Buraku identity as a social category
Pauline Gnamm*

Abstract
Buraku are discriminated areas. The group of burakumin constitutes the largest minority in Japan. However, there is no clear answer to the questions of who the so-called burakumin are and what the buraku identity is. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the theoretical implications regarding buraku identity and to consider a new perspective of this subject from the point of view of social categorisation processes. In this paper the burakumin as a group is thought to be the product of the processes of social categorisation in terms of social identity theory employed by Tajfel and Turner. Individuals categorise themselves and are categorised by others into groups, and having membership of a certain social group provides social identity for them. The minority group of burakumin is a social category which emerged from the processes of social exclusion, social categorisation, and external and internal definitions. People who define themselves as belonging to the buraku category have the buraku identity. Not only the burakumin category but also the buraku identity is thought to be a result of a categorisation processes. The level of significance attached to the buraku identity by the burakumin members can vary.

1. Introduction
The group of the burakumin is the largest minority in Japan and it is not an ethnic minority. The discrimination of the burakumin is related to the social status. The buraku issue has been the subject of research for a long time. Many concepts were introduced in order to describe and explain the issue — in historical, religious, political, social and psychological terms. The buraku issue has its roots in Japanese history, but the roots of the contemporary phenomenon of a non-ethnic minority, which has to deal with prejudice, seem to lie in the relationship between the majority and the minority. Another crucial point of the issue is the buraku identity. These two aspects, namely the majority-minority relationship and the buraku identity, are the matter of concern and have to be studied accurately. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the theoretical implications regarding buraku identity and to consider a new perspective of this subject from the point of view of social categorisation processes. The
investigation is performed within the framework of the social identity theory developed by British social psychologists Tajfel and Turner.

The theory of Tajfel and Turner explains the phenomenon of discrimination in psychological terms as a result of social categorisation and comparison between the ingroup and the outgroup. Every individual is seen to have a palette of identities: Personal identity, which is derived from individual personality traits and interpersonal relationships, and social identity, which is based on belonging to a particular group. Through being a member of a particular social group people gain not only a social identity, but also the basis for comparison with other individuals or groups. The comparison and social categorisation helps to systematise the complex social world and to define one’s own and others’ place in the society. Social categorisation means the process of placing people into groups on the basis of some common characteristic features. Comparing one’s own social group, the ingroup, with other groups, the outgroups, is an attempt to gain positive self-esteem. The process of comparing ingroup and outgroup in order to gain positive self-esteem can lead to the creation of a social category which is regarded as less advantaged or having low status.

At this point it is necessary to explain why it seems appropriate to apply social identity theory to the buraku issue, and how it helps to understand some aspects of the buraku past and present. Social identity theory provides an excellent theoretical explanation for the intergroup discrimination, exploring the relationship between ingroup and outgroup. From the majority perspective, majority and minority are the manifestations of ingroup and outgroup on a macroscopic level. The buraku issue is a very complex one, but to put it into a simple way, the burakumin are a minority group which was segregated from society over a long period of time in the past, and is today still rejected psychologically. The assumption that the relationship between majority and minority is comparable to the relationship between ingroup and outgroup allows us to employ the social identity theory of Tajfel and Turner for investigating the buraku issue.

The majority constructed the social category labelled burakumin on the basis of multiple factors. These factors include having buraku origin, living in a buraku or being interested in human rights issues that include the buraku issue. The first factor indicates being a descendant of members of the original discriminated groups. However, the latter two are not, since many families who live in a buraku moved into it from other non-buraku areas, and being interested in human rights issues does not provide information about someone’s origin. In this sense the burakumin category includes a wide range of people. Some of them regard themselves as burakumin while some do not. Some may be regarded by other
people to be burakumin, even though they do not regard themselves as burakumin, and even though they are not aware that they are regarded by others as such. The majority also ascribes certain characteristics to the burakumin category, which enforce the difference between the majority and the minority. The fact of being different is neutral, but what matters is how the differences are evaluated. From the majority’s point of view these differences are usually assessed to the disadvantage of the minority. From the perspective of the majority, the minority has a negative image and is associated with negative attributes.

In the past, people belonging to discriminated groups were forced to settle in segregated areas — buraku — outside towns and villages. The origin of discriminated groups is unclear, but is usually explained as a result of the political measures of the Tokugawa Shogunate system. The members of discriminated groups were forced to perform necessary but non-prestigious work which was regarded as contaminating from a religious point of view. In 1871, through the Meiji Emancipation Edict, the discriminated groups were officially declared equal in status to other social groups. However, the Emancipation Edict was not accompanied by financial or educational support to make the liberation of former outcast-groups real. It was not until 1969 that the Japanese government took the first step and passed the Law on Special Measures for Dōwa Improvement Projects (Dōwa Taisaku Jigyō Tokubetsu Sōchihō). The purpose of the Law on Special Measures was to improve housing, common facilities, health and education. However, the Dōwa Improvement Projects targeted only people of buraku origin living in buraku areas. The initial term of implementation was restricted to ten years, but it was extended several times until coming to an end in 2002. The physical environment of the buraku has changed completely. However, the discrimination remains in terms of economic disadvantage and opposed marriages, and the buraku as a place as well as the people living there are often avoided by the majority of non-buraku people.

Not only is it very difficult to investigate the questions of what a buraku is and who the members of this minority group are, but also to agree upon appropriate terminology to discuss these questions with. This is because there is no neutral and general term to describe people from discriminated areas. It will be refrained here from using terms ‘buraku residents’ (buraku jūmin) and ‘people of buraku origin’ (buraku shusshinsha) as was suggested by the Buraku Liberation League about one decade ago. The government officially refers to them exclusively as dōwa areas (integration areas) and the dōwa issue. In this paper these terms are used only when quoting official Japanese government terminology. Instead of the expressions mentioned above, the time-honoured terms ‘buraku’ and ‘burakumin’ or
‘buraku people’ will be used. The equivalent of Japanese expression buraku/ippan will be buraku/non-buraku. Ippan means ‘general’ or ‘ordinary’ and is often used in contrast to the term ‘buraku’. The term ‘buraku area’ and ‘dōwa area’ are not equivalent, since some of the buraku areas were not officially registered as the target of the Dōwa Improvement Projects, i.e. as dōwa areas. For the same reason, the burakumin and dōwa kankei jūmin (dōwa related residents) are different groups. The group of the dōwa related residents is restricted to that part of the population in dōwa areas which has buraku origin. Members of the burakumin, on the other hand, may have residence in the buraku as well as in the non-buraku areas.

2. Buraku identity

2.1 Identity issue

In psychology, a very influential approach to identity theory was developed by Erikson, who investigated the process of identity formation across a lifespan. Erikson distinguished between the ego identity, the personal identity and the social or cultural identity. The ego identity is the conscious sense of self which derives from social interaction, and undergoes constant changes through new experience and information. The personal identity is a set of characteristics and features that separates one individual from another and is unique to every person. The social identity consists of a number of social roles an individual plays in life. According to Erikson, human beings go through eight stages of psycho-social development which cover the development from infancy to late adulthood. Each stage is a social challenge for a person, which leads to either success or failure. In case of failure a person might experience an identity crisis.

Sociology deals with social identity as a way for individuals to describe themselves as a member of particular groups in order to create and define the individual’s place in society. In this context a group might be a nation, culture, ethnicity, social class, people with the same occupation or gender, etc. Goffman explored personal identity and group relations from the perspective of symbolic interactionism, emphasising a qualitative analysis of the component parts of the interactive process. Goffman employs a ‘dramaturgical approach’, whereby an individual is seen as an actor and a social interaction is accordingly a performance, shaped by the audience and the environment. The individual, while playing a social role and interacting with other individuals, develops his/her own identity that can be viewed as the product of the interaction with others. However, if a conflict between the ‘actual social identity’ (what a person actually is) and ‘virtual social identity’ (what a person ought to be) occurs, a person might be rejected by the society in the process of social stigmatisation. According to Goffman, stigma is a phenomenon where an individual with distinctive characteristics is extremely discredited and refused to gain social
acceptance by the society on the basis of these characteristics.

In social psychology, a very well known model of social identity was provided by Tajfel and Turner (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Social identity theory began as an attempt to explain intergroup discrimination with the help of the 'minimal group paradigm'. In the initial experimental paradigm participants were arbitrarily assigned to one of two groups. The participants were asked to make decisions concerning the distributing of money between members of the two groups. As the groups were created arbitrarily, there was neither an initial conflict of interests nor previously existing hostility between these groups or members of these groups. Furthermore, social interaction was not allowed. Under these conditions the groups are referred to as minimal groups. The participants of the experimental paradigm demonstrated ingroup favouritism and discrimination against the outgroup. Moreover, creating the largest difference between the two groups seemed to be more crucial for participants than maximising the ingroup profits. Tajfel concluded that social categorisation of people into distinct groups can produce intergroup behaviour in which persons favour ingroup over outgroup members and which can lead to intergroup discrimination. Moreover, the process of social categorisation provides social identity for members of the respective category.

Tajfel employed four linked concepts: Social categorisation, social identity, social comparison and psychological group distinctiveness (Tajfel, 1981). The first concept is used by people to order and to understand the social environment and to create categories by assigning individuals to groups on the basis of certain characteristics. The social category creates a social identity and the individuals concerned define themselves, and are defined by others, as members of a group. Tajfel made a distinction between two extremes of social behaviour, interpersonal and intergroup behaviour which he discerns to be two poles of the same continuum. Interpersonal interaction takes place when individuals define themselves through their personal attributes and perceive a situation as based on their personal relationships. Group interaction is determined by individuals' respective memberships of various social categories. The concept of social comparison is derived from competition between groups in terms of gaining some resources such as prestige and authority. The last concept, psychological group distinctiveness, explains the tendency to achieve a positive self-evaluation by considering oneself as a member of a prestigious group, and comparing oneself with members of other groups in ways that reflect positively on oneself.

To what extent can the four concepts presented above be applied to the buraku issue? There are two different perspectives
which have to be regarded — the majority perspective and the minority perspective. In accordance with personal attitudes and using certain criteria, which are discussed in the following section, individuals make a decision about whether a person belongs to the burakumin category. In the process of categorising some people as burakumin, the majority often uses not only the widest spectrum of decisive factors, which includes a large amount of speculation, but also ascribes stereotyped characteristics to this category as well. In simple terms, the majority decides who buraku people are and what they are like. For example, a buraku is often seen as a coarse, frightening and impure place (see Osaka Prefecture Opinion Poll Analysis, 2006: 57). This image of the buraku influences the image of people who are regarded to be burakumin. Thus, in the process of external definition, i.e. the definition of the category by others, the majority assigns certain attributes to the burakumin category. These certain attributes constitute the nature of this category from the majority perspective. Through creating the burakumin category, members of the majority gain a basis for social comparison and achieve permanent positive evaluation of their own category compared to the minority. Furthermore, the differentiation between majority and minority categories has reached such an extent that members of the majority try not to get associated with burakumin, in order to prevent becoming the target of the discrimination themselves. The avoidance on the part of the majority in order not to be discriminated against, especially in such affair as marrying a minority member, reproduces the discrimination. The behaviour of avoiding members of the outgroup can be explained in terms of anxiety of social exclusion from the ingroup.

From the perspective of the minority the four concepts of social categorisation, identity, comparison and distinctiveness have another outcome. It should be mentioned that there are people whose place of birth and residence is a buraku, but who do not regard themselves as belonging to the burakumin. For people who categorise themselves as burakumin, being a member of this group can have a different meaning (see Matsushita’s identity types, discussed below). Some individuals who do regard themselves as burakumin and have buraku identity, do not necessary attach much relevance to this identity. For example, working in a certain company may be more important for a person’s construction of identity than being a member of a minority. Consequently, people use social identity provided by other groups in order to gain positive self-evaluation. Other social identities may be offered through various categories, for example gender, nationality or occupation. Those who have strong buraku identity often attained it through the buraku liberation movement. The goal of these burakumin members is to create new forms of comparison with the majority through re-evaluation of the
existing group characteristics and through initiation of social change. Re-evaluation means to gain a new perspective of buraku history, revitalisation of traditional buraku customs and work skills, and becoming aware of the values which were common in buraku communities in the former times. Social change implies the aspiration of the burakumin category for full acceptance in society, the change of the group's status, and the possibility to be equal, but to keep buraku identity.

As a continuation of Tajfel's theory, Turner emphasised and extended the categorisation aspects of the social identity model, developing the theory of self-categorisation (Turner et al., 1987). Turner distinguished between social identity as self-definitions in terms of social category memberships and personal identity as self-definitions in terms of individual characteristics. The main process postulated in his theory is self-categorisation, which leads to self-stereotyping and the de-personalization of self-perception. One of the consequences of social category membership is a tendency to accentuate the similarities between the members of the same group and to emphasise the differences between members of one's own and members of other groups. The more important social identity becomes to an individual in comparison to his/her personal identity, the more a person perceives him/herself as a prototypical representative of his ingroup category and less as a distinct person. Turner describes this process as a process of 'de-personalisation'. This kind of 'de-personalisation' produces group behaviour, that is referred to as a collective action and processes regulated by a shared 'social categorical self'.

Turner's theory is in so far important for understanding of the buraku issue as it describes the processes of self-categorisation, which can be applied to the development of a strong buraku identity. In the past, the Buraku Liberation League as a powerful organisation provided a social identity for its members, namely buraku identity. Besides providing help in dealing with discrimination, with cooperation from local governments the Buraku Liberation League offered new jobs, scholarships and new housing. After becoming a member of the Buraku Liberation League people used to develop a high loyalty towards the organisation and take part in collective activities, which led to strengthening of the social identity. Other reasons of the development of a strong social identity were common interests with other members of the group, such as shared experience of discrimination and the aspiration to improve the situation of the burakumin. The process of the buraku identity becoming more salient was accompanied by the process of 'de-personalisation'.

2.2 **Burakumin definitions**

The previous section was a rough outline of identity theories available in the social sciences, with the main focus on the division of personal
and social identity, i.e. the 'individual self' versus the 'social self'. Before approaching the topic of description and definition of buraku identity, the meaning of the term 'buraku people' or 'burakumin' is discussed.

There is no exact answer to the question of who the so-called burakumin are. The borderline between buraku and non-buraku people, and therefore the definition of the burakumin as a group, is ambiguous. The criteria to decide whether or not a person or a group of persons belong to burakumin is often arbitrary. In the last decade the discussion about 'what is burakumin' has been restarted with regard to the growing number of mixed buraku/non-buraku marriages, the increasing number of people who leave the buraku and also the large number of non-buraku people who move into buraku. Some recent studies on the buraku issue cast doubt on the necessity to define the subject of the research and to label people. The burakumin category is thought to be a construction.

In 2006 the Osaka Prefecture Report on Human Rights Opinion Poll published the results of a survey on attitude pertaining to the aspects which are crucial to decide whether a person has dōwa origin (2006: 44). For more than half of the participants in the survey the most decisive factor to define the belonging of someone to the minority is the residence in a dōwa area. The officially registered permanent address in a dōwa area is the second important factor. The third factor is the fact of being born in dōwa area. These matters concern the actual person, whereas the following three refer to the person’s relatives, but have the same order of importance. These factors are whether the parents or grandparents live in a dōwa area, have their registered permanent address in a dōwa area or were born there. The next reason is related to person’s residence in a dōwa area in the past. Thus, there are two big categories: The first is residence in a dōwa area and the second is the line of descent which in turn is based on the residence.

According to Noguchi in the Encyclopaedia of Buraku and Human Rights Issues (2000: 944f), burakumin are a social phenomenon and can be defined only in terms of social relations. As was mentioned above, it is not possible to unambiguously define who the burakumin really are. The definition depends on other factors, such as who is determining the definition and for what purpose the determination occurs. Noguchi considers three main perspectives which the burakumin as a group are seen and defined from, namely the perspective of the members of the burakumin group, the perspective of administrative organs and the perspective of people who discriminate. The definition of burakumin given by the burakumin members themselves is an internal definition. The definition of the burakumin category on the part of the majority is an external definition.
The first perspective is that of the burakumin themselves. From their point of view, the people who have the experience of being discriminated against and share the feeling of resentment against discrimination are burakumin. Thus, from the burakumin's point of view the emotional involvement is more relevant than the actual origin of a person. For instance, when a person has moved into a buraku and has spent a long time living there, he/she is perceived and treated from the outside as a burakumin. When this person him/herself develops such feelings, then this person will probably be absorbed into the buraku community. Following the argumentation presented in the Encyclopaedia of Buraku and Human Rights Issues, persons with buraku origin who live in a non-buraku area and who either do not attach much importance to their line of descent or try to conceal it, are not regarded from the burakumin with strong buraku identity as belonging to burakumin, because of the lack of emotional connection. However, persons with buraku origin living outside are actually regarded as related to buraku from the point of view of buraku people. Moreover, persons without buraku origin who live in buraku and who do not share any experiences are also regarded as related to buraku. It depends on the level of personal involvement with the buraku issue and on the relevance of buraku identity to an individual.

The second perspective is that of the government, which established a definition of the burakumin minority in order to restrict the group that could claim funding according to the Law on Special Measures for Dōwa Improvement Projects. In administrative language, target areas are referred to as 'dōwa areas' and target subjects as 'dōwa related persons'. The Japanese government provides the following definition: 'Dōwa related persons are those members of a dōwa area's population who are placed on a low position in economic, social and cultural terms as a result of discrimination based on historical processes of formation of hierarchical structure in Japanese society, and who are unjustly hindered to improving their social and economic position today.' (Sōrifuhen, 1977; own translation). This definition of the term 'dōwa related persons' is very restrictive. First of all, the definition excludes people with buraku origin but who are not living in dōwa areas. Furthermore, it also excludes people without buraku origin but who are living in dōwa areas. It is critical to emphasise the fact that buraku and dōwa areas are not the same. The terms are not equivalent, because some buraku refused to get officially registered as a dōwa area in order to avoid the new label and official designation as a discriminated area. Also, some buraku were considered wealthy enough and not in need of support of the Improvement Projects. This explains the significant difference in the number of discriminated areas given by the government and by the Buraku Liberation League.
Finally, the third perspective is that of people who discriminate themselves. In order to prevent being discriminated against, the majority avoids any possibility to be related to *burakumin*. Consequently, *burakumin* are defined in a diffuse and extensive way, and include all people who might have some connections with buraku. Some members of the majority are regarded as *burakumin* without having noticed it and are avoided because of this. The definition includes people who have buraku descent, who live in buraku, who have relatives having buraku origin or living in buraku, who are linked to buraku symbols such as certain kind of occupation, who show enthusiasm for *dōwa* education, who protest against discrimination, and finally people who maintain intimate relationships with buraku people. Thus, *burakumin* are people who are regarded to be *burakumin* and are discriminated against, or for whom the likelihood of being discriminated against in the future is very high (Encyclopaedia, 2000: 945). One of the main features of such a definition is its arbitrariness.

The administrative definition of the *burakumin* minority group is very precise and includes residence and origin as the two main criteria, which are of an objective nature. The other two definitions are formulated in a very wide sense and are based on these objective criteria and also on a number of subjective criteria. Besides residence and origin the definition by the *burakumin* themselves involves such subjective criteria as shared experiences of being discriminated against and emotional involvement into buraku issue. The definition by people who discriminate is based on a large number of subjective criteria: Maintaining intimate relationships to buraku people, connection to buraku symbols or protest against discrimination.

The Encyclopaedia of Buraku Issues published in 1986 gives the following definition of *burakumin*: ‘*Burakumin* are people who are regarded or regard themselves as *burakumin*’ (Encyclopaedia, 1986: 793; own translation). The Encyclopaedia examines four possible conditions on the basis of which the *burakumin* group could be constituted. The first condition is the fact of being a descendant of the discriminated groups liberated in 1871. However, based only on the line of descent it is not possible to decide objectively whether or not a person belongs to the *burakumin* group. The second condition is starting a family in which one spouse is from a buraku but the other is not. The decision whether children from those families belong to the *burakumin* is subjective and arbitrary. The third condition is leaving the buraku. The forth condition is moving into buraku. The last two conditions do not provide an objective criterion for the formation of the *burakumin* either. The conclusion is that the *burakumin* are made to the *burakumin* because of the discrimination. The *burakumin* definition formulated in Encyclopaedia 2000 dissociates the minority
Buraku identity as a social category

group with the criterion of descent and deals with burakumin as a constructed term.

According to Noguchi, the group of burakumin exists as a consequence of discrimination, which means that the burakumin minority formed as a consequence of its members being excluded from the majority on the basis of various conditions. From the initial definition of burakumin as people who are regarded to be burakumin and are discriminated against or have strong possibility to be discriminated against in the future, Noguchi goes over to reconstruction of the term burakumin. He argues that locality and origin are no more the sole criteria for the categorisation of people as burakumin members. The increasing numbers of people who move into or out of buraku, and also the increase in marriages between buraku and non-buraku people, lead to the blurring of the boundary between buraku and non-buraku people. Noguchi suggests concentrating on collective experience and emotional involvement. Thus, the reconstructed definition says 'burakumin are people who share the experience of buraku discrimination and who can share feelings of anger and frustration against discrimination' (Noguchi, 2000: 42).

However, Noguchi considers two factors which separate the theory from reality. On the one hand, non-buraku people who are regarded as burakumin usually do not make an effort to end discrimination; rather they try to prove that they are not a member of this minority group. This position supports the mechanism of the buraku discrimination. Proving that one is not a burakumin means that one believes there is no reason for non-buraku people to be discriminated against. The strong implication is that there is a reason for discriminating against burakumin. In this way attempts not to be regarded as a member of the burakumin minority reproduce the discrimination. On the other hand, compared to the past buraku nowadays show less sense of community and insufficient common experiences. In the past the discrimination was severe and the buraku community offered security and help. Now, the discrimination is weaker and the coherence of the community has subsided.

2.3 Buraku identity

This section deals with research on buraku identity in previous studies. One of the most comprehensive studies analysing the types of buraku identity is the work of Matsushita. Between 1995 and 1997 Matsushita interviewed 18 youths, between 15 and 25 years of age, regarding their past experiences, views on today's situation and expectations for the future against their background of being from buraku. Collected data were categorised in one of four ideal identity types: A strong buraku identity type, a multiple-identity type, a conflicted type and a moratorium type. Matsushita notes that these categories present ideal types, that they are a product of long time processes, and that they may overlap. They can also develop from a lowly distinctive
type such as moratorium and conflicted type to a highly distinctive identity type such as multiple-identity type or strong buraku identity type. Matsushita defines the sense of self-awareness, the social category to which one belongs and one's sense of value as important components of the identity. Matsushita's study is one of the first studies to provide a classification of different identity types while focusing on the buraku issue.

The characteristic point of the strong buraku identity type is the central role of buraku identity for an individual, and also that the buraku identity does not deny the existence of other identities. Typical for this category is a positive attitude towards minority membership, willingness to state this membership and to oppose discrimination. To establish this identity is often a complex process which is accompanied by confrontation with one's identity as a burakumin or rejection of it. For respondents with multiple-identity type the buraku identity does not take precedence over any other identity and remains as important as any other identity. Individuals with this identity type maintain relationships with people from outside the buraku. The multiple-identity is also formed over longer period of time with possible phases of confusion. The next identity type Matsushita describes is the conflicted type, which is characterised by having the most personal relations within buraku. Conflicted type interviewees often emphasise the safety of the buraku community and feel discomfort by interacting with people from non-buraku areas. Moreover, many of them conveyed a general sense of concern about their future. The moratorium identity type presents youths for whom the establishing of a distinct identity is an unfinished process. These respondents do not take an explicit stand to their situation. They may reveal their buraku background if necessary, but this is not a consequence of established buraku identity. The distinguishing point between moratorium type and multiple-identity type is that the people with the former do not seem to experience the internal conflict which is typical for the people with the latter.

The important point of Matsushita's study is to offer interviewees the opportunity to speak for themselves and to give priority to their experiences. Matsushita discusses the importance of change in environment, for example enrolment in a university, starting a career or participating in buraku liberation movement activities. In new social settings the respondents reported to undergo a shift of identity awareness. Matsushita includes the perspective of the parents in some interviews, emphasising the relevance of social support and family attitudes for the identity formation.

Another study, in which attitudes of young people toward buraku identity, evaluation of this identity and reasons for self-categorising and for categorising other individuals as burakumin are analysed, is presented by Uchida.
Uchida stresses that the purpose of the study is not to find the ‘struggling buraku identity’ of the interviewed youths, although this is very important to the ideology of the Buraku Liberation League. The purpose is to examine the construction of young peoples’ buraku identity. He employs the distinction between personal and social identity, where the former is connected to Erikson’s definition. The latter has its roots in social psychology, namely in gaining the social identity through certain social groups, in this case the burakumin.

In 2003 Uchida carried out a questionnaire survey among participants of the 47th National Buraku Liberation Youth Convention. This means the participants are members of the Buraku Liberation League and the findings are thus restricted to an active part of the buraku youth. The results of a survey with broader scope might be different. More than two thirds of those questioned lived in a buraku at the time of the survey. Twenty percent lived in non-buraku areas (Uchida, 2005: 67). Questions referring to the grounds for decision whether someone has buraku origin were based on three categories: Buraku descent, living in a buraku area and the experience of being discriminated against. According to the results, the most significant category is buraku as area: ‘Because one was born in buraku’. The next is descent: ‘Because one’s parents have buraku origin’. The third most significant category is again related to buraku as an area: ‘Because one lives in buraku’. With only two percent

the shared experiences of being discriminated against seems not to be relevant for the respondents (Uchida, 2005: 68).

Furthermore, Uchida considers buraku identity types presented by Matsushita, paying special attention to the strong buraku identity type and the multiple-identity type. Youths with buraku origin were asked whether buraku identity is of importance for them. The answers were similarly distributed: For one third this identity is very important (correlation to strong buraku identity type), for one third this identity is quite unimportant (correlation to multiple-identity type), and one third chose not to answer the question. Uchida found a tendency among people with buraku origin living in non-buraku areas to perceive buraku identity as relevant. He concludes that through the experience of living outside buraku and daily interaction with non-buraku people they obtain awareness of their buraku identity to an increased extent. The reason for this awareness could lie in heightened perception of the social differences, or a lack of support by their family and the buraku community. However, the dependence of growing awareness of the buraku identity from the residence outside the buraku could probably be found only by young people who were interested in their origin before leaving their buraku. Uchida also investigates such topics as whether people are proud of their own origin or try to conceal it, coming out, and the attitude towards the buraku community.
Furthermore, since one's family generally heavily influences the formation and evaluation of one's personal identity, Uchida examines whether young people discuss buraku related issues with their parents.

3. Social identity and categorisation

3.1 Social identity

As mentioned above, in order to build his theory Tajfel uses four connected concepts: Social categorisation, social identity, social comparison and psychological group distinctiveness. Social categorisation 'is a process of bringing together social objects or events in groups which are equivalent with regard to an individual's action, intentions and system of beliefs' (Tajfel, 1981: 254). The connection of these concepts can be explained in the following way: Individuals categorise themselves and are categorised by others in groups and the membership of certain social group provides social identity for them. According to Tajfel's definition, which is limited to some aspects of the individuals' relation to the surrounding world, social identity is 'that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership' (Tajfel, 1981: 255). Social identity in turn offers a basis for social comparison as a member of a group, and through the comparison individuals seek to gain positive-valued differentiation with respect to others. This improves their self-image and boosts their self-respect.

The four linked concepts have another outcome for a minority group. The crucial point is the process of self-categorisation and the process of being categorised by others. As was stated in the discussion about buraku definitions, the largest burakumin category is constructed not by burakumin themselves or by the government, but by the people who discriminate. Thus, the burakumin category which contains the most number of potential members is formed in terms of an external definition by the majority. The external definition is based on many criteria including buraku as origin, buraku as residence, connection to buraku symbols and others. The burakumin category created through this external definition comprises also the burakumin category formed by the internal definition, although the external and internal evaluation of the minority group differs significantly.

The burakumin minority was established through the process of social exclusion over a long period of time. The members of the minority group were forced to settle in segregated areas and were rejected by the society. In this sense the majority was responsible for the initial formation of the burakumin as a group. The Yūwa movement was a governmental, and in this respect an external, attempt to integrate the minority. Through the Suiheisha movement the burakumin as a group developed minority consciousness.
and identity, and started the social action in order to change the situation of the *burakumin*. Thus, the buraku identity is a result of external categorisation, which caused the cohesion of the group and led to the formation of identity.

Social identity defined by Tajfel is based on three main aspects: An individual's membership of a social group, and the value and emotional significance attached to the membership. One aspect, namely emotional significance, is one of the crucial components of the *burakumin* definition suggested by Noguchi. According to Noguchi, being *burakumin* is based on the shared experience of the buraku discrimination and shared feelings of anger and frustration against the discrimination. Thus, the awareness of the membership of the buraku category and existence of collective experience and feelings create the buraku identity. However, there are people who regard themselves as a member of the *burakumin* minority, but do not attach any emotional importance to it or claim that they have not been discriminated against. Is it possible to state that these people have the buraku identity? The answer is yes. What makes the difference is the individual significance which people attach to their buraku identity, or to describe it in other words, how important the buraku identity is for them.

A good example to show how the significance may individually differ is the study of Matsushita, which was mentioned above. For the individuals with the strong buraku identity type the membership in the buraku group is actually highly valued, emotionally important and is accompanied by a high significance of the identity and its priority over other identities. The multiple-identity type shows some of the same elements, but in a less extensive form. People with this identity type usually do not give priority to the buraku identity over others, so that the significance is distributed in a balanced way between several identities. The conflicted type is characterised by a passive attitude towards the buraku identity, which implies a reduced emotional involvement. The moratorium type describes the process of searching for one's own identity, this search not being restricted to the buraku identity. The last two identity types seem not to be followed by the explicit significance of the buraku identity, but this fact does not deny the existence of the buraku identity for these people. The strong buraku identity type and multiple-identity type assign a high significance to the buraku identity, whereas the conflicted and moratorium types assign a low significance to it. People who identify themselves as belonging to the *burakumin* category can be said to have the buraku identity, regardless of what kind of significance they attach to that identity.

### 3.2 Social category implications

Analysing social identity as a group or category membership that is significant for
an individual, Tajfel considers several consequences:

(1) [...] An individual will tend to remain a member of a group and seek membership of new groups if these groups have some contribution to make to the positive aspects of his social identity; i.e. to those of it from which he derives some satisfaction.

(2) If a group does not satisfy this requirement, the individual will tend to leave it unless: (a) leaving the group is impossible for some 'objective' reasons, or (b) it conflicts with important values which are themselves a part of his acceptable self-image.

(3) If leaving the group presents the difficulties just mentioned, then at least two solutions are possible: (a) to change one's interpretation of the attributes of the group so that its unwelcome features (e.g. low status) are made acceptable through a reinterpretation; or (b) to accept the situation for what it is and engage in social action which would lead to desirable changes in the situation. [...] 

(4) No groups live alone — all groups in society live in the midst of other groups. In other words, the 'positive aspects of social identity' and the reinterpretation of attributes and engagement in social action only acquire meaning in relation to, or in comparison with, other groups (Tajfel, 1981: 256).

The first point is based on the theoretical principle formulated by Tajfel and Turner: 'Individuals strive to achieve or to maintain positive social identity' (Tajfel and Turner, 1979: 40). The second point discusses the possibility of leaving the group, when the individual cannot gain positive value from the social identity of a particular group. As a member of a minority the individual is exposed to many restrictions regarding the choice of another group. On the one hand, the members of a minority are usually prevented from joining the majority by the majority itself. On the other hand, frequently the minority group tries to stop the minority group members from joining the majority in order to retain power, which is achieved through a large number of members. In the case of burakumin it could be argued that this prevention and retention is performed by the Buraku Liberation League. On the individual level there is an option of becoming a member of the majority through passing. The term 'passing' means hiding the own buraku origin in order to pass into the society as a member of the majority. It is assumed that people who attach low significance of their buraku identity prefer passing, since this option requires hiding the connections to the buraku category.

If there is little opportunity for leaving the group the third point offers two alternatives: reinterpretation and social change. However, both alternatives demand action on the collective level. Rather then reinterpretation, the minority group started the re-evaluation of
the attributes of the burakumin category to create the basis for confidence for minority members and to convince the majority to change the negative image of the minority. Re-evaluation implies a need for improved education about the buraku issue, the willingness to open buraku facilities for public use, revitalisation of traditional buraku customs and also frequent cultural festivals. Social action was initiated by the Buraku Liberation League and has brought enormous improvements and change for the buraku situation. People who are actively engaged in the social change attach high significance to their buraku identity. The last point is a reminder that social groups are related to each other in terms of social comparison.

4. Conclusion

The minority group called burakumin is a social category, which emerged from the processes of social exclusion, and external and internal categorisation. In the course of time the burakumin minority developed group consciousness, the result of which was the origin of the buraku identity. In this respect the buraku identity owes its beginning to the categorisation processes. Buraku identity is thought to be a social identity. Present-day buraku identity is a product of the interplay between external and internal burakumin definitions. The burakumin category defined by the majority is the largest one and includes the burakumin category created through internal definition. However, the external and internal evaluation of the burakumin category shows considerable differences. The crucial factor to decide whether the individual has the buraku identity is the existence of any significance attached to this identity. The level of significance a person attaches to this identity is responsible for the individual choosing either active or passive membership of the burakumin category or passing. People who identify themselves as belonging to the burakumin category in fact have the buraku identity, regardless of whether the attached significance is high or low.

*大阪市立大学大学院創造都市研究科博士後期課程

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91


