.43	0.42	
F statistic			21.13		22.76		27.2	
B. Murders:								
Dependent variable: Murders, PC								
	1886		1907		1922		1935	
	OLS		OLS	2SLS	OLS	2SLS	OLS	2SLS
	(1)		(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Burakumin, PC								
1868	5.27e-6 (126e-5)							
1907		3.54e-6** (1.60e-6)	3.21e-6* (1.81e-6)					
1921				4.15e-6** (1.86e-6)	4.06e-6* (2.08e-6)			
1935						1.23e-6** (5.04e-7)	2.10e-6*** (5.88e-7)	
Density								
1884	1.72e-10 (1.08e-9)							
1907		-2.05e-11 (1.58e-10)	-2.42e-11 (1.46e-10)					
1921				1.94e-10 (142e-10)	1.94e-10 (1.30e-10)			
1935						8.72e-12 (2.80e-11)	5.25e-12 (2.70e-11)	
Exogamy	2.62e-5 (1.29e-4)	1.95e-5 (2.66e-5)	1.81e-5 (2.5e-5)	-3.55e-6 (2.94e-5)	-4.04e-6 (2.77e-4)	-9.58e-6 (8.61e-6)	-4.72e-6 (8.48e-6)	
Taxpayers, PC	-3.98e-5 (0.0019)	6.278e-4 (4.37e-4)	6.49e-4 (4.08e-4)	3.145e-4 (4.81e-4)	3.177e-4 (4.44e-4)	-9.38e-5 (1.14e-4)	-1.047e-4 (1.31e-4)	
Population growth								
1884–1908		2.07e-5 (1.43e-5)	2.01e-5 (1.31e-5)					

(continued)

Table 7: (continued)

1884–1921				1.6e-5 (1.13e-5)	1.6e-5 (1.04e-5)		
1884–1935						6.89e-7 (2.12e-6)	1.23e-6 (2.05e-6)
n	40	40	40	38	38	40	40
Adj R ²	-0.11	0.23	0.22	0.21	0.21	0.14	0.06
CDW F			21.13		20.85		22.67
Statistic							

Notes: *, **, ***: Statistically significant at the 10, 5, and 1% levels, respectively. Correlation coefficients, or regression coefficients followed by standard errors. All regressions include a constant term.

In the 2SLS estimates, the **Burakumin PC** variable is instrumented by **Burakumin PC 1868**, **Shirayama shrines**, and **Hinin fraction**. 1884 is the earliest national census, and 1886 is the earliest year for which crime data are available. The murders for 1886 include batteries.

Sources: See text and Table 1.

and on general population density (**Density**). To capture the level of integration between the burakumin and the general public, I include the rate of intermarriage between the burakumin and commoner populations (**Exogamy**; unfortunately, available only for 1921). To proxy for per capita income levels, I include the fraction of the population paying taxes in 1923 (**Taxpayers PC**):

Total crime PC: Total crimes for given year, as provided in Naimu daijin (appropriate year), divided by total population.

Murders PC: Total murders for given year, as provided in Naimu daijin (appropriate year), divided by total population. For 1886, murders include battery.

Exogamy: Number of marriages between burakumin and commoners in 1921, divided by all marriages involving burakumin in 1921, as provided in Naimu sho (1921).

Taxpayers PC: Number of taxpayers in 1923, divided by the total households, as provided in Okura sho (1923).

Although burakumin concentration did not correlate with observable crime in 1868, by 1907 the two variables correlated strongly. Obviously, a wide range of qualifications are again in order – the ecological fallacy with prefecture-level data, unobserved variables, the fact that the data mix buraku and non-buraku murders, and so forth. And as in 2010 (see Table 5.B., above), crime rates do track urbanization: the higher the population density, the higher the rate of crime. Crucially, however, in 1907 they also tracked the relative number of burakumin in a community. In the first column of Table 7 Panels A and B, I

regress (with OLS) 1886 crime rates (the first available year) on burakumin density, population density, the exogamy rate, and the number of taxpayers per capita.³⁹ The coefficient on burakumin density is not statistically significant for either total crimes or the murder rate. In the second column, I add the rate of population growth since 1884, and conduct the same exercise for 1907. Note:

Population growth: fractional growth in total prefectural population since 1884.

In 1907, the coefficient on **Burakumin PC** is significantly positive: the higher the fraction of burakumin in a prefecture, the higher the rates both of total crimes generally and of murders specifically. The magnitude of the effect is modest: an increase in burakumin concentration from 0.5% to 1% increases the prefecture-level crime rate by 0.00136 on a prefecture-level median of 0.00925. Note that total crimes are a distinctly urban phenomenon: the coefficient on population density is positive and significant. The significance of the **Burakumin PC** variable is robust to serially dropping **Taxpayers PC**, **Exogamy**, and **Population growth**.

Whether burakumin choose to leave the community or to remain burakumin may plausibly depend in part on opportunities in the criminal sector. If so, **Burakumin PC** is endogenous to **Total crime PC** and **Murders PC**. To address this phenomenon, in the third column of Panels A and B, I instrument the 1907 value of **Burakumin PC** with its 1868 predecessor, with a proxy for the location of Tokugawa-era buraku communities (**Shirayama shrines**), and with the fraction of burakumin in 1868 with hinin backgrounds (**Hinin fraction**). I thus add:

Shirayama shrines: The number of Shirayama shrines (said to have been a marker of the traditional location of burakumin communities), from Kikuchi (1961:691).

Hinin fraction: Fraction of hinin among the 1868 burakumin, as given in Buraku mondai (1980). Note that the hinin are said to have migrated out of the buraku communities during the late nineteenth century.

The coefficient on the instrumented **Burakumin PC** for 1907 is significantly positive for both **Total crimes PC** and **Murders PC**.

³⁹ I use the exogamy rate in 1921 and the taxpayer fraction in 1923 because of data availability.

D The rice riots

1 Prices

In 1918, burakumin across a wide range of prefectures brought violent crime to the center of public attention. Rice prices had trebled in a year, and urban residents rioted en masse. At the head of the many of the crowds – and at the head of the most violent crowds – were the burakumin. If anyone had not connected burakumin to crime before, in 1918 the newspapers did it for them.

The stimulus was not poverty. For farmers, the higher rice prices obviously translated directly into higher profits (Shakai 1938:54). To that income, they routinely added profitable textile-related by-employment besides. Yet urban residents enjoyed higher income as well. Incomes in the cities had soared. During the first decades of the century, the economy had boomed: young men and women moved to the city, and there earned high wages.

Granted, growth temporarily stalled in 1918. The indexed cost of living in Tokyo rose from 100 in 1914 to 174.3 in 1918, while wages had risen only to 160. But the standard of living would soon soar again, as it had been soaring since the late nineteenth century. Take the ratio of wages to the cost of living, similarly indexed at 100 for 1914. As of 1918, the ratio had in fact declined slightly to 95. Yet by 1921 it would climb to 135, and by 1924 to 150. Discounted for the cost of living, real wages rose 50 % over the decade from 1914 to 1924 (Shakai mondai shiryō kenkyūkai, 1938:54,57).

For poorer Japanese, rice had only recently become a staple anyway. Traditionally, many of the poor had eaten barley and millet, and sold their rice as a luxury good. With their newfound prosperity, however, farmers and urban workers shifted a larger and larger share of their diet from barley to rice (Harada, 1989:87).

In response to this new demand (boosted further by army procurement), the price of the luxury-turned-widespread-staple climbed. But supply was fixed, at least in the short-run. With their children earning high wages in the city, farmers lacked the labor with which to expand production. Boost demand and cap supply, and prices will rise. And so they did.

2 The riots

The protests began in a Toyama fishing village in July; the riots themselves started in Kyoto and Nagoya on August 10. In Kyoto, those riots lasted 23 days, in Hyogo 12 days, in Nara 14 days, and in Fukuoka 34 days. They ended nationally in mid-September. In due course, prosecutors would investigate 8,200

people, and judges would find 4,200 guilty. Despite the rampant burglary and arson (a capital offense where cities contain densely packed wooden homes) and occasional deaths, judges imposed relatively lenient punishment: no death sentences, and only three life imprisonments.⁴⁰

Mobs pillaged and burned stores, warehouses, and wealthy homes, and leading the riots were the burakumin. Contemporary journalists and police placed them at the head of the mobs, and modern scholars confirm that role (Takayama, 2005:66–69). Police reported upwards of 9,300 burakumin participating in the riots in Osaka alone. In Kyoto, Osaka, Hyogo and Nara, burakumin averaged 30 to 40 % of the rioters (Mitani, 1985:82). And within the mobs, journalists and police placed the burakumin among the most violent.⁴¹

At root, the riots were not about protest; they were about looting and extortion. Most often, the mobs targeted rice dealers, merchant houses, and wealthy homes. There, they used the threat of arson to extract cash or price cuts. If their targets hesitated or refused, they looted the building, drenched it with “oil” (probably kerosene), and burned it down. Operating through what one observer called “theft rings,” women and children followed the mobs to cart away valuables. If a mob torched a home during the night, the women and children appeared early the next morning to take any valuables that remained.⁴²

Mobs took this violence, arson, and extortion far across the country. When firemen arrived, they sometimes attacked the firemen. In Fukui, they destroyed the homes of the mayor and police chief, and burned down the police station. In Kobe, they torched 27 of the Suzuki shoten trading firm’s buildings. In towns in Fukuoka prefecture, they threw dynamite, and fought off the army with guns. They rioted on the largest scale in Osaka prefecture. There, mobs sometimes 20,000-strong extorted money, looted merchant safes, and torched buildings.⁴³

E The buraku in 1920

1 Incomes

The average burakumin in 1920 (and 1930) were still poorer than the general public. As during the Tokugawa period, they were not all poorer; incomes of the burakumin and the general public overlapped considerably. But take the 1920 Diet election.

⁴⁰ See generally Shakai (1938:2–4, 91–95, 102–04, 439).

⁴¹ See Shakai (1938:94, 132, 197, 216, 259, 260, 379, 391).

⁴² See Shakai (1938:97, 178, 216, 230, 260).

⁴³ See Shakai (1938:98, 101,128, 180, 184).

Eligibility to vote turned on tax liability, and over the country as a whole 5.42% (3.07 million) of the population voted. Within the buraku, eligibility rates ranged from Ishikawa where 0.17% of the burakumin voted, to Chiba's 3.32%. The mean of buraku eligibility rates across the prefectures came to 1.55%.

Or take the size of farms. Historian Haraguchi (2014:393) reports the following distribution of farm sizes across Japan in the mid-1930s:

	Under 1/2 cho	1/2 to 1 cho	1 cho & over
Buraku	51 %	32 %	9 %
All Japan	34	34	32

Note that one cho equals 9,917 square meters. As the voter eligibility data suggest, burakumin farmers tended to be among the relatively poorer farmers.

Historian Aoki (1998:21) compares the area cultivated within Nagano prefecture by burakumin and all farmers in 1931:

	All Nagano		Burakumin	
	Households	%	Households	%
less than 1/2 cho	74,880	36.3	1,761	72.9
1/2 to 1 cho	79,162	38.4	460	19.0
1 to 3 cho	49,532	24.1	183	7.6
3 cho & over	2,443	1.2	13	0.5
Total	206,017	100	2,417	100

The farm sizes for the Nagano public track the numbers in Haraguchi's national totals, while buraku farmers in Nagano tilled smaller farms than burakumin elsewhere. Other scholars (e. g. Yoshida, 1997:82–85) survey still more locations, but reach a similar general conclusion: burakumin farmers tended to be poorer than the general public, but not uniformly; many burakumin were richer than the poorest of their neighbors, and a few were actually quite wealthy.

2 Other indices

By many other observable indices, however, the burakumin as a whole in the 1920s and 1930s seemed not to face observably worse circumstances than their non-buraku peers. In Table 8, I regress various prefecture-level indices of social welfare

Table 8: Buraku and social welfare, Pre-World War II.

Dependent variable	A. Variables from 1920 and 1935					
	Illegitimacy		Divorce		Infant Mortality	
	1920	1935	1920	1935	1920	1935
Burakumin PC						
1921	4.70e-7** (2.07e-7)		-8.98e-8 (1.39e-7)		2.38e-7 (2.08e-7)	
1935		3.11e-7** (1.15e-7)		1.88e-8 (9.46e-8)		-7.68e-8 (1.04e-7)
Density						
1920	2.99e-5 (1.7e-5)		-1.58e-5 (1.14e-5)		4.23e-5** (1.71e-5)	
1935		-4.32e-7 (6.73e-6)		-3.74e-6 (5.52e-6)		-4.32e-7 (6.09e-6)
Exogamy	0.00137 (0.0409)	0.0866** (0.0425)	0.02974 (0.0273)	0.01613 (0.0390)	0.01595 (0.0411)	-0.05278 (0.0385)
Taxpayers PC	-0.6708 (0.7335)	-0.6008 (0.5080)	0.3659 (0.4914)	0.3587 (0.4170)	-1.375* (0.736)	-0.4641 (0.460)
n	41	41	41	41	41	41
Adj. R ²	0.11	0.11	-0.00	-0.08	0.07	0.05
Dependent variable	B. Variables from 1933 and 1934					
	Suicides (34)		Dysentery (33)		Tuberculosis (33)	
	1933	1934	1933	1934	1933	1934
Burakumin PC						
1933	-4.09e-10 (2.61e-10)		2.33e-10 (6.72e-10)		1.15e-9 (2.43e-9)	
Density						
1933	1.28e-8 (1.52e-8)		1.29e-7*** (3.92e-8)		1.13e-7 (1.42e-7)	

Exogamy	-0.000415*** (9.63e-5)	-0.000158 (0.000248)	-0.000541 (0.000896)
Taxpayers PC	0.000357 (0.00116)	0.004037 (0.00296)	0.009489 (0.0107)
n	41	41	41
Adj. R ² :	0.27	0.45	0.04

C. Physical Size, Age 7, 1933

Dependent variable	Height		Weight		Chest Circumference	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Burakumin PC 35	3.95e-6 (3.36e-6)	-3.24e-6 (5.20e-6)	1.37e-6 (1.51e-6)	1.45e-6 (1.22e-6)	0.001873*** (0.000405)	1.07e-6 (2.03e-6)
Density 35	0.0004652** (0.000196)	0.0004582 (0.000304)	3.22e-6 (8.83e-5)	-0.3804 (0.4516)	-0.0423* (0.0234)	-0.000166 (0.000119)
Exogamy	-2.320* (1.239)	-3.402* (1.919)	-0.3549 (0.5577)	-0.3804 (0.4516)	195.60 (149.31)	1.2402 (0.7505)
Taxpayers PC	16.803 (14.809)	43.488* (22.927)	4.485 (6.663)	9.500* (5.396)	1764.6 (1783.9)	4.2487 (8.967)
Adj. R ² :	0.38	0.25	-0.15	0.15	0.43	0.00

Notes: *, **, ***: Statistically significant at the 10, 5, and 1% levels, respectively. Regression coefficients followed by standard errors. OLS regressions. All regressions include a constant term.
Sources: See text and Table 1.

on the number of burakumin per capita, on population density, on the exogamy rate (as an index of burakumin-commoner interaction), and on the number of taxpayers per capita (as an index of income). The obvious qualifications to prefecture-level data apply. I create the following dependent variables:

Suicide rate: Number of suicides in 1934, divided by the total population, from Naikaku (1935).

Dysentery rate: Number of deaths from dysentery in 1933, divided by the total population, from Naimu sho (1933).

Tuberculosis rate: Number of deaths from tuberculosis in 1933, divided by the total population, from Naimu sho (1933).

Height: Height of boys and girls at age 7, 1933, as reported in Monbu sho (1937).

Weight: Weight of boys and girls at age 7, 1933, as reported in Monbu sho (1937).

Chest circumference: Chest circumference of boys and girls at age 7, 1933, as reported in Monbu sho (1937).

Consider the regression results in Table 8. I again control for income, population density, and exogamy. At the prefectural level, infant mortality is correlated with population density (it is an urban phenomenon), but not with the fraction of burakumin in either 1921 or 1935 (Panel A). Suicide rates are not correlated with the density of burakumin (Panel B). Death rates from dysentery are correlated with population density (again, it is an urban phenomenon), but not with the fraction of burakumin (Panel B). Death rates from tuberculosis are not associated with the fraction of burakumin (Panel B).

In general, the average size of children will reflect their nutritional history. Yet burakumin density is not negatively associated with the heights, weights, or chest circumferences of seven year-old boys and girls. Instead, it is significantly positively associated with the chest circumferences of the boys (Panel C).

3 Non-marital births

Despite no observable signs of poorer public health (according to these measures) than among their non-buraku peers, by 1922 the burakumin were indeed associated with the most basic characteristic of community dysfunction – the fraction of non-marital births. To be sure, communities varied in how promptly newly weds registered their marriage. But controlling for income, population density, and exogamy, the fraction of burakumin in both 1921 and 1935 were positively correlated with non-marital birth rates (Table 8 Panel A).

Similarly, take the non-marital birth rates specifically for burakumin and for the general public (Naimu sho, 1921). Among the public in 1920, prefecture-level illegitimacy rates ranged from 0.54 % in Miyagi to 15.9 % in Osaka, with the prefectural numbers averaging 8.1 %. Among burakumin in 1921, those prefecture-level rates ranged from 2.01 % in Shizuoka (with 14,000 burakumin residents) to the astonishing 60.7 % in Okayama (43,000 burakumin), with the prefectural numbers averaging 19.6 %. If we compare the illegitimacy rates for several key prefectures (1920 for the general public, 1921 for the burakumin), those numbers were:

	General public	Burakumin
Fukuoka	7.2 %	14.8 % (69,000 burakumin)
Hyogo	10.0	19.3 (108,000)
Osaka	15.9	22.5 (48,000)
Hiroshima	7.3	13.0 (40,000)
Okayama	10.6	60.7 (43,000)
Kyoto	13.4	21.7 (42,000)

4 Crime rates

During the 1920s and 1930s, burakumin density was again prominently correlated with crime rates. In 1921 the burakumin were only 1.46 % of the general population. Even in the large urban centers of Kyoto, Osaka, Hyogo and Fukuoka, they comprised less than 3 % of the population. Nonetheless, even at the prefectural level, higher percentages of burakumin were indeed associated with significantly higher rates of crime.

In the fourth and sixth regressions of Table 7 Panels A and B, I use OLS. The coefficient on the density of burakumin (in percentages; **Burakumin PC**) is positive and significant for both 1922 and 1935 for both total crimes and the murder rate. Because – as described earlier – burakumin density is plausibly endogenous to the crime rate, I use the instrumented values of burakumin concentration in the fifth and seventh regressions. The coefficient on the instrumented **Burakumin PC** is positive and significant for both 1922 and 1935. For the murder rates, the coefficient on the instrumented **Burakumin PC** is significantly positive for both 1922 and 1935. The actual magnitude of the effect is, again, modest. An increase from about 0.5 % burakumin to 1 % would increase the aggregate prefecture-level total crime rate by about 0.0014 on a prefecture-level median of 0.0286.

From these prefecture-level crime rates, turn to the rate of crime specifically among the burakumin (Naimu sho, 1921). For the general public in 1922, the combined battery-murder rates (the buraku data offer only the sum of the two) ranged from 15.8 per 100,000 population in Okinawa to 95.8 in Fukuoka, with a prefectural mean of 41.7. Among burakumin in 1921, the combined battery-murder rate ranged from 6.9 per 100,000 in Shizuoka (with 14,000 burakumin) to 231.7 in Miyazaki (2,600 burakumin), with a prefectural mean of 74.7. If we compare six key prefectures (1922 for the general public, 1921 for the burakumin), the combined battery-murder rates per 100,000 population were:

	General public	Burakumin
Fukuoka	95.8	103.8 (69,000 burakumin)
Hyogo	76.7	36.2 (108,000)
Osaka	73.4	225.4 (48,000)
Hiroshima	36.5	49.8 (40,000)
Okayama	40.3	42.0 (43,000)
Kyoto	48.9	52.2 (42,000)

Among the six key buraku prefectures, only in Hyogo was the battery-murder rate lower in the buraku than among the general public.

VII The invention of identity politics, 1922–1945

A Context

As the 1910s closed, the burakumin were poor but not destitute. They tended to farm smaller plots than others. They tended to earn lower incomes. But not all burakumin were poor, and those doing well continued to identify with the community and to contribute to its social and economic infrastructure. At the prefectural level the buraku were associated with higher rates of crime and non-marital births, but not with noticeably higher rates of suicide, diphtheria, tuberculosis, or malnutrition.

Crucially, only partly did Japanese treat burakumin status as a loosely inherited status; instead, they also used the term to describe a particularly

dysfunctional pattern of behavior. Only partly, in other words, did they call someone a burakumin if his parents had been burakumin; in part, they called him a burakumin (regardless of his ancestry) if he exhibited the constellation of characteristics associated with the classic buraku: they called a neighborhood a buraku if its residents lived by the “cracker”-like code they called “eta-konjo”: if it suffered from extremely high crime rates, and if its families had largely collapsed.

The way a city’s residents could respond to a slum illustrates the way they could use the term “eta” and “buraku” to describe behavior rather than lineage. In Kobe and Kyoto, for example, poor workers – whether burakumin or no – who moved to the city found cheap housing in what had been buraku districts. As they did, writes activist (but nonconformist) historian Fujino (2009:23–24), others subjected them to “the same discrimination they imposed on the burakumin.” By contrast, in Yokohama poor migrants created two large slums in areas with no burakumin core at all. Notwithstanding their lack of any historic connection to the burakumin, Yokohama commoners called the residents of these two slums “eta.” “Eta mura,” they named the neighborhoods, or eta districts (Fujino 2009:24–29). Apparently, the people in the areas lived by the norms associated with the buraku – and other citizens responded by calling them eta districts.

Bear in mind the obvious implication this poses for Tables 7 and 8: if the public used “buraku” and “eta” in part to describe behavior rather than identify lineage, then the conclusion that pre-1920 buraku status correlated with crime and illegitimacy becomes straightforwardly circular. Yes, neighbors called a neighborhood a buraku because their predecessors had called them buraku districts for decades. But sometimes they simply called a neighborhood a buraku because it showed high rates of crime and illegitimacy.

In 1922, all this would begin to change.

B The Suiheisha

Within these – poor but not destitute – communities, identity politics broke violently into the open in 1922. Over the course of the decade, young intellectuals from the buraku upper class and criminal buraku entrepreneurs would together invent for the still-only-loosely identified communities a new, more sharply defined, and largely fictitious collective persona. In the process, they would launch a lucrative shake-down strategy that would reward those burakumin who chose to invest in criminal rather than mainstream careers; that would drive out burakumin who chose to live by standard Japanese behavioral norms instead; that

would profoundly escalate public hostility toward the group; and that would generate ever-increasing levels of organized crime and public subsidies.

In November of 1921, several young burakumin from the Nara town of Kashihara banded together to launch a “liberation” movement. Their commoner peers were forming a wide swath of Bolshevik and Anarcho-Syndicalist cells, and these young men wanted one of their own. They would call it the Zenkoku Suiheisha, they decided: the National Levellers. Toward that end, they would first redefine the buraku as an “outcaste” community with roots in a leather-workers’ guild and a history of unmitigated discrimination.

Come March 1922, the burakumin intellectuals held a 4,000-strong rally in Kyoto and announced the group’s formation. Obviously echoing the Communist Manifesto, they urged their cohorts to action. “Burakumin of the nation, unite!” they proclaimed (Kyoto, 1922:3; Hasegawa, 1927:12–13, 17).

The young men immediately established a central office in Kyoto. Over the course of the first year, they would form offices in eight of the more prominent burakumin prefectures, including Osaka, Hyogo, and Nara. Over the next several years, they would establish still more.

To all slurs everywhere, the young men vowed to respond with “tettei kyudan,” or “total denunciation” (Kyoto, 1922; Hasegawa, 1927:17). They had in fact invented the term “kyudan,” but apparently meant to evoke by it something close to the “self-criticism” that the Red Guards and Khmer Rouge would later enforce in the P.R.C. and Cambodia. Should anyone insult a burakumin, they would rally their cohort to mob violence. If lucky, the speaker would escape with no more than ritual self-abasement. Occasionally, he would face brutal violence and a financial shakedown.

The term was new, but the strategy was not. Burakumin had been using the tactic for several years. In 1909, they attacked a village mayor in Okayama over a claimed slur (Watanabe, 1965:717). In 1916, they rioted over a demeaning local newspaper article near Fukuoka (Takayama, 2005:53–58; Fukuoka, 2003:58–60). And in 1910, they took offense at what a Kyoto village mayor had called them, and promptly beat him to death (Kyoto Buraku, 1995).

As the allusion to the Communist Manifesto suggests, the founders of the group placed their loyalty in the fringe left. The Bolsheviks had taken power in Russia in late 1917. By the early 1920s, a large assortment of groups on the far left were trying to organize workers and (in many cases) foment revolution in Japan. Police did their best to monitor them all. They watched the Suiheisha as one of the many.

By 1924, self-styled Bolsheviks seemed to have taken over the Suiheisha. As in many of the 1920s fringe groups in Japan, relative moderates, Anarcho-syndicalists, and Leninist Bolsheviks had fought for control over the

Suiheisha. And as in so many other such groups, it was a fight the Bolsheviks at least initially seemed to have won.⁴⁴ The event that precipitated the Bolshevik takeover involved a purported police spy. Among the moderates, declared insurgents in late 1924, was a paid police informant. In the ensuing chaos, the Bolsheviks purged the incumbents and took control.

C The ideological origins of the fictive past

The orthodox buraku history of itself – the history (detailed in Section II, above) on which virtually all Western accounts rely – dates from this period. In the 1920s and 30s, Japanese intellectuals sought to write histories that fit within the elaborate schematic that Marx and Engels had outlined. Those most loyal to the Party sought to meet the more detailed instructions from the Comintern as well.

For most scholars, the Marxist schematic entailed describing the Tokugawa period as one or another variant of feudalism. Necessarily, this required characterizing the Tokugawa government as a rigidly hierarchical regime. The description of the social order as incorporating a pervasively binding four-class-plus-outcaste formula followed: the Tokugawa regime enforced a fixed status hierarchy, and consigned the kawata to the bottom of the ladder.

Second, the schematic entailed describing the regime as ruthlessly exploitative, and the peasants as bleakly immiserated. Toward this end, writers characterized the Tokugawa economy as contracting, and the kawata as the most destitute of all. The Tokugawa regime left farmers brutally impoverished, in other words, and the kawata poorer still.

Third, ideological fidelity required describing the Tokugawa industrial and commercial world by the guilds Marx had placed at the heart of *German Ideology*. That Suiheisha activists and allied intellectuals defined the buraku through an imagined ancestry in the leather-working craft, explains historian Kentaro Minegishi (1996:224–25), reflects this importance of *German Ideology*. To fit the history Marx had outlined in the essay, in other words, activists and writers transformed the kawata into the leather-working guild. A few village kawata had indeed handled dead carcasses. A few town kawata had tanned leather. Marx required guilds, so guilds it would be: the kawata became the leather-worker's guild.

Starting in the 1920s, historians of the buraku began to track this newly created identity politics. Sadakichi Takahashi started the enterprise, writes historian Kurokawa (1989:92–97), with his 1924 history of the group. Born to a

44 See Hasegawa (1927:93–94, 102–03, 148); Takayama (2005:199–204).

buraku, Takahashi had helped found the Suiheisha. Soon thereafter, he would travel secretly to the U.S.S.R. where he would join the Soviet Communist Party and serve on Comintern. Of the academic historians, continues Kurokawa, University of Kyoto historian Kiyoshi Inoue was easily the most prominent. So loyal was he that he worked not just to describe a buraku experience that followed traditional Marxist principles, but to create a buraku history that fit within the confines of Comintern's 1932 mandates to boot.

To modern scholars, these mid-century Marxist premises can lead to what seem odd debates. Marx traced peasants to serfs, and serfs to slaves. Can the burakumin trace their ancestors to prehistoric slaves (e. g., Watanabe, 1965:16–18; Kikuchi 1961:56)? Answer: no. Sixteenth century warlord Oda Nobunaga faced several violent peasant rebellions. Might he have banished buraku ancestors to outcaste status as punishment for participating in the rebellions (e. g. Funakoshi, 1976; Teraki, 1996:chs. 4–5)? Answer: again, no. Nobunaga usually just slaughtered his opponents. And did the class hierarchy come first, and assignment to the despised occupation follow? Or did the occupation come first, and the class structure follow (Teraki, 1996:19–20; Watabane, 1963:8–9)? Answer: Marxism faded from the universities before historians reached a consensus.

From time to time, the most militant of the buraku activists (e. g. Asada, 1979:297–98) claimed that the Tokugawa government deliberately consigned their ancestors to outcaste status in order to let it oppress the broader peasant class more effectively. As Neary (1989:18; see also Ohnuki-Tierney 1989:94) articulated it (apparently with approval), the regime treated the burakumin badly so that “the rebelliousness of the peasants and urban dwellers would be reduced with the reminder that there was a group which was even worse off than they were.” This was not, however, a theory that many serious Japanese scholars ever endorsed (see Saito and Oishi, 1995:56).

D The geography of the Suiheisha

1 The exercise

To examine which communities organized Suiheisha branches, I begin with simple OLS (again, the usual caveats for prefecture-level data apply). I find that burakumin formed the branches: in communities where the concentration of burakumin was high; in urban areas; in areas with a cohort of wealthy burakumin; and in areas with relatively more hostile ties to the general population.

As dependent variable, I take the number of Suiheisha branch offices in a prefecture in 1933, a decade after its formation:

Suiheisha BO 1933: The number of branch offices of the Suiheisha, as given in Watanabe (1965).

As controls, I take the values of the explanatory variables immediately prior to the Suiheisha's national formation. For the basic model, I posit that the number of branch offices would reflect the fraction (in percentages) of burakumin in the population (**Burakumin PC 1921**), the extent of the group's integration into the general population (**Exogamy 1921**), the urbanization of the prefecture (**Density 1921**), and the fraction of wealthy families within the buraku. As a proxy for the fraction of wealthy burakumin, I create:

Buraku prefectural voters PBC (per burakumin capita) 1921: The number of burakumin eligible to vote in the prefectural elections (suffrage depended on income), divided by the number of burakumin, as given in Naimu sho (1921).

Additionally, I construct:

Buraku crime rate, PBC: Number of burakumin committing a crime in 1921, divided by the number of burakumin, as given in Naimu sho (1921).

Buraku public assistance, PBC: Number of burakumin on public assistance in 1921, divided by the number of burakumin, as given in Naimu sho, 1921).

Buraku agricultural ratio: Number of burakumin households engaged in agriculture in 1935, divided by the number of burakumin households, as given in Chuo Yuwa (1936).

Anti-liberation riots: 1 if the prefecture experienced any riots opposed to the 1871 liberation edict, 0 otherwise, as given in Inagaki et al. (1993). The variable proxies for the extent of local hostility toward the buraku at the close of the Tokugawa period.

2 Results

I report the resulting regressions in Table 9. They suggest a couple of straightforward conclusions. First, the coefficient on the number of burakumin per capita is positive and significant: burakumin tended to organize Suiheisha

Table 9: The location of Suiheisha branches.

A. Basic Regression					
Dependent variable	<i>Suiheisha branch offices, 1933</i>				
Burakumin PC 21	3.760*** (1.088)				
Exogamy 21	10.305 (18.298)				
Density 21	0.000112** (5.19e-5)				
Buraku Prefl voters	541.60*** (182.59)				
n:	42				
Adj. R ² :	0.36				
B. Additional Regressions: Regressions of the number of Suiheisha branch offices in 1933 on the control variables given in Panel A, and the following additional independent variables					
	Murder rate 20	Tot Crime rate 20	Buraku Cr rate 21	B illegit rate 21	B divorce rate 21
Coef.	96,404	29.194	223.91	6.3198	-11.884
S.e.	(137,034)	(336.52)	(225.80)	(13.004)	(24.084)
Adj. R ²	0.35	0.34	0.36	0.34	0.34
	B public assist 21	Buraku agricul	Buraku size 21	Hinin frac	Anti-lib riots .
Coef.	-528.87	0.8186	-0.0023	-14.444	-0.5976
S.e.	(864.44)	(6.202)	(0.0130)	(10.921)	(2.447)
Adj. R ²	0.35	0.34	0.34	0.37	0.34

Notes: *, **, ***: Statistically significant at the 10, 5, and 1% levels, respectively. OLS regressions. Regression coefficients followed by standard errors. All regressions include a constant term.

Sources: See text and Table 1.

branches in areas with relatively high concentrations of the group. Second, the coefficient on population density is positive and significant: the Suiheisha were a urban phenomenon.⁴⁵

Turn to two somewhat more curious observations. First, the coefficient on the fraction of burakumin rich enough to vote is positive and significant:

⁴⁵ If I instead use the number of burakumin (rather than the number of burakumin per capita), then the coefficient on the number of burakumin is strongly significant, and the coefficient on density is no longer significant.

Suiheisha branches were more common where wealthy burakumin formed a larger fraction of the buraku. Recall the early disputes within the Suiheisha between the Bolsheviks and Anarcho-Syndicalists. Engaging in a debate along those lines entails at least a passing acquaintance with Trotsky, Lenin, Kropotkin, and Proudhon. Necessarily, a familiarity with those names and ideas entails a background in a home with a commitment to education (e.g. Aoki, 1982:74).

Second, the coefficient on the exogamy rate is insignificant: the number of branches seems not to have been correlated with the level of interaction between the buraku and the general population. In fact, however, the observation misleads. The pairwise correlation between the exogamy rate and the number of branches was -0.26 , almost significant at the 10% level. Burakumin, in other words, seem to have been less likely to establish Suiheisha branches in areas where they freely mixed with the population. The coefficient is statistically insignificant in the regression only because of the strong correlation among the independent variables.

None of the following independent variables is associated with the establishment of a Suiheisha branch (see Panel B). With buraku income (proxied by the fraction of voters) held constant, Suiheisha branches were not associated with crime rates. Similarly, they were not associated with buraku illegitimacy rates, buraku divorce rates, or welfare dependency in the buraku. They were not associated with the fraction of burakumin in agriculture or with the size of the buraku. They bore no relation to the ratio of hinin to kawata in the buraku in 1868. And they were not associated with any anti-buraku riots in the wake of the 1871 liberation decree.

E From Bolsheviks to opportunists

1 Matsumoto

If the anarchists were no match for the Bolsheviks, the latter would soon prove no match for the buraku criminal underworld. Over the next several years, control over the Suiheisha would shift again, this time from the Bolsheviks to a largely apolitical cohort of criminal entrepreneurs. These entrepreneurs, in turn, would then use the group's new fictitious history to extort increasingly large sums from private firms and local governments. Selective out-migration followed: the logic follows classic Becker – burakumin with the lowest opportunity costs to criminal careers stayed; those with the most to lose from this new collective criminal identity left, and migrated into the general public.

In early 1923, the head of a construction firm in Fukuoka, Jiichiro Matsumoto, organized the all-Kyushu branch of the Suiheisha. His was a meteoric rise. By early 1925, he chaired the national Suiheisha Central Committee.⁴⁶

Recall the 1924 discovery of a “police spy.” Obviously, the police might indeed have paid an insider to monitor the fringe-left group. Obviously too, the Bolsheviks might have used the story of a police spy to purge their moderate rivals. Hasegawa (1927), however, thought a police informant unlikely. Hasegawa served as a career prosecutor – probably within an elite cohort. Apparently, he had worked extensively on Suiheisha crime. In the mid-1920s, the central personnel office seems to have seconded him to a research post, and commissioned him to compile the information available on the group into a book-length reference for prosecutors nation-wide. Hasegawa produced an astonishingly perceptive text. He did not dismiss outright the possibility that the police might have paid an insider. He thought it more likely, however, that Matsumoto and his allies had simply invented the story to take control themselves.⁴⁷

Historian Neary (2010:1) tells us that 1970s burakumin families kept Matsumoto’s portrait on their “god shelf” next to the photographs of their dead ancestors. To be sure, no one so dominated the pre-war buraku movement as this flamboyant, bombastic, and sometimes bizarrely violent Matsumoto. Yet no one so epitomized the buraku criminal underworld either. Hasegawa (1927:181) himself remarked in 1927 that “many people think of him as the don of an organized crime syndicate.” Consistent with that description, he noted that Matsumoto had already bought out a local geisha from her employment contract and installed her as his mistress (Hasegawa, 1927:181).

Born in 1887 to a buraku farm family near Fukuoka, at age 16 Matsumoto left Kyushu for middle school in Kyoto. Ordinarily, children would have left at age 13. Matsumoto might have left for Kyoto voluntarily, observes his otherwise sympathetic biographer Fumihiko Takayama. But he suspects that – for whatever reason – he left because he no longer could safely stay (Takayama, 2005:29).

A few years later, Matsumoto sailed for north China. He loaded drugs onto a pull-cart, and declared himself a peripatetic “First Class Japanese Military Physician.” He conducted tests, he diagnosed, and he sold his patients medicine. Demand was high. “The stuff sold,” his later secretary explained. “You could put tooth-brushing powder in a packet and call it stomach medicine. It’d

⁴⁶ See Hasegawa (1927:52, 84); Fukuoka (2003:67).

⁴⁷ Hasegawa (1927:77–78, 84); for a more conventional interpretation, see Bayliss (2013:207 n.93); Asaji (2009:ch. 8).

still sell.” Unfortunately for Matsumoto, fraudulent doctors peddling fake medicines gave Japan a bad name. In 1910, the Japanese consulate threw him out of the country (Takayama, 2005:38–39).

2 Violence

Back in in Fukuoka, in 1911 Matsumoto organized a construction firm. His older brother managed the business, and he coordinated the workers. Much of the work he did for the local railroad (Takayama, 2005:46). The bidding could cause disputes, and in March 1923 Matsumoto’s workers quarreled with employees from the rival Matsuo construction firm. Both firms worked for the local railroad. But the custom, according to the BLL’s otherwise hagiographic account (Buraku 1987:74), was for the firms to rig the bid with the understanding that the winning firm would share its profits with the losers. The Matsumoto firm had won the bid, and now refused to share the profits.

Later on the night of the quarrel, three Matsumoto workers went to the inn at which Kotaro Matsuo, owner of the rival firm, was staying. When Matsuo came to the door, they beat him. They grabbed a bicycle that was there and beat him with the bicycle. Other Matsumoto workers joined the fray and attacked Matsuo with swords. By midnight, he was dead.

While the Matsuo employees were attending his wake the next day, fifty Matsumoto workers again stormed the group. They threw rocks, trampled doors, and drew swords. They left three of the Matsuo group badly injured. The police arrested thirty Matsumoto employees. They arrested Matsumoto himself too, but eventually discharged him on grounds that he had not been at the scene of the murder.⁴⁸

Heading the new Kyushu branch of the Suiheisha, Matsumoto announced that the heir to the Tokugawa shogunate, Prince Iesato Tokugawa, should return his imperial peerage. The burakumin suffered because of his ancestors’ brutal reign, declared Matsumoto. In remorse for their ruthless oppression, he should resign. Tokugawa would have none of it, so Matsumoto sent a young Suiheisha member to Tokyo with a gun and a knife. When the police stopped the would-be assassin, they discovered Matsumoto’s role. Matsumoto acknowledged his part in the assassination attempt, and served four months in prison. In fact, however, the attack continued anyway: another of

48 Takayama (2005:144–47); Buraku (1987:74); Fukuoka (2003:68).

Matsumoto's followers travelled to Tokyo, broke into Tokugawa's estate, and burned his house down.⁴⁹

The Suiheisha seem to have had rare access to guns. Matsumoto procured the handgun for Tokugawa's planned assassin. Other Suiheisha sometimes brought guns to their *kyudan* (Hasegawa, 1927:47–49). Post-war BLL leader Asada (1979:34–35, 52) recalled carrying guns to Suiheisha events. He recalled his colleagues carried guns. Perhaps tied to the number of construction firms in the buraku, the Suiheisha also had access to explosives. Asada remembered bringing dynamite to events. When Matsumoto started a dispute with local reservists in 1926, the fight quickly escalated. Matsumoto and his colleagues decided to blow up the military base, and Matsumoto obtained the dynamite for the occasion.⁵⁰

3 Extortion

The Suiheisha's denunciations (*kyudan*) shaded into simple extortion from the start. Once Matsumoto took control of the national Suiheisha, members of his Kyushu branch began shaking down local firms. From 1925 and into 1926, police counted eight times that the Fukuoka Suiheisha threatened denunciations and settled for cash (Hasegawa, 1927:56–62). For the Suiheisha more generally, however, local governments promised the easiest money. Very few denunciations involved actual discrimination. Instead, most just concerned pejorative epithets, and many were schoolyard taunts among children. But from 69 *kyudan* in 1922, the number reached 1,046 in 1924 and 1,025 in 1925 (Hasegawa, 1927:1–2).

In the typical case, one child would call another “eta.” The burakumin child would complain to his parents. The parents would obtain an apology from the other child's parents. They and others from the buraku would then demand an additional apology from the teacher for not teaching the children properly. They would demand an apology from the school principal for not supervising the teachers properly. They would attack the police for not stopping the taunts. Finally, they would turn to the local government for not administering the

⁴⁹ Hasegawa (1927:29, 43–45); Takayama (2005:182–198, 203); Fukuoka (2003:68).

⁵⁰ BLL-oriented scholars claim the police planted the dynamite (e. g. Bayliss, 2013:208 n.995). Hasegawa (1927:30, 38) writes that the Suiheisha coerced a colleague into confessing that the police paid him to plant the dynamite. Consistent with this narrative, the government prosecuted the Suiheisha member for coercing that colleague into confessing.

schools appropriately – and settle for subsidies to the local buraku (Aoki, 1998:143).

4 Consequences

The flamboyantly criminal turn in the Suiheisha obviously increased the wariness with which members of the public eyed the buraku. Faced with the group's tactics, they responded by doing their best to stay out of the way. With the growth of the Suiheisha, reported the Kyoto police (Kyoto, 1924:258), commoners stopped distinguishing between social and anti-social burakumin. Instead, they now viewed all burakumin suspiciously. "Never mind that most burakumin opposed the Suiheisha," the police reported. "The violent tactics of the Suiheisha eliminated that sympathy."

What is more, employers who had earlier hired burakumin began to discharge them. Kyoto police described the development in 1924 (Kyoto, 1924:260):

Large and small factories for fabric weaving, for spinning, for dyeing, for electrical goods, for steel, for ceramics; road crews; gardeners; various merchants – all these employers had been hiring ordinary citizens and burakumin alike. Since the Suiheisha movement began, however, disputes over claimed discrimination have begun to arise between employees and employers. Many employers have responded by not hiring any burakumin. In fact, in order to discharge the burakumin they have, some employers announce that they face a business downturn and lay off all of their employees. They then hire back only the ordinary citizens."

And burakumin began to leave the community. Basic logic suggests that those who left would have been among the more successful burakumin, the men and women who contributed to the group's social and economic infrastructure. Recall from Figure 1 that from 1870 to 1935, the burakumin population grew in tandem with that of the general public. After 1935, the general population continued to increase while the number of burakumin hovered at 1 million. Burakumin did not have a lower birth rate; they simply left.

To use Hirschman's (1970) classic distinction, burakumin faced low costs of "exit." To leave the group, burakumin did not need to change their names, alter their appearance, change their speech, switch religions. They simply needed to move. To fight the leadership of the community (to exercise Hirschman's "voice"), they would have needed to confront Matsumoto and the criminal syndicates. Given the low cost of exit, burakumin who chose to invest in mainstream careers did not try to exercise voice. Instead, after the 1930s they apparently began to exit in massive numbers.

VIII The shake-down politics of the post-war buraku

A Introduction

The Suiheisha's ties to the criminal underworld – ties that began with Matsumoto's ascendance in the 1920s – turned central after the war. The group's post-war successor BLL retained its fringe-left patina, but only as a patina. First and foremost, the BLL was an organization dedicated to using the threat of violence to shake down governments and extract buraku-specific transfer payments. By manipulating construction and land-sale contracts, the League's leaders then diverted large fractions of that money to their private accounts.

In early 1946, several former Suiheisha leaders – most prominently, Matsumoto and Asada – reconstructed the group. They jettisoned the earlier name, and called the new organization the Buraku Liberation National Committee. Matsumoto himself had won election to the Diet in 1936. He now won election again in 1947, this time under the Japan Socialist Party. In 1955, the group renamed itself the Buraku Liberation League.

The BLL was about identity politics. It was not about class politics, and the distinction matters. The defining characteristic of the BLL was its relentless focus on subsidies specifically for the buraku. It did not push for subsidies to the poor. Many people were poor in 1950s Japan, and most were not burakumin. A substantial minority of burakumin were not poor at all.

In the course of this discussion, bear two points in mind. First, as noted, the burakumin were not descended from any ritually unclean pre-modern guild. Instead, they were simply descended from one only informally identified group – a group largely limited to the areas adjoining the inland sea – of poor farmers. If many Japanese avoided marrying or hiring them in the early post-war years, the reason for that avoidance was massively over-determined. If ever ethnic discrimination were rational, it was rational here. Given the place that violent crime, illegitimacy, and the criminal syndicates played in the buraku, one hardly needs any notion of ritual purity to understand why some Japanese might not have wanted to marry or hire a person from the group.

Second, the construction projects afforded enormous opportunity for corruption. By the 1980s, it was an opportunity that had become flamboyantly clear. “It wasn't unusual for BLL members to be current or former members” of the mob, wrote burakumin journalist Kadooka (2012:53–54). “Some people

marched into battle under the [Suiheisha-BLL's distinctive emblem of a] crown of thorns out of anger toward discrimination. Others marched with plans to make a buck through the [government-funded] buraku [construction] projects. In any case, there was a time when the historic anti-discrimination group had current or former members of the yakuza holding important positions.”

B *All Romance*

BLL leader Zennosuke Asada led the first major post-war government shake-down. In 1951, the *All Romance* pulp magazine published a short story called “Special Buraku.” Written by one pseudonymous Sugiyama (1951), the story told of the tender (if somewhat maudlin) love between an idealistic young physician and the daughter of a Korean moonshine brewer in a Kyoto buraku. Sugiyama described the plight of the burakumin with sympathy and compassion. Despite its poverty, he found in the buraku a cohesive community tied together by deep, tender, and passionate human bonds. And in the love across class lines, he located the promise of reconciliation among the various communities, and of the redemptive power of love.

For Asada, the story offered the chance to monetize the identity politics that the Suiheisha had invented. The key lay in the fact that the author worked as an interim employee in the Kyoto sanitation department. His article was flagrantly “discriminatory,” declared Asada (1979, ch. 7; Morooka 1980, ch. 8). Given that he worked for the city, Kyoto was responsible for the outrage. Buraku militants attacked the mayor. They attacked the sanitation department. They attacked one department after another.

And by all this, Asada and his cohorts were spectacularly successful. In 1951, the Kyoto governments had spent 11.4 million yen on the buraku. In 1952, they spent 46.5 million (Zenkoku 1998, tab. 12). The buraku budget in adjacent Osaka went from 2.4 to 4.1 million; Hyogo's went from 0 to 8 million; Wakayama's went from 8.5 to 24.4 million; and Shiga, Okayama, Hiroshima, Yamaguchi, Ehime, and Fukuoka all began lavishing substantial sums on buraku where before they had spent nothing at all (id.).

The hapless Sugiyama was apparently so much collateral damage. The mayor quickly promised Asada he would fire him (Asada, 1979:184). The sanitation department assured buraku leaders that he obviously deserved criminal punishment (Kyoto 1991:474–75). Sugiyama never published another story. An “outrage” his apparently seldom-read love story has remained ever since.

C The Sayama murder⁵¹

To extort successfully, the criminal wing of the buraku needed to be able visibly to threaten extreme violence. The role of the “denunciation” sessions lay in the way that they enabled that wing to keep the threat both visible and credible. Most sessions were relatively small-scale campaigns, but a few took public stage. Perhaps the most bizarrely violent of the denunciations involved a rape and murder in suburban Tokyo.

In 1963, a family in the town of Sayama found a ransom note in their front door. Their high school daughter Yoshie had not returned home, and her kidnapper (or kidnappers) demanded money. The family tried to contact the kidnapper, but found their daughter raped, murdered, and buried in a shallow grave instead. Three weeks later, the police arrested a young unemployed burakumin named Kazuo Ishikawa. He ran with a bad crowd, had a criminal history, and lied to the police. After long interrogation (but not torture), he confessed to the kidnapping, rape and murder. The court sentenced him to death (commuted to life in prison on appeal), he served time, and in 1994 the government released him on parole.

The BLL transformed Ishikawa into a buraku hero, an innocent victim of police bias. In fact, Ishikawa fairly obviously played a key part in the rape-murder. By making him a celebrity, the BLL ensured that a curious scholar could easily locate the ransom note and Ishikawa’s handwritten confession (e.g. Kanno, 2009). The bizarrely distinctive handwriting and illiteracy patterns in the two documents indicate that the police almost certainly found the right man. Given the higher rate of violent crime among the burakumin, they probably did focus first on the buraku through a Japanese variant of racial profiling. They may well have planted other evidence. They interrogated him for an astonishing month and a half without an attorney present. They may even have tricked him into making the confession that he did. But they pretty clearly had the right man.

Other circumstances do suggest that Ishikawa may not have raped and killed her alone. Two days after the police located the girl’s body, one of the workers on her family farm was found dead in an empty well. The police called it a suicide, and explained that he had drunk pesticide and dived into the well. Five days later, a farmer who had reported a group of three suspicious men to the police on the evening of her kidnapping ended up dead too. The police called this one a suicide as well: he had stabbed himself through the heart with a knife. Four months after the district court sentenced Ishikawa to hang,

⁵¹ Much of the material below is from Ramseyer (forthcoming); Kanno (2009).

Yoshie's older sister was found dead. She had drunk poison (maybe agricultural pesticide), concluded the police. In 1966, a laborer on the Sayama pig farm where Ishikawa had once worked lay dead on the train tracks. In 1977, one of Yoshie's brothers was found hanged. And again in 1977, unidentified assailants beat to death a journalist covering Ishikawa's case.⁵² But the handwriting and illiteracy patterns in the ransom demand and Ishikawa's other writings leave little doubt that he was at least part of a gang that raped and killed the girl.

Guilty as the evidence seems to indicate he was, the BLL declared Ishikawa innocent anyway, and turned the rallying cry into a national movement. With allies among 1960s Trotskyite New Left, buraku leaders made their threats of violence as credible as could be.⁵³ In 1969, demonstrators threw Molotov cocktails at the Urawa District Court and occupied the building. In 1974, they organized a 110,000-strong mob in support of Ishikawa; broke into the Tokyo High Court; attacked the court staff with steel pipes; and tried to fire bomb the home of the judge presiding over the high court appeal. In 1976, they attacked that high-court judge in his car with bats, and in 1977 tried to firebomb the home of the judge handling the Supreme Court appeal. In 1979 they tried to firebomb a Ministry of Justice housing complex. In 1990 they did firebomb the home of the district court judge who initially sentenced Ishikawa to death. And in 1995 the home of the high-court presiding judge finally burned to the ground.

D The communist purge⁵⁴

Through the *All Romance* dispute, BLL leaders decisively raised the level of funds the Kyoto government spent on the buraku. They soon realized, however, that there were limits to how much they could redistribute from non-buraku Kyoto residents. To raise the transfer payments higher, they needed to tap the national government (e. g. Amagasaki, 1988:387).

Toward that end, the BLL began a strenuous decade-and-a-half campaign. The process involved many steps, but the group reached its goal in 1969. That year, the national government began a program to direct massive funds specifically to the buraku. By the time the government terminated the program in

⁵² See, e. g. Kanno (2009:301–03; Jiken kankeisha ga 6nin jisatsu, henshi shita Sayama jiken [The Sayama Case in which 6 People Connected with the Case Committed Suicide or Died Under Mysterious Circumstances], available at: <http://ww5.tiki.ne.jp/~qyoshida/jikenbo/057sayama.htm>).

⁵³ See, e. g. Kanno (2009:298–299), and a variety of other sources on the internet.

⁵⁴ I base this account heavily on Ramseyer and Rasmusen (2018).

2002, it had spent 15 trillion yen (about \$125 billion, at the 2002 exchange rate) on buraku projects.

Having obtained this national program, BLL leaders now needed to control its allocation. The largest share of the funds would go toward construction projects. To divert that money to their private accounts, they needed to control the distribution of the contracts. They needed, as they would put it, to be the “one window” for the funds. Necessarily, they also needed to exclude all other potential intermediaries. In particular, they needed to exclude their rivals in the JCP.

To acquire control over the allocation of the construction contracts, BLL leaders attacked city governments in sequence. They began with the city of Suita in Osaka prefecture. In June of 1969, they demanded that the city government give them exclusive control over the money. When the city government balked, according to BLL critics, they sent 300 BLL members. For three days, report those critics, they surrounded the mayor’s house. They banged drums through the night. They cut his gas, water, and telephone lines. They scaled his wall and climbed onto his grounds. Eventually, the mayor acquiesced (Nakahara 1988:128–29; Ichinomiya, 2013:270).

The BLL moved from city to city. As necessary – again, according to its critics – it repeated the tactics. When it faced the Habikino city government (in Osaka prefecture), BLL members occupied city hall for 122 hours, and confined the mayor for 22.⁵⁵ They did not obtain control everywhere, and when challenged they could lose in court.⁵⁶ In time, most (not all) cities dismantled the one-window policies, but the BLL continued to push for the control.

Simultaneously, the BLL needed to exclude the JCP from the money. The most decisive break came immediately in 1969, when the BLL broke with JCP-allied teachers in the city of Yata. There, they harangued the JCP teachers in front of 200 burakumin for 12 hours. But if these Yata “denunciations” were the best known, the 1974 “denunciations” against JCP teachers in Yoka were perhaps the most cruel. The JCP has never been the most reliable of sources, but when burakumin writer Uehara (2014, ch. 3) travelled to Yoka decades later to interview those involved in the event, he found reports of extensive violence. Anthropologist Rohlen (1976:685–86) was in the area doing field work at the time. According to his account, by the time the denunciations were over, twelve of the JCP teachers had broken bones, including broken vertebrae. Thirteen of

⁵⁵ Nakahara (1988:128–29); Ichinomiya and Group K21 (2013:96–97, 270).

⁵⁶ E. g. Maeda v. Nishiwaki shi, 887 Hanrei jiho 66 (Kobe D. Ct. December 19, 1977); Fukuoka shi v. Matsuoka, 870 Hanrei jiho 61 (Fukuoka High Ct. September 13, 1977); see generally Upham (1980:54–62).

them needed at least six weeks of hospitalization. Five more were hospitalized for a month, 15 for from two to three weeks, and 15 more for over a week.

IX Out-migration and subsidies

A Introduction

By dramatically raising the level of income a young burakumin male could earn by joining the mob, the national subsidies lowered his incentive to stay in school, leave for university, and merge into the Japanese mainstream. In Ramseyer and Rasmusen (2018), we explored this phenomenon through the 2002 termination of the 1969 national subsidies. More specifically, we used the 1935 census (the only one with local data) to construct a municipality-level panel data set and examine the effect of the 2002 subsidy termination on out-migration levels. Because we did not have data on the level of migration specifically out of the buraku at the municipality level, we looked at the relation between the total migration from each municipality and the concentrations (based on 1935 data) of burakumin. We found that post-2002 emigration increased most dramatically in those cities with the highest concentration of burakumin.

In this Section IX, I exploit the 14 buraku censuses to study changes in the population specifically of the buraku themselves. I begin by using the last four censuses to explore the general determinants of buraku out-migration over the final three decades of the twentieth century (Subsec. B.). I then examine the distribution of subsidies among the buraku during the 1947–1969 period (Subsec. C.). Finally, I combine the data on out-migration with the data on the 1947–1969 subsidies to explore the effect of the subsidies on exit specifically from the buraku (Subsec. D.). I find that large subsidies substantially slowed the pace at which burakumin migrated into the general public.

At root, the government subsidies constituted the pay-off funds to the local criminal syndicates. Consider Gary Becker's general models of human capital and crime. Where subsidies were small, young men earned low returns to criminal careers. Necessarily, they were more likely to stay in school, perhaps leave for university, locate a job in the mainstream sector, and exit the buraku. By contrast, where subsidies were large, young men earned higher returns to criminal careers. By increasing those illegal returns, the high subsidy levels apparently encouraged young burakumin men to drop out of school, stay in the buraku, and join the criminal syndicates. In the process, they generated an unholy spiral: the government responded to the higher numbers of nominally

“unemployed” young men with more generous subsidies; those subsidies in turn caused more young men to drop out of school, stay in the buraku, and enlist in the mob; with still more “unemployed” men now in the buraku, the government raised the level of subsidies even higher; and so forth.

B Out-migration

Before turning to the effect of the subsidies themselves (Tables 11 and 12), I use the last four censuses to explore more general patterns of burakumin out-migration (Table 10): in which buraku did population fall, and in which did it increase? I take as the dependent variable the buraku population at the time of the various censuses, indexed by the burakumin population in 1921. The variable thus captures the extent to which burakumin left the communities in the years after 1921 and merged into the general public. As independent variables, I use variables already defined (see Table 4). They capture the extent of burakumin

Table 10: Determinants of outmigration, 1971–1993 censuses.

	Dependent variable: <i>Buraku population indexed at 1921, for –</i>			
	1971	1975	1987	1993
Burakumin PC 21	2.146 (5.51)	2.059 (4.57)	–4.731 (6.66)	2.641 (3.62)
Buraku size 21	0.2075*** (0.054)	0.2146*** (0.045)	0.2218*** (0.065)	0.1644*** (0.035)
Density 21	4.63e-6 (2.50e-4)	4.91e-5 (2.07e-4)	–2.84e-4 (3.02e-4)	–1.13e-4 (1.64e-4)
Exogamy 21	–147.72 (107.84)	–220.17** (89.36)	–0.9738 (130.38)	–106.38 (70.78)
B pref voters 21	1122.05 (834.34)	34.230 (691.40)	890.716 (1009)	808.87 (547.7)
Buraku agri ratio	11.122 (24.57)	55.716*** (20.36)	82.693*** (29.71)	49.850*** (16.13)
Suiheisha BO 33	1.559** (0.67)	1.495** (0.55)	0.6798 (0.80)	0.6838 (0.44)
Murder, PC 20	–12,658.19 (558,979)	400,033 (463,213)	2286533*** (675,845)	746935** (366,915)
n	40	40	40	40
Adj. R ²	0.57	0.71	0.51	0.69

Notes: *, **, ***: Statistically significant at the 10, 5, and 1% levels, respectively. Regression coefficients followed by standard errors. All regressions include a constant term. Regressions are OLS.

concentration (**Burakumin PC**), the average size of buraku communities (**Buraku size**), the degree of urbanization (**Density**), the extent to which burakumin interacted with the outside community (**Exogamy**), buraku economic welfare (**Burakumin prefectural voters, PBC**), the reliance on agriculture (**Buraku agricultural ratio**), the extent to which the local buraku endorsed the BLL's violent predecessor (**Suiheisha branch offices**), and the presence of a criminal subculture (**Murders PC**). I take values as near as possible to the beginning of buraku militancy in the 1920s.

Preliminarily, note that out-migration rates were lower from farming communities: the coefficient on the fraction of burakumin in agriculture in 1935 (**Buraku agricultural ratio**) is positive and significant. This phenomenon is an artifact of the definition of burakumin by location. Human capital is mobile; land is not. Necessarily, those who invest in agricultural real estate will be less likely to move than those who invest in their human capital.

The regressions suggest (obviously do not prove) that burakumin were most likely to move out of the community and join the Japanese mainstream where they faced the lowest costs of investing in a legal relative to an illegal career. On the one hand, burakumin were less likely to leave the buraku where they were at farther social distances from the general public or (what is analytically the same thing) where the buraku provided a relatively all-encompassing social world. Thus, the coefficient on the number of **Burakumin per capita** in 1921 is positive albeit not statistically significant: burakumin were less likely to leave communities with the highest density of burakumin. Similarly, the coefficient on **Buraku size** in 1921 is positive: burakumin were less likely to leave large buraku than small.

On the other hand, burakumin were less likely to leave buraku where they faced greater suspicion from the general public. For example, the coefficient on the 1921 **Exogamy** rate is negative: the burakumin were more likely to leave communities where they intermarried with the general public – where they had relatively close and harmonious contact with the outside world. Note that the pairwise correlation between the 1993 indexed buraku population and the 1921 exogamy rate is -0.52 , significant at more than the 1% level. Conversely, the coefficient on the 1920 **Murder rate** is positive: burakumin were less likely to leave those buraku with relatively high criminal opportunities. Similarly, the coefficient on the number of **Suiheisha branch offices** in 1933 is positive: burakumin were less likely to leave communities where their predecessors had organized branches of the violent group.

Where the buraku were small and members maintained amicable relations with their neighbors, young burakumin had relatively cheap access to the information, training, and education necessary to build profitable careers in the mainstream sector. Where they lived in large buraku with little contact

with the outside world, they had less access to that information. With high rates of violent crime, they had access instead to information about illegal careers.

C Subsidies

In Table 11, I explore which communities received the targeted prefectural burakumin subsidies. As Eric Rasmusen and I investigate the 1969–2002

Table 11: Buraku-specific prefectural subsidies (1947–1968).

A. Basic regressions				
Dependent variable: <i>Subsidies per burakumin capita, for years</i>				
	1947–57	1958–62	1963–66	1967–68.
Burakumin PC 21	0.0300* (0.0150)	0.1070* (0.0573)	0.4146** (0.1810)	0.1369 (0.270)
Exogamy 21	-4.16e-4 (2.83)	-0.7363 (1.73)	-2.036 (3.993)	-3.956 (7.92)
Density 21	4.73e-7 (6.89e-7)	1.34e-5*** (4.50e-6)	6.52e-5*** (1.49e-5)	5.29e-5** (2.04e-5)
B pref voters 21	0.8612 (2.32)	9.061 (8.489)	25.462 (25.12)	-8.022 (41.10)
Buraku size 21	1.732e-4 (1.48e-4)	-4.291e-4 (5.74e-4)	-3.46e-4 (0.0019)	0.0021 (0.0030)
Buraku agri ratio	0.0296 (0.0679)	-0.1177 (0.2250)	-0.5073 (0.7251)	0.2059 (1.10)
Suiheisha BO 33	-5.235e-4 (0.0018)	-0.0134* (0.0071)	-0.0530** (0.0231)	-0.0188 (0.0299)
n	40	30	37	33
Adj. R ²	0.13	0.23	0.47	0.37
B. Additional Independent variables				
To the regressions on Subsidies, PC, 1963–66 , I add each of the following additional independent variables. The Table gives the resulting coefficient on that additional variable, followed by the standard error and the resulting Adjusted R ² .				
B Illegit rate 21	B public ass rt 21	Anti lib riots	Hinin frac 68	Kyudan rate 23
0.1737 (1.75)	-100.63 (109.21)	0.4747* (0.276)	-0.0112 (1.42)	230.34*** (80.01)
0.46	0.47	0.51	0.46	0.58

Notes: *, **, ***: Statistically significant at the 10, 5, and 1% levels, respectively. Regressions are OLS. Regression coefficients followed by standard errors. All regressions include a constant term. Sources: See text and Table 1.

national subsidies in Ramseyer and Rasmusen (2018), I do not repeat the exercise here. Instead, I examine the prefectural subsidies that preceded the national program. Note that the censuses of 1946, 1958, 1963, 1967, and 1971 divide the period prior to the national subsidies into four segments. I use the following dependent variable:

Subsidies PBC: The amount of the pre-1969 prefectural subsidies targeting burakumin (in 10,000 yen) over a given period, divided by the number of burakumin, as provided in Zenkoku Buraku (1998). The source does not detail the content of the subsidies further.

As independent variables, I take several values for each prefecture at the time of the formation of the Suiheisha (or shortly thereafter). Among the variables already defined, I use burakumin concentration (**Burakumin PC**), **Exogamy**, population **Density**, the fraction of wealthy burakumin (**Buraku prefectural voters, PBC**), the average size of buraku districts (**Buraku size**), the **Buraku agricultural fraction**, and the number of **Suiheisha branch offices**. I also construct the following new variables:

Buraku illegitimacy rate, 1921: Non-marital burakumin births in 1921, divided by total burakumin births.

Kyudan rate, 1923–24: The number of denunciation sessions in 1923–24, divided by the number of burakumin, as provided in Hasegawa (1927).

Urban prefectures distributed the highest subsidies per burakumin capita (Panel A): the coefficient on prefectural **Density** is positive for all periods, and significantly so in three of the four. Prefectures with higher concentrations of burakumin paid higher subsidy levels: the coefficient on **Burakumin PC** is similarly positive for all periods, and significantly so for three. Curiously, all else held equal, the prefectures with more **Suiheisha branch offices** in 1933 paid the least subsidies: the coefficient on the number of branch offices is negative in all periods, and significantly so in two of the four periods.

In Panel B, I add several other measures that might explain the subsidy patterns. One might, for example, expect that the subsidies would go to the most impoverished buraku. Yet the fraction of buraku on public assistance, the burakumin illegitimacy rates, and the fraction of burakumin with the income entitling them to vote are all insignificantly different from zero.

Note two further observations. First, the governments may have paid the largest subsidies in areas where tensions between the burakumin and the other

residents were highest. The factors used in the Panel A regressions held equal, the governments paid higher subsidies where local residents had rioted against buraku liberation in the 1870s (**Anti liberation riots**), and where early Suiheisha members had held the most denunciation sessions (**Kyudan rate**). Second, some writers (e. g. Honda, 1991, 30) suggest that the subsidies went to those descended from the kawata rather than the hinin. The **Hinin ratio** in 1868 is not significantly correlated with subsidy levels during any of the four periods in pair-wise correlation, and the coefficient on the hinin ratio in the Panel B regressions is similarly insignificant.

D Subsidies and out-migration

In Table 12, I again exploit the fact that the government conducted five burakumin censuses from 1946 to 1971. I couple those multiple prefecture-level censuses with annual data on the amount of prefectural subsidies, and examine the effect that subsidy levels had on the pace at which burakumin chose to leave buraku and merge into the general public.

The Table 12 regressions suggest that the prefectural subsidies slowed the pace at which burakumin joined the general public. In the first four regressions in Table 12, I regress the burakumin population indexed by 1921 values on the level of subsidies per burakumin (**Subsidies PBC**), burakumin concentration (in percentages; **Burakumin PC**), **Buraku size**, and population **Density**. The resulting coefficients on the subsidy levels are positive for three of the periods, and significantly so in two. The significance levels are sensitive to the independent variables used, but the underlying correlation is extremely strong. The pairwise correlation between the indexed 1958 population and the 1947–57 subsidies is 0.28, significant at the 7% level; between 1963 population and 1947–62 subsidies 0.33, significant at the 3% level; between 1967 population and 1947–66 subsidies 0.52, significant at the 0.1% level, and between 1971 population and 1947–68 subsidies 0.55, significant at the 0.01% level. The magnitude of the effect is not trivial. Suppose we increase the level of subsidies from those paid in Saitama (0.669) to those paid in Osaka (16.785). The size of the 1971 burakumin population, indexed at 1921 = 100, increases by 15.8 (on a prefecture-level median of 94.77).

Subsidy levels are, however, plausibly endogenous to the strength with which burakumin are rooted to their community. Accordingly, I instrument the level of subsidies with **Burakumin PC**, **Buraku size**, **Density**, **Suiheisha branch offices 1933**, **Kyudan rate 1923**, **Buraku public assistance PBC 1921**, **Buraku illegitimacy rate 1921**, **Buraku divorce rate 1921**, **Buraku prefectural**

Table 12: Prefectural subsidy (1947–1968) levels and out-migration.

		Dependent variable: <i>Buraku population indexed at 1921, for –</i>									
		1958	1963	1967	1971	1971	1971	1971	1971	1971	1971
		OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	2SLS	2SLS	2SLS	2SLS	
Subsidies, PBC							601.49***				
1947–1957		-3.150 (87.70)					(208.62)				
1947–1962			11.84 (14.09)					47.89** (21.80)			
1947–1966				6.271** (2.88)					9.50** (3.55)		
1947–1968					3.154** (1.46)					6.173*** (1.58)	
Burakumin PC 21		20.706** (8.51)	13.975** (5.46)	19.653*** (4.71)	13.694*** (4.92)						
Buraku size 21		0.168* (0.094)	0.0800 (0.067)	0.0293 (0.062)	0.102 (0.067)						
Density 21		-2.222e-4 (4.06e-4)	-2.138e-4 (2.87e-4)	1.485e-4 (2.56e-4)	-4.25e-5 (2.76e-4)						
n		42	42	42	42	42	40	30	37	37	
Adj R ²		0.25	0.27	0.49	0.46		0.06	0.06	0.24	0.30	
CDW F Statistic							1.52	2.49	6.66	14.13	

Notes: *, **, ***: Statistically significant at the 10, 5, and 1 % levels, respectively. Regression coefficients followed by standard errors. All regressions include a constant term.

In Panel A, **Subsidies, per burakumin capita** are instrumented with **Total burakumin 35/46/58/63, Suiheisha branch offices 33, Kyudan rate 23, Buraku public assistance PBC 21, Buraku illegitimacy rate 21, Buraku prefectural voters 21, Anti-liberation riots, Suiheisha branch offices 33, Buraku size 35/58/63, Density 35/46/58/63, Buraku Divorce rate 21 and Shirayama shrines.**

Sources: See text and Table 1.

voters 1921, Anti-liberation riots, and Shirayama shrines. In the last four regressions of Table 12, I report the two-stage least squares results. Here too significance levels and the Cragg-Donald Wald F statistics are sensitive to the variables used. Nonetheless, the coefficients on the subsidy levels are positive and significant in all four regressions: the higher the rate of subsidies, the lower the level at which burakumin leave to join the mainstream Japanese society.

One can interpret the results in two very different ways. On the one hand, this phenomenon is consistent with a ruthlessly straightforward explanation: if the government subsidizes burakumin who choose to stay in a community but not those who leave, more burakumin will choose to stay. On the other hand, as Table 5 shows, more burakumin staying is associated with higher crime rates. And as detailed elsewhere (Ramseyer and Rasmusen, 2018), for much of the post-war period the mob dominated the BLL, and used its control over construction contracts to divert large portions of the funds to their private accounts. During the peak of the mob in the 1980s, 20–25% of young burakumin men were members of the organized crime syndicates. As a result, the phenomenon fits a far less benign explanation: by raising the relative returns to criminal careers, the subsidies caused young burakumin to drop out of school, join the mob, and pursue buraku-specific criminal careers. Where subsidy levels were lower, young men stayed in school, left the buraku for university, and pursued mainstream careers instead.

X Epilogue

Fundamentally, Western scholars and intellectuals miss the logic to the buraku's transformation because they miss the basic economics of social and political behavior. It is the economics of behavior outside of the realm of classic markets, but behavior that is rational and strategic all the same. In this article, it is the economics behind the invention and collapse of identity politics in a specific country – Japan. But its theoretical generality would suggest that it should explain similar phenomena at other times, in other societies.

Contrary to the accounts in the West, the burakumin are not outcasts, and probably never were. With few exceptions, they are not descended from tanners or leather-workers. They are descended from dysfunctional communities of poor farmers in the nineteenth century, and of the urban poor in the 20th.

During the 1920s, young intellectuals from the burakumin upper class invented for the group a largely fictive identity. To fit within the dictates of Marx's *German Ideology*, they declared the buraku the descendants of a leather worker's guild. Their ancestors had suffered unrelenting discrimination, the

leaders declared, out of a religiously inspired aversion to members of a ritually unclean guild.

What the intellectual leaders invented, the criminal leaders exploited. With this newly fashioned identity, they embarked on full-scale shake-down identity politics. They coupled their claims of pervasive discrimination with violent extortionate tactics and successfully extracted ever-increasing amounts of government subsidies. Predictably, they also triggered ever-increasing public hostility. Members of the public now did all they could to keep the group at bay.

Prior to the 1920s, burakumin who chose to live by traditional Japanese behavioral norms had often done well, and had stayed within the community and helped to build its social and economic infrastructure. After the 1920s, they left. Under Hirschman's classic typology, they faced trivial costs of "exit." As the criminal entrepreneurs increased the general levels of hostility toward the group, burakumin pursuing legitimate careers simply moved out of the buraku and migrated into the general public.

In turn, the young burakumin who invested in criminal careers caused the subsidies to spiral. The higher the subsidies, the higher the returns young burakumin earned from those criminal careers that exploited the identity politics. The higher relative returns caused increasing numbers of young burakumin men to drop out of school, stay in the buraku, and join the criminal syndicates; the higher number of nominally unemployed men caused the government to raise the level of transfer payments; and so it went. Burakumin who chose to live by the general behavioral norms of Japanese society left the buraku and migrated into the general public. Disproportionately, those who chose to invest in criminal careers chose to stay.

And then suddenly it was all over. The identity politics that had created the buraku as a sharply defined phenomenon ended as abruptly as it had begun. Ramseyer and Rasmusen (2018) details that collapse. Just as the identity politics began with the invention of a history about a leather-workers guild, so it ended in 2002. That year, the national government halted its buraku-specific subsidies. As the absolute returns to criminal careers plummeted, the relative returns to education rose. Rather than drop out of school and join the mob, young buraku teenagers increasingly stayed in school. They finished high school, left the buraku for university, and never returned.

The BLL withered. With no money to distribute, membership fell from 200,000 during the subsidy years to 50,000. Today, more than half of the members are over 60. And with the BLL, the organized crime syndicates withered as well. With no subsidies to divert, members no longer earned the massive rake-offs from the buraku construction projects. From 91,000 in 1991,

the number of members and affiliates plummeted to 47,000 in 2015. By 2014, three-quarters of the mob were over 40; 40 % were over 50.

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