



# Urban lower-class society in modern Osaka

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines the historical development of urban lower class society in modern Osaka. Taking into account developments from the early modern period, it analyzes the transformation, expansion, and structure of modern Osaka's urban lower class. Early modern Osaka's largest slum district, Nagamachi, was dismantled in the late-nineteenth century. However, as industrialization and urbanization advanced, new slum districts appeared in southern Osaka's Nipponbashi neighborhood and just south of the city in an area known as Kamagasaki. Notably, the slums that developed in Nipponbashi were very different from those that formed in Kamagasaki. Osaka's slums became even more diverse in the early-twentieth century. Not only did Nishihama, Osaka's longstanding "outcast community" (hisabetsu buraku), continue to expand, but also new slum districts populated by Korean immigrants and Okinawan migrants emerged. Accordingly, urban lower class society in modern Japan was comprised of a diverse range of groups. The residents of Osaka's slums were neither the "negative image" of the modern citizen, nor passive actors. As industrialization transformed urban society, impoverished migrants traveled to Osaka, married, and gathered together in back-alley tenements, over time building communities of their own. Influenced by new urban policies introduced in the early twentieth century, lower-class city residents began to join together and participate in collective efforts to obtain improved living conditions. Over time, many grew increasingly aware of their rights as citizens. The disputes that occurred in the Nipponbashi neighborhood surrounding the Substandard Housing District Reform Project are a manifestation of that enhanced awareness.

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## Subject and analytical perspectives

This article surveys the transformation, expansion, and structure of urban lower-class society in modern Osaka, as well as the way of life of lower class city residents while taking into account developments from the early modern period. The study of urban lower-class society has been an important field in Japanese modern urban historical research. In particular, Western postmodernist-influenced research conducted since the 1990s emphasizes the criminal character of modern society that excluded the urban lower classes (Narita, 1993, 2003). That research stresses the fact that modern journalism portrayed urban lower-class society as an alien society characterized by idleness, squalor, disorder, and abnormality and thereby cast modern society as a homogeneous society comprised of diligent, hygienic, and orderly "ryōmin" (law-abiding people).

However, when considered from the perspective of social history, there are problems with this sort of approach.

Working from the assumption that there was a dichotomy between "lower-class society" and "general society," research employing this approach has a strong tendency to treat lower-class society as isolated, stress its peculiarity, and portray it as the "opposite of modern." Thus, it lacks the perspectives and analysis necessary to elucidate the place of the urban lower classes in the various local social relations that existed in Osaka. Since lower class residential district neighborhoods were very much part of modern Osaka's urban social structure, a structural analysis of local urban society that includes the lower classes among the city's constituent parts is essential.

In mid-to-late nineteenth-century urban society, the urban lower classes were often characterized by the fact that they lived together in concentrated residential enclaves. This article considers the place of the lower classes in the broader development of urban society as a whole. While examining the emergence, development, and characteristics of the lower-class communities that formed during each of the periods examined herein, this article attempts to survey the history of urban lower-class society in modern Osaka.

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## Urban lower-class society in the Meiji era

### *From the Traditional city to the modern city*

#### *Urban population trends*

First, let us examine population trends in the city of Osaka during the Meiji era. Osaka's urban population reached a peak of approximately 420,000 during the second half of the eighteenth century. Thereafter, it declined continuously, shrinking to approximately 280,000 by 1868. While the city's population remained stagnant during the 1870s, it entered a period of robust expansion during the 1880s as scores of rural migrants, driven into destitution during the deep recession that accompanied the Matsukata deflation, made their way to the city.

By 1891, the city's population had risen to 480,000. However, thereafter, the pace of growth slowed and the population reached 500,000 in 1896. The declining rate of growth in the 1890s indicates that, by then, the city's population had reached a point of saturation.

In contrast, in Nishinari and Higashinari Counties, which encircled the city, the population continued to grow at a virtually consistent rate throughout the 1880s and 1890s. This growth is recognized to be the result of saturation in the city center, which led to outflows of population to the urban periphery. In the 1880s, communities along early modern Osaka's outer edge began to industrialize. As the process of industrialization advanced, new factory sites and housing tracts (often tenements) were constructed. As a result, the city area expanded outward, ushering in a process of urban sprawl.

In 1897, the authorities carried out the first expansion of Osaka's city limits. The expansion was prompted by three factors: (1) the growth of factories and companies in communities, (2) the subsequent migration to those communities, and (3) the development of urban infrastructure, beginning with a port project, which accompanied the growth of the city area. As if chasing after an urban area that, in both a social and economic sense, had transcended existing administrative boundaries and was expanding outward, Osaka city strove to strengthen its fiscal foundations as a self-governing body. As a result of the first extension of the city's borders, Osaka's population reached 750,000. It surpassed one million in the early twentieth century, as Japan entered a period of full-fledged industrialization.

In this way, due to the advancement of industrialization and urban development from the 1880s to the 1900s, Osaka grew, in terms of both scale and structure, into a modern megalopolis.

### *The dissolution and transformation of the early modern urban lower class*

How did Osaka's urban lower-class society change during the Tokugawa–Meiji transition in the second half of the nineteenth century? During this period, early modern Osaka's most prominent poor peoples' community, Nagamachi (or Nagomachi), transformed into a modern slum. At the same time, chaotic urbanization and overcrowding resulting from increased migration to communities on the city's outer edge gave rise to new slums.

### *The transformation of Nagamachi*

During the early modern and modern periods, Nagamachi (Nipponbashi-Suji 3–5 chō-me) was Osaka's largest "poor peoples'" district. During the early modern period, Nagamachi developed into a lower class residential neighborhood. It was the site of dozens of low-quality inns known as *kichin'yado*, or "flophouses," and served as a gathering place for the thousands of day laborers that stayed (or, in reality, lived) in *kichin'yado*.<sup>1</sup> During the 1880s, the neighborhood expanded dramatically as a result of in-migration from rural villages.<sup>2</sup> During that process of expansion, Nagamachi's Flophouse Fraternity, an organization that played an important role in the neighborhood's emergence during the early modern period as a gathering place for the lower classes, lost its monopolistic right to broker housing for persons classified under the Tokugawa-era population system as "unregistered" and arrange employment for them as day laborers. As a result, Nagamachi's flophouses became regular pay-by-the-day tenements. Yet, as before, the area continued to expand as a gathering place for day laborers and other members of the city's vast urban lower class. According to the *Osaka Nagomachi hinminkutsu shisatsuki* (An Observer's Account of Osaka's Nagomachi Slum) (Suzuki, 1888), a record written in 1888 by newspaper reporter Suzuki Umeshirō, the "poor people" of Nagomachi performed the following occupations:

- a. Artisans employed in occupations related to umbrella and fan production. (Most of the individuals in this category did not have shops of their own. Rather, they commuted to factories or workshops.)
- b. Day laborers who performed manual occupations, including rickshaw and wagon pulling.
- c. Rag pickers, beggars, and individuals who performed other extremely low-wage occupations. (Individuals in this category were the most numerous.)
- d. Street performers and other types of entertainers, known as *kadotsukegeinin*, who earned money by performing songs and dances in front of the gates of city households.
- e. Laborers, including many women and children, who worked in modern industrial enterprises, such as match factories.
- f. Small-scale retail merchants, including individuals who operated shops along Nagamachi's front street.

As a whole, Nagamachi's workforce was comprised of two main groups: (1) mostly adult male laborers and artisans; and (2) persons who worked in unskilled and semi-skilled "poor people's" occupations, which were commonly performed by entire families. On the one hand, the composition of Nagamachi's labor force was similar to that commonly seen in the working and lower class residential districts of Japan's mega-cities since the early modern period (Yoshida, 1992, 2000). On the other hand, however, the small number of artisans and preponderance of persons who worked unskilled, low-paying "poor people's" occupations served to distinguish Nagamachi from other neigh-

<sup>1</sup> *Kichin'yado* were inexpensive inns where guests could stay for a rate that was roughly equivalent to the price of a single night's kindling, or *kichin*.

<sup>2</sup> For more about Nagamachi, please refer to Saga (2007).

borhoods. Around 1890, the number of laborers working in match manufacturing and other modern industries increased in Nagamachi as the industrialization process advanced on Osaka's urban periphery. Matches and umbrellas were important commodities in the "intra-Asian trade" that developed between Japan, China, and Southeast Asia. In this way, from the early modern period, the fortunes of lower-class residents of Nipponbashi were tied to economic fluctuations in the Asian region.

In addition, when considering the relationship between the urban lower classes and the local communities in which they lived, one must not overlook the fact that from the early modern period landlords and landowners extracted wealth from local residents through a range of means, including flophouses, pawnshops, and money lending. They arranged lodging and employment for lower class people who struggled to survive from one day to the next. At the same time, however, they collected high-rate daily rents from poor tenants, lent them money at usurious rates, rented them futons and mosquito nets, and sold them low-quality foodstuffs and sundries.

However, as I noted above, after the Meiji Restoration, local landowners lost their long-held right to operate specially licensed flophouses. At the same time, the financial burden of many landowners increased with the creation of the so-called *gakku* ("school district") system in 1872, which required local citizens to fund and administer elementary schools. In addition, a suite of problems, including recurring cholera epidemics, struck the area between the late-1870s and mid-1880s. Due to these issues, the value that could be extracted from the vast stratum of poor people in Nagamachi was gradually lost. As a result, in 1886, the Osaka prefectural government submitted a proposal calling for Nagamachi's demolition and the relocation of its population. Although I refer the reader to John Porter's article (this issue) for a detailed explanation of the government's proposal, I would like to mention that this proposal called for the elimination of Nagamachi's back-alley tenements and relocation or dispersion of poor residents outside the city. The major factor driving efforts to dismantle Nagamachi was the aforementioned shift in the interests of the stratum of landholders and landlords, who for many years had governed and extracted wealth from the neighborhood's poor.

In the end, a large-scale slum clearance was carried out in 1891 (Katō, 2002). As a result, the structure of early modern Nagamachi, which centered on the rows of flophouses that lined the neighborhood's main thoroughfare, Nipponbashi Boulevard, was dismantled. The poor people who were driven from Nagamachi relocated to areas immediately to the neighborhood's southeast, and the Kamagasaki district which was located to its southwest. The influx of impoverished residents from Nagamachi to those areas led to the formation of new slum districts.

#### *The formation of modern slums*

The 1890s, the period after the Sino-Japanese War in particular, was an era of dramatic development for Japanese capitalism. During that period, migration to communities on the city periphery increased and the formation of new slums advanced. In the mid-1890s, following the dismantling of Nagamachi's back-alley tenements, small and

medium-scale factories and new tenement tracts began appearing to the east and west of Nipponbashi Boulevard, resulting in the formation of mixed residential-industrial districts. The districts came to be populated primarily by nuclear families whose members were part of the city's vast and diverse "miscellaneous labor stratum" (*zatsugyōsō*). One such district, Hachijuken-nagaya, will be discussed in section four of this article.

At the same time, a large-scale slum district known as Kamagasaki formed to Nagamachi's southwest in an area located just south of the intersection of the Kansai and Nankai rail lines. Following the first expansion of the city limits in 1897, the administrative district immediately south of the Kansai rail line in which Kamagasaki was located came to be known as Imamiyachō. Rows of new two-story *oikomi*-style flophouses, in which groups of lodgers slept together in large shared rooms on the upper floor, were constructed there. In addition, the practice of day laborers gathering in the area and an outdoor labor market, or *yoseba*, to seek work each day, developed. Although initially there were a significant number of families in Kamagasaki, the presence of flophouses and the local labor market gradually transformed the area into one in which unmarried day laborers congregated (Kamagaseki *shiryō sentā*, 1993; Katō, 2002). These developments mark the origins of the post-World War II-era "Kamagasaki problem."

#### *Nishihamachō*

In southern Osaka, there was another large urban lower-class enclave known as Nishihamachō (Fukuhara, 1986). In 1887, Watanabe Village, an early modern outcast community located just outside the Osaka city area, was officially renamed Nishihamachō. Due to an influx of migrants from former outcast communities across Japan, in particular the Kinki region, Nishihamachō expanded outward to neighboring districts as a gathering place for the urban lower class. Although Nishihamachō was incorporated into Osaka in 1897 during the first expansion of the city limits, it continued to expand, emerging in the 1910s as the nation's largest urban outcast community (In 1920, the population reached 16,000). While there were some influential people at the center of the local community in Nishihamachō, such as people who were the descendants of wealthy leather wholesalers and/or those who handled the circulation of leather during the early modern period, in-migration from other outcast communities in the region and the growing number of poor people transformed the area into a slum. This led to the rise of a range of social problems. Around 1910, children from Kizu kitajimachō, one of the districts that developed on the periphery of Nishihama, experienced discrimination at the local elementary school in their district and were forced to either enroll in the school in the neighboring Nishihama outcast community or drop out entirely.

During this period, police and local officials directed outcast community improvement efforts aimed at promoting independent, community-led reform. However, at the same time, residents of outcast districts became skeptical and felt that the discrimination they experienced in society at large could not be eliminated even if they worked to improve their communities. Thus, class conflict within Nishihamachō intensified: repeated disputes occurred

between impoverished tenants and the landowners and landlords who comprised the community's ruling stratum. These conflicts laid the groundwork for the rise of the Leveller Movement in the 1920s.

### Urban lower-class society in the Taishō era

#### *The development of urban Osaka and the housing problem*

##### *Urban population growth and housing scarcity*

World War I (1914–1919) sparked a period of rapid economic growth in Japan. In addition to industrial development, the period also saw an increased population concentration in large cities and large-scale industrialization.

Here again, let us examine population trends in the city of Osaka and surrounding counties. During the 1910s, the population of Nishinari and Higashinari Counties, which surround the city of Osaka, expanded rapidly. Between 1914 and 1919, Higashinari County's rate of population grew at a rate of 44 percent, while Nishinari County's population increased at a rate of 50 percent. This increase was due to the construction of factories and linked migration of labor power to the communities along the city periphery. As a result, industrialization advanced rapidly and housing scarcity became a severe social problem.

The housing problem that emerged during this period had two facets. First, there was the housing shortage, which led to rent inflation and tenancy disputes. In 1920, the city of Osaka faced a shortage of 50,000 dwellings, and between 1912 and 1921 median rents inside the city doubled. In order to compensate for the scarcity of housing, city residents engaged in relations of "subletting" and "subleasing," in which two or more families shared a single dwelling. Second, overcrowding and environmental degradation resulting from the construction of poor-quality housing and disorderly urbanization became serious problems. Squalid and overcrowded residential areas were known as "sub-standard housing districts" (*furyō jūtaku chiku*). In addition, the rapid expansion of cities led to the intensification of a range of social problems that afflicted urban residents.

#### *The outbreak of the Rice Riots*

The period of economic prosperity that accompanied World War I also gave rise to increased population concentrations on the periphery of large cities, and the formation of slum districts (Koyama & Shibamura, 1991). Kamagasaki, described above as a slum where unmarried day laborers congregated, is a model representation of the sort of slums that took shape during this era. In 1913, the population of Imamiyachō, the district in which Kamagasaki was located, was just 11,200. By 1916, it had doubled to 23,500. It doubled again 4 years later when it reached 49,000 in 1920. In addition to the general rise in commodity prices that accompanied the World War I boom, agricultural production stagnated as a greater percentage of the population moved to cities. These factors caused the price of rice to continue rising.

The government's August 1918 decision to dispatch troops to Siberia to intervene in the revolutionary conflict prompted widespread market speculation and rice hoarding, which in turn led to an unprecedented spike in the

price of rice. In Osaka, one *shō* (1.8 l) of rice, which normally sold for 20 *sen*, rose to 30 *sen* in July, 40 *sen* in early August and 56 *sen* by August 12.

When reports of the "Nyōbō ikki" (Wives' Riot) that occurred in Uozu Town in Toyama Prefecture began to spread outside the prefecture, a mass movement demanding bargain sales of rice and poverty relief took shape across the nation. On August 11, large crowds demanded bargain sales of rice in Osaka near Tennōji Park and in Imamiyachō. On the night of August 12, units from the Army's Fourth Infantry Division were dispatched to quell the riots. Despite this, related incidents occurred in the city until August 16.

In other words, the Rice Riots exemplified the explosive reaction to a volatile combination of urban social problems prevalent during World War I: underlying factors erupted to the surface when combined with a final "last straw" element. They also sparked a range of subsequent urban class-based social movements.

The labor movements, tenants' movements, outcast liberation movements, and peasant movements that developed in villages surrounding the city all emerged as a direct result of the social inconsistencies that accumulated during and after World War I.

#### *The Osaka prefectural District Commissioner System*

In October 1918, the Osaka prefectural government established the District Commissioner System (*Hōmen iin seido*) using donations provided during the Rice Riots as a new mechanism for regulating and providing relief to the poor (Matsushita, 1987; Ōmori, 1982; Saga, 2007).

The system had the following features. The authorities created territories called "districts" (*hōmen*). Generally, districts were established on the *gaku* ("school district") level. Ten to fifteen commissioners were appointed in each district. They carried out surveys of needy local households and recorded the results on documents known as "district cards." In addition, they aimed to solve the problem of poverty by arranging public assistance for needy individuals and providing them with employment introductions and life coaching. It is well-known that the District Commissioner System was the precursor of the contemporary Welfare Commissioner System (*Minsei iin seido*).

On the one hand, the District Commissioner System systematically mobilized persons of influence as local "caretakers" and worked to identify the poor and provide them with livelihood protection and relief. On the other hand, it was an urban "safety mechanism," which functioned to constantly regulate the lower classes, who were considered a source of social instability.

#### *Slums in the Taishō era – A composite of diverse elements*

Migrants to major cities frequently settled first in communities populated by people from the same place of origin, and established residential enclaves based on shared regional or ethnic bonds. Particularly notable are the communities that Koreans and Okinawans formed in Osaka in the 1920s.

First, let us examine the communities formed by people of Korean descent (Sasaki, 1986; Sugihara, 1998). Migration to Osaka from the Korean peninsula began after Korea became a Japanese colony following its annexation in 1910,



and increased rapidly in the 1920s following the opening of a boat line between in Jeju Island and Osaka in 1923. Initially, most of the migrants were single men who came to Osaka in search of work. However, the relative proportion of females gradually increased and migrants began to form families and settle permanently in the city. During this period, Korean migrants established enclaves in Higashinari Ward's Tsuruhashi kinochō, Ikunochō, and Higashi obasechō neighborhoods. Others moved to small settlements in other parts of the city.

Next, let us consider the example of Okinawan migrants (Tomiyama, 1990). During the 1920s, Okinawa's major industry, sugarcane production, suffered a devastating blow as the price of sugar fell precipitously. For much of the population, this led to a state of grinding poverty known as *sotetsu jigoku* ("palm tree hell"). It also prompted a dramatic outflow of labor power to Japan's main island, Honshū. A large number of Okinawan migrants settled in Osaka. During the second half of the 1920s, the number of annual migrants from Okinawa to Osaka rose to nearly 5000. Generally, male migrants worked as day laborers and performed miscellaneous tasks in small- and medium-scale factories. In contrast, many female migrants worked as laborers in spinning factories. As in the case of Korean migrants, Okinawan migrants settled in Osaka with the help of relatives, acquaintances, and people from the same region who had already established themselves there. They formed enclaves in Taishō Ward's Sangenya, Kobayashi, and Okajima districts; Konohana Ward's Shikanjima district; and Minato Ward's Ichioka district. Although Okinawan migrants' living and working conditions were often harsh, some found work in Osaka's heavy industrial sector during the 1930s.

## The prewar urban lower class

### *The birth of "Great Osaka"*

In 1925, Osaka's city limits were extended for the second time under the direction of the city's seventh mayor, Seki Hajime. In an effort to respond to the intensifying social problems resulting from rapid population growth and the disorderly urbanization taking place along the city periphery, the authorities integrated 44 towns and villages in Higashinari and Nishinari Counties into the city. As a result, Osaka's population reached 2.11 million and it replaced Tokyo as the nation's largest city. I would like to highlight population trends during the subsequent 15 years (1925–1940). The population of the old city area rose 16 percent from 1.33 million to 1.54 million. During the same period, the population of the new city area increased 120 percent from 0.78 million to 1.70 million. As a whole, the city's population rose by 54 percent from 2.11 million to 3.25 million.

An examination of population trends in both the old city area and the newly added parts of the city reveals that population growth in the urban core stagnated or declined, while population growth in newer districts on the urban periphery continued to increase. As a result, the relative size of the urban core and periphery reversed and overcrowding, poverty, and sprawl on the city periphery emerged as the major urban problems of the era.

### *The intensification of unemployment and destitution*

During the 1920s and early 1930s, the Japanese economy suffered a deep recession. The impact of the 1930 Shōwa Panic was particularly severe. In that year, the unemployment rate in Osaka rose to 5.5 percent and the city replaced Tokyo as the urban area with the highest number of unemployed persons.<sup>3</sup> Yet, despite the fact that high unemployment would normally result in a population decline, the city's population actually increased, as communities on the city periphery absorbed massive numbers of poor people. The increasing number of substandard housing districts and rising population of Korean immigrants serve as a vivid manifestation of the impoverishment that resulted from the economic instability of the 1920s and early 1930s.

First, let us examine the increase in substandard housing districts. Districts populated by impoverished city residents who worked in miscellaneous urban occupations and lived in poorly built back-alley tenements spread outward from the border between the old city area and new city area. According to a survey conducted by the Osaka municipal authorities in 1937, there were 333 substandard housing districts in the city and 17,896 substandard dwellings. The authorities continued to view the squalid living conditions and impoverishment of residents living in back-alley tenements as a problem.

Next, let us consider the increase in Osaka's Korean population. By 1932, the population of Korean residents in Osaka exceeded 100,000. Examination of Koreans' working and living conditions reveals the following points. First, working conditions for Korean immigrants were often harsh and characterized by high-unemployment rates, low wages, and strenuous manual labor. During the 1930 Shōwa Panic, the median unemployment rate in the city of Osaka was 5.5 percent, whereas the unemployment rate for Korean immigrants was 18 percent. Koreans commonly worked in glass and rubber factories or as casual laborers, day laborers, and construction workers. As a result of ethnic discrimination, their wages were lower than those paid to low-level Japanese laborers.

Second, all of the communities in which they lived in Higashinari Ward were classified as "substandard housing districts." Therefore, the residential environments in which Koreans lived were often squalid. Unmarried immigrants commonly slept in temporary worksite shelters (*hanba*) and barracks, while immigrants with families often lived in tenements. In the case of Higashinari Ward's Obasechō neighborhood, Korean residents had a median personal living space of 0.89 m<sup>2</sup>. Considering that at the time all individuals with personal living space of less than 2.43 m<sup>2</sup> qualified for assistance under the District Commissioner System, Korean immigrants were no doubt forced to live in the very worst slums.

### *The Case of Hachijūken-nagaya district*

As a concrete example of one of the substandard housing districts mentioned above, I would like to examine the back-alley tenement tracts that were located in the Nip-

<sup>3</sup> During this period, Osaka came to be referred to as the nation's "most unemployed city."

ponbashi neighborhood (Saga, 2007). In particular, Hachijūken-nagaya, a housing tract comprised of 80 tenement units that was constructed in the 1890s, represents a valuable example. Much is known about conditions in Hachijūken-nagaya because both the Osaka prefectural and municipal authorities carried out detailed surveys there. In 1924, just around the time of the second expansion of Osaka's city limits, the area was home to 79 tenement dwellings, which were populated by 129 households and 504 residents. Of the 129 households in Hachijūken-nagaya, 50 were "subleasing" households and there were many cases in which two or sometimes three households lived together in shared two-story dwellings.

When we examine the residential environment of Hachijūken-nagaya's tenements, we find that nearly 40 percent of local households only had the use of one room, while 75 percent of all local households had the use of two rooms or less. In the case of tatami mats, 72 percent of residents had 7.5 or less.<sup>4</sup> Households in Hachijūken-nagaya had an average of 7.2 tatami mats, while individuals had an average of 1.9 tatami mats. Considering that most families included approximately 4 people, it is clear that housing density in Hachijūken-nagaya was extremely high. Examining the infrastructure of the dwellings revealed that only the on-site landlord had a private well and water tap; the neighborhood's remaining 128 households shared three wells and just one water tap. As for electricity, which was becoming more common during this period, 14 percent had shared use of one light, 58 percent had a private light, 21 percent had two private lights, and seven percent had three or more. Although less common than in the case of wells and water taps, common or shared use of electricity was also observed in Hachijūken-nagaya during this period. While 24 newer tenements (shared by 46 dwellings) and the landlord's residence had private toilets, the other 82 households in Hachijūken-nagaya shared just two toilets.

The stratified relations concerning land, housing, and residence in Hachijūken-nagaya can be outlined in the following manner. Sumitomo Kichizaemon, the owner of Osaka's famous commercial and industrial conglomerate, owned the land upon which Hachijūken-nagaya's tenements were located. An absentee landowner, the Sumitomo House stood at the apex of the local social hierarchy. Next, there was an on-site landlord who leased land from Kichizaemon in exchange for a fee, lived in the area, and operated rental housing. At the bottom of the local hierarchy, there were households who rented single dwellings directly from the landlord and "subleasing" households that leased the second floor in a dwelling occupied by a primary tenant. These groups were bound to one another by a network of social relations centering on the neighborhood's tenements. The on-site landlord earned a high monthly income of several hundred yen (more than five times the average income of tenants) and naturally lived in a large dwelling. The wealth disparity between the landlord and tenants living in back-alley tenements is marked. In the world of Osaka's back-alley tenements, an intensely strati-

fied relationship existed between landowners, landlords, and tenants.

Let us now turn to the occupations of tenement residents. As in Nagamachi until the 1880s, many household heads worked in occupations related to the collection of waste. Many younger household members produced handicrafts, and a significant number worked in industrial occupations – sometimes as highly skilled factory workers. Here, one can discern an upward trend in the occupations of members of the urban lower class. It is also clear that districts often characterized as slums contained a diverse range of elements.

Substandard housing districts, which existed primarily in newer parts of the city area, each possessed a unique set of social relations. As the above analysis reveals, one-dimensional characterizations of districts, such as Hachijūken-nagaya, as "slums" are insufficient. It is essential to examine characteristics of such areas from the perspective of the social relationships that developed around employment, housing, and consumption.

#### *The Substandard Housing District Reform Project and the urban lower class*

The Osaka city government carried out the Substandard Housing District Reform Project, a housing improvement program which targeted tenement tracts in the Nipponbashi area and including Hachijūken-nagaya, beginning in 1927. Following the enactment of the March 1927 Substandard Housing District Reform Law, the Osaka city government was the first to move forward with reform projects. In 1928, the districts in Osaka selected for reform received official designation as substandard housing districts and reform projects were initiated. The areas that received government approval included Shimoderachō 3–4 chō-me, Kita nittōchō, Minami nittōchō, Higashi sekiyachō 1–2 chō-me, and part of Hirotamachi. The city authorities formulated a 6-year, 7.1 million yen plan calling for the reconstruction of 1200 housing units spread over a total area of 18,796 *tsubo* (62,120.78 m<sup>2</sup>). When compared to the total amount of 380,000 yen allotted for social projects in the ordinary 1928 city budget, the housing reform project was clearly a massive undertaking. As a result of this project, a series of improved housing tracts, including three steel-reinforced concrete apartment blocks, had been constructed by 1943.

However, shortly after the presentation of the city government's plan and the districts selected for reform, back-alley tenement residents launched an opposition movement in an effort to resist the project. Residents were (1) dissatisfied with the relocation payment the government planned to provide evictees, (2) unhappy about the temporary relocation site (the Imamiya area) proposed by the government, and (3) argued that the project would deprive them of their livelihoods. They opposed eviction from the outset; however, over time, the movement transformed into one that sought improved terms for evictees. Underlying residents' opposition was a love for the lives that they had cultivated in the back-alley tenements.

The struggles that occurred over the government's reform project were complex and reflect the stratified residential relations that developed around tenements.

<sup>4</sup> In Japan, room size is commonly measured in tatami mats. The size of tatami mats varies depending on the specific region and era. In the Kansai region, which includes Osaka, tatami are generally .955 m in width and 1.91 m in length.

Separate disputes occurred between residents and landlords, residents and landowners, and residents and the city government. Due to the mediation of a gangster affiliated with the Kokusuikai syndicate, landowners and landlords showed a certain willingness to accommodate residents, and the city government agreed to provide improved relocation terms. In the end, resident opposition resulted not only in improved relocation terms, but also slowed the pace of reform projects and reduced their scope.

If we examine the lives of post-reform residents, it is clear that the project led to a significant improvement in residential conditions, such as better infrastructure, more space, and lower rents. While a range of local improvement policies implemented beginning in the Taishō period also had an impact, housing reform helped to bring higher educational standards and the improved physical health of residents. In the realm of social relations, there were a number of significant changes. Subleasing and subletting decreased, new residents with comparatively higher median incomes moved in, and the stratified network of relations concerning land, housing, and residence disappeared as the city authorities achieved direct control over local residents. In short, the range of social relations that existed during the pre-reform era underwent a major reorganization.

In part, the districts that were actually selected for reform were chosen because the lives of local lower-class residents held the possibility of a certain level of improvement. Furthermore, in the assertions of the individuals who opposed reform projects, it is possible to discern a sense of self-esteem on the part of poor residents who, although they lived in slums, took pride in the fact that they had migrated to Osaka, somehow formed households, and cultivated communities while working and living their lives.

## Conclusion

The content covered in this chapter, with a focus on the changes experienced by urban lower-class society from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, is summarized by in the key points below.

First, following the transformation and dismantling of Nagamachi, Osaka's most prominent poor peoples' district since the early modern period, urban lower-class society saw the rise of new slum districts amidst the advancing trends of industrialization and urbanization. Out of that process, new slums possessing distinct characteristics emerged in Kamagasaki and the Nipponbashi area. In the twentieth century, Osaka's slums expanded and diversified. Not only did Nishihamachō, the city's impoverished outcast community, continue to expand, but also migrants from Okinawa and the Korean peninsula established residential enclaves. In this way, additional studies focusing specifically on each of the various unique subgroups that comprised lower-class society need to be conducted.

Second, the character of official policies towards the urban lower classes changed from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. Namely, the objective of policies shifted

from the simple exclusion of "the poor" (*hinin*) to intervention and regulation in conjunction with lifestyle reform. This shift reflects a broader historical transformation in urban policy from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. Specifically, the early twentieth century saw the rise of urban policies which were based on a recognition of the various rights of urban residents to housing and residence.

Third, it is also essential to mention the issue of agency on the part of the urban lower classes. Lower class citizens were neither the "other" of modern city residents nor passive actors. Amidst the massive social transformations that accompanied industrialization and urbanization, the urban lower classes of modern Osaka constructed an independent life-world in the city's back-alley tenements in which they married other migrants, lived together in groups, and established stable residences. Resulting in part from the impact of the urban policies implemented in the twentieth century (during the early Shōwa period), the urban lower classes achieved somewhat improved living conditions and status as citizens on the basis of organization, collective action, and a self-awareness of their rights. The eviction disputes that occurred in conjunction with the Substandard Housing District Reform Project symbolize those changes.

As described above, the structure of urban lower-class society in Osaka changed dramatically during the late nineteenth century. While absorbing new waves of migrants to the city, lower-class society continued to play a vital role in urban society, supporting the development of the megacity of Osaka at its foundations.

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