CHAPTER I

Silent Introductions

It was just after my eighteenth birthday. I really had no idea I was burakumin before my parents told me. I never really thought about it until I heard. I mean, we studied a little bit in school, I guess, but I just don’t really remember much about that. It just surprised me more than anything. My parents, my dad especially, must really have gone through a lot. I really had no idea. They said they wanted to wait to tell me until I was an adult. They still haven’t told my [sixteen-year-old] brother.

— Midori, twenty-year-old female

I was pretty active in a number of different social issues when I was in college. I continued to be involved after I left. I was at a meeting one day, and there was a guy from a buraku social movement group there. I went over and was just asking about the group and what they were involved in. I knew about buraku issues, but never gave them much thought. The guy at the table asked where I was from. I told him the city, and then he asked in more detail. I told him the town. He asked my name, and I told him. I didn’t think much of it, until he said, “You’re burakumin.” I had no idea. Here I was, well into adulthood, and after meeting him, I called my parents. They finally told me that yes, I was burakumin.

— Mitsuru, sixty-four-year-old male

You are a member of a minority group but do not know it. How is this possible? The paradox arose repeatedly during my research on the burakumin and raised further questions: How do you learn that you are a minority when discussions of that minority group are mostly rendered invisible? How does this (new) knowledge then shape your experience of the world? To be burakumin is accompanied by a framework of understanding, expectation, and stigma. As will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2, the burakumin are Japan’s largest minority group, with population estimates ranging between 1.5 million and 3 million people. The discrepancy, as we shall see, comes from how membership is counted.
and does not take into account the complexity of silence surrounding these issues. The burakumin bear no physical markers of difference from majority Japanese though continue to be labeled different as a result of past governmental actions and social beliefs. The category burakumin comes out of a legacy of outcaste groups in Japanese history, and the continued vacillation between action and inaction by the government in the contemporary era has only served to reinforce this marking of difference.

The core argument of this study is that buraku issues stem from a struggle with silence and that for buraku groups and individuals, their relationship to this identity is essentially the search for a voice for their complex experience. This is a study of how young people initially learn about being burakumin in school and in their community, and how, over time, they negotiate the silence that surrounds the issue in Japan. It considers the ways in which schools and social relationships shape people’s identity as burakumin within a protective cocoon, where risk is minimized. The work examines the ways in which these youth are taught buraku issues once they enter junior high school, the tools that experience provides, and the ways in which lessons learned are carried along the life cycle, as expanding social interactions force individuals beyond their protective cocoon. It does so by following these youth through high school and into young adulthood.

The protective places in this study are the communities of Takagawa and Kuromatsu.1 Takagawa is a small town on the island of Shikoku, the smallest of the four major islands of Japan, and Kuromatsu is located in the Kinki region of western Honshu, the main island of Japan. Community leaders, schoolteachers, and others in Takagawa reject silence and adopt an open, engaging approach to buraku concerns. Far from being lodged in the background, buraku issues in Takagawa are at the fore, both literally and symbolically. Local events, such as festivals and town publications, place buraku issues at the center, and thus encourage townspeople to be active and open with their buraku identity. Conversely, policies implemented by community leaders in Kuromatsu remove buraku issues from discussion. Although some in Kuromatsu are aware of buraku issues, many do not openly engage with them; a form of self-censorship regarding buraku issues renders them silent.

The silence surrounding buraku issues in Japan is alternately challenged and sustained by differing social movements: the Buraku Kaihō Dōmei, or Buraku Liberation League (BLL), which confronts silence,
and the *Jiyū Dōwa Kai* (JDK), or Liberal Assimilation Association, which embraces it. The BLL—the largest and most vocal group (Davis 2001)—encourages burakumin pride and is determined to challenge discrimination wherever and whenever it is found. By contrast, the JDK engages with the same issues but argues that continued discussion, and what it regards as the problematic approach of the BLL, perpetuates the stigmatization of the burakumin. In the JDK approach, individuals and organizations should work to eliminate all forms of discrimination in a way that does not marginalize or turn people away. These two groups are found in the communities of Takagawa, which has a strong BLL presence, and Kuromatsu, which has a JDK branch within its buraku district. Each approach shapes the local environment and the socialization of youth and forms of knowing as young people deal with their background and interact with others.

The self and its public visage change as the youth move from childhood to adulthood and encounter fateful moments of challenge and risk. In order to understand how young people respond to these challenges, this study follows them as they move beyond their “safe” environment of junior high school to young adulthood, where they will face the reality of what it means to be burakumin in the wider society.

Contemporary society approaches buraku issues with silence, and many of the youth, likewise, learn to manipulate that silence, knowing when and how to bracket parts of their identity—that is, deciding what part of their background to share and what part to hide. Bracketing is a social process that all people undertake at certain points in time, depending on the social setting. The youth in this study learn various ways to present themselves as burakumin and the consequences of such actions.

The process of bracketing brings with it the unintended consequence of continuing silence. Bracketing derives from a sense of agency: youth making clear decisions about how to present themselves within a broader social framework. Rather than a passive acceptance of the marginalized status of a stigmatized social position, bracketing is conscious and proactive.

The initial research was based on twelve months of participant observation and interviews of forty youth in the two communities, conducted while they were in ninth grade—their final year of compulsory education. The youth were re-interviewed in subsequent years, as they moved through different life stages. Some entered college, whereas others
went directly into the workforce. Some married, had children, and divorced, whereas others remained single. Throughout these experiences, the youth were facing a broader social silence on buraku issues; thus, in each new social setting, they reflexively reconsidered how to present themselves. This presentation of self was not just a one-time event, for the process of bracketing one’s identity is based on a continued assessment of the social field in which one is embedded. This continued approach allows for an exploration of the way in which the youth create a protective cocoon through the process of bracketing at different points in time.

**Social Silence**

Silence is about what is rendered missing: both aural and visual—the unsaid and the unseen. Both forms of silence must be unraveled. We can “see” silence because there are no physiological markers of difference between burakumin and majority Japanese. Whereas difference was once marked by occupation, the marking of difference now centers on area of residence and can be determined through the *koseki*, Japan’s family registry system. If you did not live in a known buraku district or were not told of your background, it would be possible to be burakumin and not know it. This fact has led many English-language sources to refer to the burakumin as “invisible” and has also rendered them invisible, or even silent, to most majority Japanese. Nevertheless, in addition to the population range of the burakumin being between 1.5 and 3 million people, in some parts of the country the burakumin make up well over 50 percent of the local population (Noguchi et al. 1998, 14–15). For many individuals, burakumin or not, the burakumin are not invisible, nor are they silent.

Silence as unspokenness is self-replicating, and when it becomes the dominant approach to any issue, it becomes difficult to challenge. Buraku issues are rarely addressed in media or political discussions (though there are exceptions), and this shapes the narratives that challenge silence. Silence requires formal and informal consensus. Some are taught that they are burakumin, together with the dominant approach to buraku issues, even while being taught to challenge these approaches.

Silence is both symbolic and literal marginalization. You know a burakumin only if he or she “comes out,” is willing to tell others. Much like
compulsory heterosexuality, whereby the assumption of sexuality centers on heteronormative understandings (Adams 2010; Rich 1980), the assumption for many minorities in Japan is that one is majority Japanese. There is no way to know otherwise. Marking groups as different from the majority essentializes a binary of majority and minority, minimizing or eliminating overlap (Brekhkus 1996). You are either burakumin or not. This labeling removes a sense of what the label means and glosses over the diversity within buraku groups (Amos 2011; Boocock 2011). The assumptions are true not only for burakumin but also for resident Koreans, the largest ethnic minority group in Japan (Ryang and Lie 2009; Ryang 1997, 2000; Fukuoka and Gill 2000).

Silence is an intentional devoicing of knowledge. Silence is part of a set of social relations that requires an agreement, a shared understanding, and acceptance of what should be talked about (Zerubavel 2006). Silence can be considered a process by which people are aware and knowing, but are caught in a social environment that discourages open discussion. Silence has a dual power: it can serve to perpetuate the marginalization of certain groups and social problems by replicating the suppression of thoughts and ideas, and it can provide security, or a respite from one’s stigmatized status—even if that security is temporary and comes at a cost. Silence evokes multiple meanings. It is not the same as acceptance (Sheriff 2000; Kanuha 1999), and alternate “voices” may be invoked in response to their marginalized status (Scott 1990). The unyielding power of silence, even when challenged by the marginalized, is difficult to break.

We “hear” silence when social actors remind us of its presence, giving voice to highlight social problems that did not capture the attention of, or were ignored by, broader society (Hirschman 1970). Silence is a window on how powerful groups or individuals can control the dialogue. The highly public and vocal demands by AIDS activists in the 1980s that people listen (and the “Silence = Death” slogan) is a striking example. If silence is institutionalized, it perpetuates itself with modest effort (Zerubavel 2006, 68; Rusch 2005, 87); and unless there is a social environment ready to break down the wall of silence, dissenting voices will not be heard, despite the actions of numerous social movements (Meyer and Minkoff 2004; McAdam 1999).

How do we arrive at knowledge of who is and who is not burakumin? There are a number of clues: (a) knowledge of the geographic area, though this is not always an effective marker (Davis 2000); (b) family
backgrounds, which private investigators can look into to discern membership as burakumin or as resident Koreans (Murphy-Shigematsu 2003, 207; Hayashida 1976); and (c) perceived cues from individuals. Thus, what is not said becomes an indicator of what might be. Being intentionally elusive about personal background ineluctably sends out a signal that there is something to be told.

One adult informant—a middle-aged man who had moved from a buraku district to attend college in Osaka (Japan’s third largest city)—was formerly active in the BLL. He was not, he said, intentionally hiding his background, but he did not reveal it to his coworkers; in short, he was bracketing part of his identity, sharing with some and not with others (Brekus 2003; Heritage 1984, 140–41). He had a coworker whom he thought was burakumin. “One day after work, when we were the only two left in the office working overtime, I decided to break the silence and find out about his background.” He began to whistle a song and symbol of the BLL, known to insiders and recognizable to anyone in the movement, though outsiders would likely be unaware. The coworker looked up, “Are you?” he asked. The answer was apparent. The symbol came and went, the silence momentarily broken, then resumed. Here, silence is a social process, the outcome of a shared understanding of what is not to be talked about and a cipher of the issues surrounding buraku concerns in Japanese society.

Numerous agents shape and reinforce the public discourse on buraku issues. We can “see” silence in the media, education, and government policies. The media are agents that silence public exposure to buraku issues. They selectively engage with topics as both an economic and a political entity. First, as an economic entity, it is in the interest of owners, producers, and editors to highlight issues that will sell. Second, as a political entity, the media play a role in shaping particular public policy (Bernhard 2003; Cook 1998; Humphreys 1996), reflecting and shaping the prevailing social norms on many issues, such as global warming (Boykoff and Boykoff 2007), racial understanding (Larson 2006; Sommers et al. 2006; Jacobs 2000), gender (Holtzman 2000), and prejudices against religious groups (Nacos and Torres-Reyna 2007).

The Japanese media is criticized for its history of ignoring sensitive issues (Adelstein 2009; Freeman 2000; Krauss 2000; Hall 1998; Jameson 1997; Pharr and Krauss 1996). The canonical example is the enforced silence on the coverage of the imperial family (Gamble and Watanabe 2004;
Media self-censorship keeps hidden any unflattering information about the imperial family, highlighting positive, staged images. The Imperial Household Agency exerts a strong grip on official information, and rarely is gossip presented to the Japanese press (Gamble and Watanabe 2004; Eisenstodt 1998). Compare this to the information leaked to the press for decades about the British royal family; the differences are clear. When Australian journalist Ben Hills’s book about Crown Princess Masako was to be published in a Japanese edition, the publisher faced diplomatic challenges and protest from the Japanese government (Joyce 2007).

There are security issues for those who violate the codes of media silence, particularly in regard to the imperial family. Right-wing groups act aggressively as “protectors” of the honor of Japan and the imperial family. Honda Katsuichi—an investigative journalist formerly with the Asahi Shimbun, a center-left newspaper—resorts to disguises when going out in public; his articles have been perceived as anti-emperor or anti-Japanese (Gamble and Watanabe 2004; Honda 1993). David McNeill, an independent reporter and author, has written about how right-wing groups have tried to intimidate him and how threats inspire a high degree of self-censorship among media outlets (McNeill 2001). These are not idle threats. In 1987, an Asahi Shimbun reporter was shot and killed (an exceedingly rare crime in Japan), allegedly by a member of a right-wing group; the crime was never solved. Such events shape reportage. Indeed, reporters covering the imperial family, “hoping to avoid such attacks,” are often “purposefully vague” (Feldman 1993, 199).

A similar approach is taken with buraku issues. However, coverage for the imperial family centers on positive events, such as ceremonies, and symbolic acts, like the opening of the Diet, whereas buraku issues are, if even covered, done so in as neutral a manner as possible. As scholars have noted, there is a “virtual taboo” on reporting on the burakumin (Jameison 1997, 2; Pharr and Krauss 1996, 13). According to Yuko Matsuyama, a former editor of the Asahi Shimbun, this is because “nobody likes to read those stories” (Farley 1996, 138). This signals the role of the press in shaping what is to be discussed. As Gottlieb (2005, 106) comments in her discussion of discrimination and the media, “If [the] public only ever sees censored texts, people will not be able to develop any real awareness of the realities of discrimination.” This speaks to the manner in which the media shape discussions of the burakumin. Gottlieb continues, “Media
became its own best watchdog and to a large extent ceased what little coverage there was of burakumin-related items, in particular, for fear of provoking unwelcome retaliatory publicity” (106). Further, she argues, “Language controls do nothing to eradicate discrimination itself but merely push it further underground by hiding the sort of language which bests manifests the discrimination while at the same time making people feel inhibited about expressing themselves freely” (105). The media will often consider buraku issues euphemistically, using the term *Dōwa* or even the less direct “human rights issues.” Using such terminology disguises buraku issues under a larger linguistic umbrella, rendering them silent under the broader category of human rights issues.

The Sayama Incident well illustrates how the media treat buraku issues. Named for the city outside of Tokyo where the case occurred, it has been famous among activists since 1963, when the initial events took place. The case involved the kidnapping and subsequent murder of a high school girl and the arrest of Ishikawa Kazuo, a young man from a buraku district. From the start, there were several problems with the police investigation. First, it took repeated searches of the suspect’s home (a full fifty-nine days after the initial search) to find the pen alleged to have been used in the ransom note. The pen was found sitting on the doorframe of Ishikawa’s room, at eye level, and yet was missed in previous searches of the home. Second, the suspect, who had only a third-grade education, was alleged to have written a grammatically correct ransom note in flowing prose (unlikely, considering the complexity of the Japanese language). This case, for those active in buraku movements, still represents the power of the state and long-standing personal and institutional discrimination.

In the media reports on the Sayama Incident, the suspect’s buraku links went unmentioned until May 1976, over thirteen years after the incident. In the 525 newspaper articles on the Sayama Incident, reported in the *Asahi Shimbun* between May 1963 and December 2010, the connection to buraku issues was made in only forty-six articles. In the intervening years, there were numerous requests for retrial, and after Ishikawa was paroled in 1994, lawyers requested the initial verdict be overturned. The few media overviews of the case that mentioned a buraku connection were relegated to final paragraphs (“Man Found Guilty,” May 24, 2006).

Clearly, buraku issues were not completely ignored by the media, but their delivery highlighted the silence surrounding them. In 2005, a television network ran a program describing various cases of false accusation,
confession, and imprisonment—issues that had gained recent notoriety. Following a segment on the Sayama Incident, the announcer made a final crucial point: The reason that most people had not heard of the case was that the alleged perpetrator, the victim of false accusation, was burakumin. As such, the media has been reluctant to address this issue (Kasamatsu 2009). This coverage was isolated and did not lead to long-term open engagement with buraku issues as a whole.

Silence is self-sustaining. The editor of a well-known national news-magazine commented to me thus, “We know there are a lot of people and things connected with burakumin, but we also know we can’t cover them. It’s better not to say anything.” Silence is institutionalized, and institutions, like the media, employ terms that shape the public discourse on marginalized populations, such as the burakumin and the physically challenged. The determination of this terminology mostly happens behind the scenes, and the general public is not aware of how their understanding is being manipulated (Gottlieb 2005, 105).

Government institutions also perpetuate silence. Bills emerge from committees and are silently buried within other bills. The criminal justice system is caught up in silence. In the United States, Japan, and other countries, the fundamental right to silence provides protection from the state (Mirfield 1997; Foote 1995). A suspect’s past actions are often inadmissible in court, as is the past sexual history of a victim of sexual violence. Judges, throughout a trial, instruct juries on what to consider and what to ignore during their deliberations.

There are formal and informal sanctions for violating norms of silence. Formal sanctions include the use of the legal system. The awareness of sanctions and the need to protect the violator of these norms has led to the creation of whistle-blower protection laws in some countries. Not all violations of silence are protected (Jackson and Raftos 1997), and there are informal sanctions for various violations of norms of silence. This can lead to either ostracism from the group or the silent treatment. The United States policies that prevented gays and lesbians from openly serving in the military—Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell—directly punished those who came out by not permitting them to serve in the military.6

The language of Japanese government policies reinforces the silence that shrouds buraku concerns. In government-created policies aiding buraku communities, the term buraku was missing. In 1969, the national government implemented a series of affirmative action laws for buraku
districts, known as Dōwa laws. These laws were designed to improve living conditions, increase educational opportunities, and aid buraku-run businesses. Yet the initial law, and its subsequent continuations, eschewed the term buraku in the title, and once Dōwa came to be understood as standing for buraku, it too was removed from the official name of the laws.

**Experiencing Silence**

How is silence experienced and reproduced through individual interaction? This work examines how youth experience silence in various social practices, such as local communities and schools where silence and voice are socialized. In schools, students learn what is important, what is to be valued, and what is to be hidden—silence as a form of suppressing ideas. They learn how to highlight issues by placing some at the fore and others in the background, rendering them silent (Brekhus 1998; Zerubavel 1997). Knowing what to talk about is part of knowing what *not* to talk about—what is not acceptable for discussion.

Lessons in school can enforce silence as the status quo approach to buraku issues, or they can reshape understanding, with lessons that place buraku issues and pride in being burakumin as a key pedagogical approach. The outcomes are based on the complex interaction between a socialized self and the broader social world. People struggle with how to present themselves to others based on an assessment of perceived risk over any violation of expected silence.

The process of impression management and presentation of self are connected with bracketing: sharing part of an identity in one setting while bracketing out other parts (Garfinkel 2002, 135–44). We control the self that we are presenting at a given moment, and at the same time it is the self that forms the foundation for future interaction. Bracketing is also a method for controlling or minimizing risk. As Goffman (1959) notes, “Defensive and protective practices comprise the techniques employed to safeguard the impression fostered by an individual during his presence before others” (24). In other words, we avoid risk by presenting a self that is least likely to harm ourselves. These defensive practices are not passive internalization of stigma but risk-conscious decisions at specific points in time.

Individuals replicate silence in their interactions with others, perhaps sharing part of themselves—the stigmatized self—with one audience but
hiding that same part from another (Brekhus 2003; Garfinkel 2002, 135–44; Heritage 1984, 140–41). Bracketing is an examination of passing. As Renfrow (2004) notes, passing is distancing and aligning at the same time: distancing from the stigmatized identity and aligning to the less or non-stigmatized identity (495)—two parts of one existential self.

Passing provides a degree of freedom for the individual but is socially constrained in terms of what is defined as stigmatized (Renfrow 2004, 502). It is not necessarily about internalizing norms of broader society and rejecting the problematic self. In her work on passing among gay men and lesbians of color, Kanuha (1999) describes silence as dissociation from a stigmatized role, a mechanism for separating majority views on their status from their own experiences. This silence, she notes, plays out in the form of passing. Silence and passing, then, are the same actions: forms of protection that engage with specific issues.

We present ourselves according to how we understand a given situation, knowing that what is “established in one interaction setting will be quite different in content from the working consensus established in a different type of setting” (Goffman 1959, 10). This is also the case with the presentation of the “burakumin self” in Japanese society. Bracketing is closely related to the concept of “covering” stigma (Yoshino 2007; Goffman 1963), in which one “makes great effort to keep the stigma from looming large” (Goffman 1963, 102). What makes bracketing different is the degree of effort involved. Covering is based on a strong conscious decision to downplay some forms of stigma; bracketing is less a process of hiding than simply ignoring or minimizing parts of one’s social self.

Creating and maintaining an identity is inherently interactive: a process of social understanding and individual actions that both respond to and reshape those understandings. Anthony Giddens (1991) writes on identity formation: “The self is not a passive identity, determined by external influences; in forging their self-identities, no matter how local their specific contexts of action, individuals contribute to and directly promote social influences that are global in their consequences and implications” (2).

The construction of an identity is part of preparing for future interaction. The individual is acting with an awareness of past experiences, which forms a foundation for behavior in future experiences. Buraku youth filter their past experiences in order to prepare for their future. These preparations are maintained where they can be controlled. In the early period of identity formation, an individual is typically in a protective cocoon, where risk is minimized though not entirely eliminated:
The protective cocoon is essentially a sense of “unreality” rather than a firm conviction of security: it is a bracketing, on the level of practice, or possible events which could threaten the bodily or psychological integrity of the agent. The protective barrier it offers may be pierced, temporarily or more permanently, by happenings which demonstrate as real the negative contingencies built into all risk. (Giddens 1991, 40)

For the youth in Takagawa and Kuromatsu, the communities where this study takes place, the protective cocoon is structured in part through an organized education system in Japan, with minimal interaction with outsiders. Once youth leave the protected world of the junior high school (the end of compulsory education), the probability of risk in terms of confronting the reality of being burakumin rises dramatically.

The concern over risk is a real one, as burakumin in contemporary Japan continue to be stigmatized, marginalized, and discriminated against (Buraku Kaihō—Jinkenseisaku kakuritsu yōkyū chūō jukkō inkai 2009). The possibility that one will be marked as burakumin can happen anywhere and anytime. Here youth learn the lessons of risk and the tools of silence. Some decide that the risk is too great and continue in silence’s embrace: a form of protection, a personal decision, and the replication of a social norm.

**Chapter Progression**

In order to understand how silence and stigma prevail in reference to buraku issues in contemporary Japan, we must first consider the historical legacy of contemporary buraku experiences, as well as social movement organizations and state responses to these histories. Chapter 2 provides a brief background of the burakumin and establishes a theoretical and empirical framework for understanding who the burakumin as a social category are, as well as a comparative understanding of how we can consider their stigmatized social positioning vis-à-vis members of the majority society.

Chapter 3 considers the role of social movements in both challenging and reproducing silence. It begins by introducing Kuromatsu and exploring how the JDK works together to strengthen a collective identity in one’s community through the process of community revitalization.
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(machi zukuri) and local festivals. Following this, the chapter turns to Takagawa and the local BLL branch, and finally to the role of the Festival of Liberation (Kaihō no Matsuri) in challenging silence and building pride in being burakumin through fun, engaging events. In both communities, the interests of the social movement and local government coincide, providing a degree of legitimacy to the approaches for the youth—silence in Kuromatsu and openness in Takagawa.

Chapter 4 centers on the formal and informal lessons of identity and silence within the school environment. I begin by examining the national standards for how buraku issues are to be engaged in schools through Dōwa (assimilation) education. Not all communities used Dōwa education in the same way, which results in profound outcomes for the children. Following this, I examine the role of schools in replicating silence in Kuromatsu and the ways in which silence is challenged through school lessons in Takagawa. Schools provide formal and informal lessons on what it means to be burakumin and how that social identity is viewed by the majority society. As long as the youth are in the protective cocoon that the school provides, these formal lessons carry a degree of legitimacy. It is in the school setting and within the protective cocoon that youth are first learning the lessons of silence, though it will not be their last.

Chapter 5 examines the role of social networks in shaping dialogue on buraku issues. Kuromatsu provided a forum outside the formal school setting for buraku students to gather through an after-school study session. Yet the very act of these buraku youth engaging in after-school club activities only further marked them as different from their classmates. On the other hand, the Kodomo Kai (Children’s Club)—the BLL-led children’s group in Takagawa—provided an evening forum for students to develop and maintain a positive buraku identity while in the protective cocoon of Takagawa. Students were encouraged to share their experiences with those whom they knew and trusted, shaping how they would cope with this identity in the future. I will show that despite the approaches found in both communities to reinforce a set perspective—silence in Kuromatsu and challenging silence in Takagawa—there are events that occur in the lives of the children that pierce the protective cocoon. Through this, I demonstrate how the children respond to incidents that do not fit with their experiences within the protective cocoon, how they respond, and what this response can tell us about the relative strengths and weaknesses of openness and silence.
Chapter 6 follows the children beyond their home community, through high school and into adulthood, where they are now interacting with those who have different backgrounds, different experiences, and different understandings of buraku issues. It is during these stages that the youth begin to bracket their identities and reconsider how they present themselves to others. The actions and interactions of youth from Kuromatsu and Takagawa beyond their respective communities demonstrate the process of silence being reproduced in its most direct form. It is not surprising that those from Kuromatsu continue to practice silence with those outside the protective cocoon, for this is how they have been socialized. Yet for the youth of Takagawa, who have been socialized to challenge silence, their actions beyond their protective cocoon ironically replicate the silence that is found in the broader society. This use of silence is not, however, an acceptance of their social position in relation to majority Japanese. Rather, this bracketing that results in silence is a rejection of outward labeling and, at the same time, a form of protection. This chapter concludes with a discussion of institutional changes that have direct and indirect impact on silence, stigma, and the burakumin. The work concludes with an understanding of how the youth manage their stigma and how that shapes a broader understanding of discrimination in Japan and beyond.

The silence that surrounds buraku issues must be historically and spatially contextualized. How did various outcaste groups become marked as different and subsequently stigmatized? This question leads to the creation and response of the modern social category of burakumin. What were, and are, the responses of various buraku groups to their position in society? The next chapter begins with an overview of the ways in which many burakumin have challenged or embraced silence over the years by considering the historical trajectory of a number of social movement organizations. Although broader historical and contemporary trajectories of social movement groups are important for understanding the overall response to marginalization, most people experience these approaches in their daily lives, within their local communities.