

Rezensionen – Comptes rendus – Reviews

Bondy, Christopher: *Voice, Silence and Self: Negotiations of Buraku Identity in Contemporary Japan*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Asia Center, 2015, 200 pp., ISBN 978-0674088405 (hardcover).

Hankins, Joseph D.: *Working Skin: Making Leather, Making a Multicultural Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014, xxii&277 pp., ISBN 978-0520283299 (paperback).

Cangià, Flavia: *Performing the Buraku: Narratives on Cultures and Everyday Life in Contemporary Japan*. Zurich: LIT Verlag, 2013, 280 pp., ISBN 978-3643801531 (paperback).

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According to the standard definition, Burakumin are arguably the biggest ethnic minority living in Japan. Burakumin are of Japanese ethnicity, descendants of former outcastes eta and hinin who, from feudal times until now, have suffered from discrimination especially in employment and marriage. This minority group has been well described, explained, redefined and argued about in the Japanese literature. The amount of research written in English is, understandably, far below that written in Japanese. In terms of quality, however, Western authors show confidence and in-depth knowledge, and offer interesting and sound perspectives. The fact that they are foreigners seems to facilitate their access to the field. For research on Burakumin in English, those interested in the issues will naturally come across the respected authorities in Buraku studies such as DeVos/Wagatsuma (1966), Yoshino (Roger 1977), and Neary (1989) who provided the framework for understanding these issues in the second half of the twentieth century.

The issue of Burakumin, though still tasting of taboo, has been researched widely and from many perspectives. The “*Buraku mondai*” as it is commonly called in Japanese, is arguably less visible nowadays for reasons such as the end of the Dōwa Special Measures Law, improved infrastructure, increasing rates of intermarriage, the choice of silence by many Burakumin, and a shifting focus of human rights discourse in Japan (away from Burakumin). Despite that, Buraku issues still exist and resonate within Japanese society, and therefore deserve to be researched further.

Literature on Burakumin in Japanese consists not only of academic research but also of books that target the general public. That is understandable as it is a domestic Japanese issue that concerns society at large, local communities, families, and personal relationships. The literature in English is mostly academic, based on anthropological, sociological, or other research, so its outreach is more limited and rarely extends beyond researchers and graduate students.

As mentioned above, Western researchers introduced and debated the issue to a rather limited extent in the second half of the twentieth century. Towards the end of that century, and early in the twenty-first century, there was a rapid increase in Western interest, which produced a boom (compared to previous scarcity) in published research as academics became increasingly interested in a diversity of approaches to Buraku issues.

While some authors focus primarily on historical circumstances and developments, three scholars wrote books between 2013 and 2015 that provide an update on the Buraku issue and show that this social, economic and political issue has been going through a whirlwind of changes. Their books are essential to the understanding of the current situation concerning this “invisible” minority.

The three authors are Cangià, Hankins, and Bondy. Flavia Cangià, a social anthropologist of the University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland, published her study, *Performing the Buraku: Narratives on Cultures and Everyday Life in Contemporary Japan*, in 2013. Joseph D. Hankins, a sociocultural anthropologist of the University of California, San Diego, published *Working Skin: Making Leather, Making a Multicultural Japan*, in 2014. And Christopher Bondy, a social scientist of the International Christian University in Tokyo, published *Voice, Silence and Self: Negotiations of Buraku Identity in Contemporary Japan*, in 2015.

We first examine the work of Christopher Bondy, whose analysis is probably the most accessible of the three. His comparison of how two communities approached Buraku identity shows that perceptions of the issue can differ radically with people’s background, education, experience, and the interpretive frameworks they gain from their social and political networks.

Bondy compares different approaches to the Buraku issue in two communities, Takagawa in Shikoku, and Kuromatsu in Kansai, Western Japan. His comparison focused particularly on education, namely local elementary and junior high schools. Bondy’s main goal was to provide answers to questions about why there are differences between the way Buraku issues are treated in schools in these two communities, and what impact those differences have on how students view their identity, including their Buraku heritage.

Bondy concluded that most of the differences could be traced to the formative influence of the dominant Buraku organization in each community. In both communities the dominant organization decided the contours and content of the Buraku discourse. In Kuromatsu, the most influential organization was the Jiyūdōwakai (JDK), while in Takagawa, the Buraku Liberation League (BLL) shaped the approach to the issue. It became clear that the approaches of these two highly influential organizations could not have been further apart.

The Kuromatsu community, under the strong influence of the JDK, embraced Silence as its primary response to the Buraku issue. The JDK promoted general human rights, with rarely a mention of Buraku, even under this relevant heading. Instead, groups such as the Nikkei Brazilians became the center of their human rights campaign. Their silence about Burakumin was naturally reflected in the way the issue was discussed in Kuromatsu schools. Avoidance was the main approach. Hence students were being tacitly instructed to bracket out the Burakumin aspects of their identity. Bondy shows that, though the extent of this avoidance was high, including taboos against using the words *buraku* and *Dōwa*, some students were not even sure about what it was they were bracketing out (p. 145). An advantage of shunning the Buraku issue (out of sight, out of mind) in the schools was that students faced a relatively smooth transition from the “protective cocoon” of the local school to high schools in another city, then to university, and the labor market. The reason for this smoother transition was that, in most cases, society outside the protective cocoon assumes the same approach of silence and avoidance. Bondy gives the JDK’s reasoning behind the silence. In their view, all discrimination should be treated equally. To focus primarily on Buraku discrimination might help perpetuate or even promote the prejudice and discrimination that remains.

The Takagawa community, on the other hand, protesting against silence, chose to promote openness about the town’s Burakumin heritage. The Buraku Liberation League (BLL) was instrumental in making this an essential and public part of the town culture, as seen by the *Kaihō no matsuri* (Liberation Festival) that became a focus for all residents, regardless of their background. Bondy notes that the friendly face of the festival represented a significant shift from the *kyūdan* strategy common especially in the 1960s and 70s. The BLL’s approach was to combat discrimination with education about positive identity. The BLL had a strong, even dominant, presence in the community. The city mayor was of Buraku heritage, signs on public buildings declared their Buraku history, and the school and Children’s club had an overt BLL Burakumin presence. For the BLL, children were the key to their fight against discrimination, and they taught

them to be proud of their Buraku identity. Unlike in Kuromatsu, students in Takagawa did not need to bracket out their Burakumin identity while in the school's protective cocoon. The students were taught that the outside world was prejudiced against Burakumin, and they would certainly experience discrimination. Bondy demonstrates that while the strong us-versus-them dichotomy made for a cohesive community, it also made the transition beyond school a challenging task. Once they left the protective cocoon, the students were alone in their fight against prejudice they were convinced exists. The cozy school environment left them unprepared to face a real world in which silence and avoidance of Buraku identity were the norm, and where human rights concerns made little or no mention of Burakumin.

Bondy concludes that after 2002, when the Special Measures Law for *Dōwa* Projects was terminated, and following a series of town mergers, the BLL has lost much of its clout in Takagawa so that the town's approach to Buraku issues quickly came to resemble that of Kuromatsu.

Bondy carried out his research in two locations. Takagawa, the one that was more open to his investigation, and showed greater pride in its Buraku heritage, receives much more detailed treatment in the book. It is difficult to escape the perception that Bondy had a greater initial interest in the BLL approach, and perhaps confidence that it would produce the best outcomes. While that seems logical given their openness, and desire to promote their cause, the reader might want to learn more about Kuromatsu to get the complete picture, in order to make more careful comparisons.

The tone of the book suggests Bondy was more impressed with the BLL approach in Takagawa. While he mentions some pitfalls of this approach, Bondy seems to think (at least until the end of the book) that silence and bracketing provide only temporary security, and the alternative JDK approach would only marginalize and suppress Buraku concerns. As he presents it, the case against silence appears quite strong on both a theoretical and an empirical level. As history unfolds, however, and Bondy brings his research to a conclusion, we see evidence from both the communities examined, that the policy of silence may actually be a better choice in current Japanese society. The apparent turnaround within the book, which Bondy does not overtly examine, strongly suggests a more in-depth and balanced comparison of the BLL and JDK approaches would be beneficial.

Bondy endorses BLL claims of discrimination but, without hard data, he is unable to gauge its extent. He describes an incidence of toilet graffiti that became significant in Takagawa's discussion of discrimination but, since toilet graffiti tends to be vulgar and racist in any setting, this is not real evidence. Doubtless, most discrimination against Buraku will go undetected,

unrecognized, and unreported, but it's hard to make general conclusions on the basis of a few anecdotal cases.

Since the BLL collects annual data on Buraku discrimination, being able to analyze such information could provide useful evidence on its extent. Using annual data to develop an historical perspective would also enable an assessment of how discrimination against the Buraku might be improving or worsening.

Bondy's field research, especially Takagawa, is unique and may never be replicated. By the end of his account, he reports that the community he described no longer existed. Many other former buraku areas that became amalgamated into larger townships, also lost their Buraku distinctiveness.

Bondy's conclusions beg two intriguing questions: How will the continued silence about Buraku in Japan change prejudice and discrimination against Burakumin? What is the future of groups like the BLL which, until recently, found their primary rationale in highlighting Buraku discrimination?

Now we turn to the work of sociocultural anthropologist Joseph Hankins, published in 2014 as *Working Skin: Making Leather, Making a Multicultural Japan*.

Hankins looks at Burakumin issues from an anthropological point of view. However, he was not merely a detached outside observer, as he gained access to Burakumin people through involvement in the key Buraku organizations, namely, the Buraku Liberation League (BLL), the Buraku Liberation and Human Rights Research Institute (BLHRRI), and the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR). In addition to what he learned about Buraku issues from an institutional viewpoint, he also rubbed shoulders (quite literally) with Burakumin by working as an intern at a Tokyo tannery, one of the industries that has traditionally defined Buraku identity. Hankins's analysis is thus a mix of content from official sources and from Buraku laborers in their workplace.

As the title of the book suggests, Hankins is concerned with the space the Burakumin minority currently occupy in multicultural Japanese society. There are three parts to the book.

In the first part, Hankins describes how Buraku organizations were able to achieve a high level of recognition for Buraku issues after the end (in 2002) of the Special Measures Law that left an initial void in which the movement struggled to keep Buraku issues in the multiculturalism discourse. The movement quickly became successful in lobbying the United Nations to recognize (the same year, 2002) a new category of discrimination: Discrimination Based on Work and Descent.

Hankins discusses the characteristics of being Burakumin. He points out that the traditional trio of workplace, location, and kinship as best markers of

Burakuminness seems outdated because it no longer reflects changes within workplaces, cross cultural marriages, and increasing mobility. Buraku people have greater freedom moving in and out of buraku areas, and greater ease in hiding their family heritage, with new restrictions on access to the *koseki* registry.

The movement that identifies with the BLL, aspires to promote pride in Buraku identity. Pride that can challenge stigma. The BLL has actively reinvented and promoted aspects of Buraku culture that can serve as a source of pride in Buraku identity. Examples include *taiko* drumming, foods that include *offal*, and *kabuki* theater. Now that the choice to pass as Japanese without reference to Burakumin is much less complicated, this actual improvement in their status presents a new challenge for the BLL: How can they persuade Burakumin to openly identify themselves?

Hankins shows that the BLL approach is somewhat schizophrenic. On one hand, the organization's goal is Buraku liberation, to openly claim Buraku identity without fear of discrimination. But, on the other hand, they insist that Buraku claim and own their identity (p. 69, 89), thus making the freedom not to claim it as unacceptable. In their view one is entitled only to this pseudo-freedom: Choose what you want but to retain our acceptance, choose the right thing, publicly owning your Buraku identity. This is an understandable response, perhaps, for an organization, in post-*Dōwa* times, that needs financial members and supporters to survive.

Hankins's descriptions of his experience at IMADR and his work at the tannery gave him insights into two different but connected worlds for understanding Buraku issues. He came to an interesting conclusion. While the IMADR (and BLL) seek to champion the rights of people like the tanners, they do not see themselves in need of such a guardian of their rights. Rather than feeling stigmatized by their work, they associate it with masculinity and professionalism. Hankins observes: "around the guys, keloids are something to be eased into; they are less emblems of a stigmatized Buraku-ness than they are signs of gnarled but firm virility or the smooth operation of expert ability attained after years of trial and error" (p. 54). Hankins describes the arduous work roles of the tannery in the political and economic context of an industry in decline. These factors made this unique workplace, in Christopher Bondy's words, a "protective cocoon". While the stigma of working in a tannery is real, the workers do not feel it when they are insiders.

Hankins mentions an observation described by other researchers. Parents have become unwilling to pass on the stigma attached to Buraku to the next generation. They know that what they say and how they say it is highly sensitive, and words out of place can have grave consequences. Hankins

observes that teenagers need a sense of groupness in the face of the heightened peer pressure prevailing in Japan. With the over-riding need for acceptance, a generation of “unknowing Buraku” has emerged, of people unaware they might be, or are considered to be, Buraku. In addition, fewer people are willing to “produce marks of [Buraku] social identity” (p. 62). From the viewpoint of the movement, this amounts to hiding one’s true identity, and an obvious challenge for the future of the movement.

In the second part of his book, Hankins continues his description of Tokyo’s tanning industry. Strict new environmental laws had brought additional costs that many tanneries were unable to afford. Liberalization of the leather trade has brought stiff competition to a long-protected Japanese industry. As for stigma, he mentions a neighbor’s surprise that Hankins was prepared to work at such a smelly (*kusai*) place. He came to conclude there is “a vast range of ways in which Buraku-ness can be located in different people” (p. 110). Bad smell is real, and can readily be used as justification for discrimination. Hankins says the “Buraku contagion” affected him via his neighbor’s comment, although he admits he may have been referring solely to the smell of the place, without making the link with Buraku.

Pondering his diverse experience, Hankins asks: Who then are Buraku? Those working in tanneries, with no Buraku bloodline? What if one is, technically, Buraku by blood but works in an upscale department store, or a profession? Hankins contrasts the unclear definition illustrated by this question with the work of private detectives (usually commissioned by parents anxious about the background of their child’s intended partner) who claim the power to decide who is of Buraku origin. No longer able to access the *koseki* registry, they inquire less about generations back and rely more on methods fraught with inaccuracy, such as talking to neighbors, looking at the subject’s earlier addresses, and checking social media.

Hankins concludes part two with an overview of an aggressive strategy the movement used last century known as denunciation sessions or demonstrations (*kyūdan* or *kyūdankai*). He notes that current approaches, based on cultivating public attention through education, are much less polarizing and have fewer negative side-effects. Organizing forums seems a more effective tool than publicly embarrassing an offender who acts in a discriminatory way, and demanding a formal apology. Hankins questioned the value of these human rights forums, however, after observing that many people in the audience were dozing. Sleepers can hide in the anonymity of an audience that attends only to listen, so they become a mere show while lacking passion, involvement, or even curiosity. He concludes that the movement faces the constant challenge of attracting public attention.

In the third part of his book, Hankins describes the international dimensions of his work with IMADR. He attended a United Nations consultation in Geneva where people from around the world were representing those who fall under the new category: “Discrimination based on work and descent”. They met to discuss how to support programs that endorse this newly recognized category. They concluded that it is the similarities rather than the differences that give this heterogeneous group its sense of purpose. Hankins also discusses political changes within the Buraku groups, with mention of the *Yuwa* movement, *Suiheisha*, *Dōwakai*, and their take on Buraku issues and their approach to the state. Last century the Japanese government initiated a variety of laws, and pledged support to lift the standing of Buraku in society. When compared with India, for example, it’s clear that Japan made great progress for the betterment of the Buraku. Japanese policies are viewed by some as a beacon of hope for what India’s Dalits could achieve in future. As Hankins says: “The discursive device of linear progress provides a framework for the amelioration of differences among the various groups that gathered for the UN “Informal Consultation”. It provides a means by which people create apparent unity by putting others into their own stories, either as ‘our past’ or ‘our future’” (p. 181).

“Shared woundedness” functions as a force for empathy and solidarity between Dalits and Buraku. The BLL organizes trips to India every year, and Hankins gave English lessons to the participants when he attended. While the focus on similarities at a theoretical level worked well to produce empathy, Hankins noted participants struggled to reconcile the shocking differences in practice between the status of Dalits and Buraku. It is the common experience of social marginalization that connects disparate groups like these on both political and personal levels.

In his conclusion, Hankins discusses the need to identify signs of Buraku. When minorities produce these signs, they help to create a multicultural society. For Buraku, production of the signs, the “labor of multiculturalism”, has changed in the recent years. The Buraku identity promoted by the organizations does not need to rely solely on the experience of discrimination; it can also be based on pride in Buraku culture and its traditional occupations. The future of the movement is precarious as the call for pride in traditional Buraku occupations and products coincides with their disappearance. Authenticity can draw on credible exhibits in museums, but the movement needs more than a history. It needs a future that maintains involvement of people and motivates them to “produce signs of Buraku-ness”.

Whether or not Japan can be described as a multicultural country seems to have always been an undisputed issue. For much of the twentieth century it was

widely held that it was not multicultural, while more recently it is believed that it certainly is. Perhaps this is more a reflection on how multiculturalism is defined. But, of equal importance, it may also be an issue of awareness. By seeing that multiculturalism (*tabunkakyōsei*) exists in Japan, minorities are encouraged to become aware of, and to claim their minority status. At the same time, an increasing number of Japanese are becoming aware of different peoples living in Japan, as they now appear in the media, or live next door, or work for the same company.

How strong, then, is the case that Burakumin are a major (some say the biggest) minority component of multicultural Japan? Hankins's conclusions on this question are open to interpretation. The movement and tannery workers quite independently embody Buraku identity, but they are very small subsets of this minority group. While there is a distinct culture with a history, few people claim to positively identify with that culture and history. Who do groups like the BLL and IMADR represent? Is this a culture for and by the very few people represented by these lobby groups, or if there is something bigger how can it be defined?

Hankins's analysis prompts another important question. Under what circumstances can movements like the BLL succeed in encouraging more people to associate with an identity now officially ignored which arose from a problem now regarded as solved. If even partial identification with Buraku identity is a necessary precondition for Buraku liberation, is it realistic to expect that liberation ever to materialize? It is surely a challenge for the movement to persuade people they are part of a minority when they are not easy to convince they feel that way. Their diluted identity as Burakumin seems to disprove the notion that Buraku is the largest minority in multicultural Japan.

While Hankins's book covers a wider range of topics than Bondy's and has a less defined focus, it presents a coherent mix of related issues. By including *kyūdan*, Dalits, tanneries, forums, IMADR, along with identity and sociopolitical issues, Hankins makes a very significant contribution to the literature.

The third book in this review, published in 2013 by social anthropologist Flavia Cangià is, *Performing the Buraku: Narratives on Cultures and Everyday Life in Contemporary Japan*.

Cangià's goal is to "investigate how the marginality and otherness associated with Burakumin are not denied but transformed through process of positive resistance" (p. 14). By interview, observation, participation and visiting museums, she explores how the unsteady concept of Burakumin transforms itself for the diverse group of people who participated in her case studies.

In the introduction and first part, Cangià describes how she prepared for her research in Japan. She discusses the labeling problem saying that Burakumin is

a “fluid social construct ... [in] constant reconfiguration” (p. 12). Using this label to describe a heterogeneous group, setting Buraku and non-Buraku as opposite identities, is simplistic and not useful for research. Cangià doesn’t forget to mention, however, that this approach has been a key tool of the Buraku Liberation League (BLL) for creating a sense of belonging in their fight against Buraku discrimination. Related to labeling are the timing and situations in which such a label can be used effectively. In this, political correctness and self-censorship are among factors that further obscure the issue. Cangià explains that her perspective is based on the “four-fold analytical grid” of Spaces, Body, Material, and Images. These categories can be used to describe fairly precisely both how otherness is transformed and how otherness is lived.

Cangià’s account of her changing roles and identities during field work is also interesting. Depending on context, she alternates during her research between the roles of foreigner, performer, ethnographer, and spectator. Each of these roles allows her to gain different perspectives on the identities and functions of Buraku.

In the second part of the book, *Whose History? Whose Tradition?* Cangià offers a brief historical (but without a focus on dates) insight into Buraku issues, emphasizing the changing views of buraku by historical context. Specifically, she asks: “How are categories concerning the ‘buraku’ and diversity socially produced, institutionalized, articulated and tabooized” (p. 69). She starts this historical excursion in the Edo and Meiji periods and continues into the Taishō period, *Suiheisha*, to the postwar left leaning BLL and legislation on Special Measures for *Dōwa* projects. She also mentions the more recent issues: Buraku lists, Buraku industries, and Buraku identity. Cangià points out that this identity, however clearly defined by the BLL, is quickly becoming vague as Buraku districts and occupations undergo significant change. In this, she provides a useful summary of theories that explain the substance of the Buraku mondai.

The next section introduces a long description of the Agency of Cultural Affairs, possibly more useful to researchers whose area of study is not specifically Japan. Cangià draws upon Yoshikazu Kawamoto’s concept of the “culture of everyday life”. Buraku cultures in her orbit include the leather culture, meat culture, and entertainment culture, that was “hidden, discriminated against, and ultimately stolen by the majority.”

After this long, scholarly introduction, full of insights on the Buraku issue, Cangià takes us on a journey during which she tells of her personal encounters with three Buraku cultures. Along the way, she stops to examine the Archives Kinogawa museum in Tokyo, the taiko hometown of Naniwa in Osaka, and the monkey trainers of Monkey Dance Company from Hikari city in Yamaguchi

prefecture. It is fascinating to observe the ways these three types of actors mention or avoid mentioning their Buraku identity and connections.

Archives Kinogawa is modern in its style as a community museum in Tokyo's pig leather producing Higashi Sumida, which Cangia claims is officially recognized as a *Dōwa* district! The museum's main aim is to impress the visitor with how leather objects produced in the area are integral to the lives of all Japanese people (e. g. festivals *matsuri*). And, secondly, it seeks to show how leather workers' lives were shaped by prejudice, as illustrated by the Kurobe story. The museum exhibits diaries of children from the 1960s in which they describe their town and say what they would like to change. They show a remarkable ambivalence toward their hometown. On one hand, they like its cozy feeling but, on the other hand, they don't like its narrow streets, dirt, or bad smell. The museum ostensibly avoids being a museum only for Burakumin about Burakumin to foster Buraku identity. It is a place that tells "marginal experiences, and local and community stories" through products and producers in order to reveal undeniable links between the locality and broader Japanese culture. It is a place that illustrates the complexity of human beings having a human rights identity, rather than a subgroup with a Buraku identity. Cangia also describes an interesting trip to the museum with two leather workers who came to observe themselves within the museum's portrayal of their lives.

Cangia's next stop in her journey towards contemporary representations of Buraku culture was the Monkey Dance Company. The monkey dance performances, that before the Meiji period were performed by low-status people, had disappeared by the 1920s, and not revived until 50 years later by Shuji Murasaki. Cangia tells the story of her travels, observations, and conversations with Kōhei, Shuji's son who continues his family's tradition. The monkey dance that, at first, seems to be entertainment for children, is viewed by the trainers in a historical perspective that presents it as a way to connect with traditional Japanese art forms. As for Archives Kinogawa, performers do not openly emphasize their connection with Buraku or past discrimination. Kōhei says few spectators now associate monkey-dancing with Buraku and the trainers' background is not an issue for today's children. Kōhei himself has rather neutral feelings about Buraku identity. He said that if the job makes him Buraku then that's fine, but otherwise he does not feel strongly about it as he has no connection to Buraku areas. Cangia's field experience of monkey-dancing is testimony to how profoundly the livelihoods and social status of monkey trainers have changed in the past 100 years.

Both the monkey performances and Archives Kinogawa that interact with the public and the community "represent a tactical attempt to make the

marginal less peripheral through a constant movement from the inside to the outside and vice-versa” (p. 250).

The book is well researched, has a clear framework, and presents Buraku issues in a balanced, realistic way. Nevertheless, there are few minor downsides. Many pages are highly academic and difficult to read unless one’s field of study is anthropology. There are too many typos, a number of factual inaccuracies, and claims poorly supported by facts. Cangià states a conclusion that “Buraku people are still affected by huge social gaps and a high percentage has remained unemployed, illiterate and socially marginalized” (p. 256). Throughout the book, however, she purposefully shies away from marking boundaries between Buraku and non-Buraku. The claim begs questions: What is the reference year for the claim? What groups of people does she have in mind? Is she referring to residents in former *Dōwa* districts, those doing typical Buraku jobs, or those whose ancestors used to reside in Eta villages?

Cangià writes: “Nowadays, the identification of these spaces by the government is characterized by the official denomination as *Dōwa chiku* (literally “assimilation area”) used to identify areas of implementation of affirmative action and development measures” (p. 33). Writing in the past tense might be more appropriate for such a statement, otherwise the reader might be led into believing that *Dōwa chiku* and affirmative action policies still exist. The reality is that government at all levels avoids labeling, be it Burakumin or *Dōwa chiku*, especially since the *Dōwa chiku* support program was terminated in 2002. Cangià also writes of *kyūdan* continuing until today (p. 53) which is technically true, but this practice became rare in the 21st century. Cangià claims “Higashi Sumida ... is included among the few areas in Tokyo officially recognized as *Dōwa* districts” (p. 163). There were no official *Dōwa* districts in Tokyo but, as Hankins writes, certain industries received *Dōwa* support.

Cangià’s study of Buraku culture and its minority-majority relations via “skilled practices, material culture, public spaces and visual images” provides a good introduction to and summary of the Buraku issues. More importantly, it also gives an update of the issue by presenting different ways of negotiating identity, everyday life, work, and public encounters. While heterogeneity of Buraku, and differences in approach to the issues between governments favoring assimilation, and the movement fostering Buraku identity and culture, have been apparent for a long time, Cangià’s firsthand experience sheds light on the constant evolution of Buraku culture and identity and minority-majority relations. An interesting question remains: How are other people unrelated to Buraku skills and art, or the movement, to negotiate the ideas of Buraku culture, tradition, and identity?

In conclusion, here are a few observations about common characteristics of the three books.

Reading these books will probably suffice for readers with little knowledge of the Burakumin who want to be initiated. But they are also essential reading for those who research minorities in general or study the Buraku issue in particular. These three books together provide an update about Buraku issues, a solid historical account, a variety of political responses, and international aspects of the movement. They show young people processing their identity, and people in traditionally Buraku jobs relating to Buraku issues. The books are a set that complement one another. Where Cangià writes about a leather museum, Hankins describes hands-on experience in a tannery. Where Hankins writes about general challenges the movement faces, Bondy offers a real example from Takagawa.

Each of the books gives estimates of the number of Burakumin, with numbers ranging from about 1 million to 3 millions. If we wanted to present Japan as a multicultural country, this would be a meaningful, even impressive, figure. This number is important to Buraku organizations that need to demonstrate they work on behalf of a fairly large number of people. But we need to ask: What significance do these numbers have today? How accurate are they? Each book more or less directly suggests these numbers are almost impossible to calculate or substantiate, which means they are arbitrary at best, possibly misleading. Numbers like these stem from the traditional Burakumin definition trio. As the contours of Buraku identity have become more obscure, the number should also have been updated so it more accurately reflects the current situation. It is highly unlikely that a new, revised number of Burakumin will ever be produced. The books show that quoting the old numbers must be done with caution.

It is interesting to read how the researchers went about gaining data on this sensitive subject. Depending on their situations, they essentially had to obfuscate the research theme. Effectively, they had to bracket out their real research intention and researcher identity. In some contexts they would, for example, present their research as dealing with rather neutral issues such as human rights, education, or youth.

In reading these books, you can't help but notice that labels used by the authors show inconsistency. What is the correct way to label this minority group: Buraku or buraku, Burakumin or burakumin? Do Buraku and buraku refer only to location or also to the people? These authors give different answers. In this review, the term Burakumin is often used, even though it is not in common use in Japan.

A final comment. A common trait of the three books, and perhaps their most valuable and novel contribution, is their testimony to the fading of

Buraku as an identity, as traditional borders between Buraku and non-Buraku become more blurred. While the groundbreaking work of DeVos/Wagatsuma (1966), Yoshino (Roger 1977), and Neary (1989) mainly described historical complexities, the recent authors Bondy (2015), Hankins (2014), and Cangià (2013) look at the increasing complexity of what being Buraku stands for in the twenty-first century. Even the monkey dancers, tanners, and people of Takagawa, easily identified as traditional Burakumin, produced ambiguous signs of belonging. In addition, non-Buraku Japanese now usually identify Buraku in a random manner. It will be interesting to see whether these trends intensify in the future.

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