

# Support for Vulnerable People and an Alternative Form of Regeneration for the Inner City in Japan

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**Summary:** In terms of the urban regeneration of socially-disadvantaged areas, Japan has had some kinds of renewal and redevelopment programs under the Housing Reform Law and Special Law for Housing Provision for people who have been discriminated against socially. The tangible achievements of these programs can be seen in the former areas of slum-like sub-standard housing or squatter occupancy, but the segregation and social exclusion between rich and poor have become stronger due to the recent recession. Based on the author's experience in assistance to the formerly homeless, we should instead introduce and develop the flexible utilization of various types of housing and nurture the skills necessary for the follow-up support of vulnerable people who are restarting their lives within ordinary localities.

## 1. The Housing Safety Net

While recognizing that previously existing policies have played a certain role in the renewal of the inner city in Japan's largest cities, the goal of this paper is to propose an alternative form of urban regeneration based on the author's experience dealing with assistance for escaping from homelessness. First I wish to make clear to what extent, and through what kind of policies, a housing safety net for Japan's minorities and other vulnerable people has been achieved. There is room for debate over whether the intervention of Japan's residential housing policies have fully addressed the degree of social inclusion, or whether they have ameliorated the degree of segregation. For example, there is probably no agreement in views over how the two polar extremes of social segregation and social mixing contribute to achieving an inclusive society. As a conclusion, it is the author's intention to connect this to a modest proposal for an alternative housing policy program that bridges the work of the Ministry of Health and Labor and the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport.

For that purpose, it is necessary to retrace a bit of history. To begin with, I would like to describe the historical characteristics of segregation in Japanese cities, and the visibility of and policy responses towards the ostracized *buraku* or underclass settlements, and the neighborhoods of cheap lodging houses, which together were the major factors in the formation of that segregation. While on the whole social mixing in Japanese cities is advancing, in the ostracized *buraku* and cheap lodging house neighborhoods, and in the areas where migrants and immigrants who have a distinct native culture live, strong segregation can be seen, particularly in the cities of Osaka and Kobe. In the functioning of the housing safety net in these areas, and especially in the responses to the ostracized *buraku*, Tokyo and Osaka are decisively different, and for Japanese cities as a whole there has been no general consistency.

## 2. Japan's Modern Cities and Segregation

The author has previously analyzed the segregation in Japan's modern urbanization using as indicators low rent housing, the rate of people receiving welfare, the proportion of factory laborers, and the proportion of day laborers. It is understood that the three geographical elements of discriminated-against *buraku*, flop house districts (equivalent to areas where day laborers were concentrated), and districts where laborers in small scale factories and miscellaneous jobs in urban inner areas were concentrated were the main components in making segregation conspicuous mainly in Japan's six largest cities in the course of urbanization in the latter half of the Meiji era. And then in the prewar period of the Showa era, districts where migrants from the Korean peninsula were concentrated were added to this. The distribution of these four geographical elements was in stark contrast to the distribution of districts where concentrations of self-employed rather affluent merchants were living.

In this way, these four geographical elements historically formed the inner spatial structure of Japanese cities, and as places where vulnerable people were gathered, they also became geographical targets of urban social policies. Settlement house projects that targeted children and their mothers, housing renovation, and provision of lodging houses were partly carried out.

While this was going on, a number of independent projects were being promoted under the mantle of *buraku* improvement, local community improvement, or assimilation that were directed at the ostracized *buraku* of western Japan in particular and were not limited only to those in cities, and such projects, which during the war were given the new name *dowa* projects, were carried on after the war as well. Projects aimed at assimilating people who had come from the Korean peninsula became also an established norm. However, after the war this was left up to the formation of self-help housing environments on the part of ethnic Korean residents.

For the so-called 'ordinary' districts (those that were not *buraku* or Korean neighborhoods), as a counter measure to slums, sub-standard housing district renovation, which corresponds to today's housing renovation projects, was promoted beginning in the early part of Showa. Strictly speaking, in Osaka City the renovation projects did begin with ordinary districts, but in Kobe and Kyoto and in part of Nagoya, these renovation projects came to be concentrated on the ostracized *buraku*. In Tokyo and Yokohama, the so-called districts of small-scale factory and miscellaneous jobs in urban inner areas were the districts where the projects were focused. In contrast, the neighborhoods of flop houses were repeatedly surveyed but no concrete policies were carried out.

## 3. Semi-permanent Squatting and Clearance

The air raid bombing attacks of 1945 destroyed these districts physically, except for in Kyoto among six largest cities, but it could not erase their historical lineages. Additionally, through the process of construction projects that were called 'war damage recovery projects' during the postwar recovery, from land readjustment projects, including the widening of streets, to the establishment of urban parks, vacant land appeared which was then illegally occupied by squatters, giving rise to the 'squatting

problem' in each of the cities. These took on the form of barrack slums and spread along the river banks as well. Migrant groups such as ethnic Korean residents and people of Okinawan origin accounted for a large share of the inhabitants of these barrack slums.

In terms of urban spatial structure, many of the barracks of illegal squatters tended to be located along the river banks within the cities or on land conveniently adjoining places of work and residence. From the standpoint of urban disaster prevention, they were undoubtedly vulnerable, and they existed in the city centers as well and were highly visible to other people, and there was considerable pressure from both an aesthetic standpoint and the standpoint of hygiene to remove them. In many cases, through obtaining subsidy money after individual negotiations, the illegal squatter residents gradually vacated the land without causing a big urban conflict. However, in the process of eliminating them, in order for clearance groups in some of the districts to be provided with public housing, a law establishing a legal basis was required, and this became the Housing District Improvement Law which was enacted in 1960. Through this law it became possible to obtain public housing as an alternative to barrack demolition.

This obtaining of public housing became a reality for the first time in Osaka through a bitter struggle of the *buraku* liberation movement making demands of the government over cleaning up the illegally occupied barracks in the ostracized *buraku*. In addition to that, in the demolition of barracks along river banks due to large scale river improvement construction, or in the places with pejorative names like the 'atom bomb slum' in Hiroshima or the 'Okinawan slum,' after struggles by their respective movements and negotiations with the government, they were able to obtain improved housing. From the 1970s through the 1980s, illegally occupied started disappearing as a visual element in the landscape of the city. However, there are cases of barracks with many ethnic Korean residents whose demolition was delayed until this century, and they partially succeeded in having public improved housing constructed. The so-called problem of permanent squatter settlements has virtually disappeared from Japan.

#### **4. Transient People and the Capacity of Facilities for Them**

Next I will describe the housing that was provided for transient people from the time right after the war. Such facilities are playing a big role in support for escaping from homelessness which I will mention later, but they are sorely lacking in contact points with urban planning or housing research. Paying attention to this kind of housing from the standpoint of housing welfare should prove to be extremely important from now on.

Immediately after the war, the appearance of '*furosha*' or vagrants who could be seen especially around train stations and parks, were at first dealt with by prewar social projects that had been aimed at the 'transient poor' or 'lumpen proletariat,' but in 1950 the Livelihood Assistance Law was enacted and based on that livelihood assistance centers (relief centers, relief housing, rehabilitation centers) were established, and such people were guided into those places. People who were by nature vulnerable, in other words those without places to live, singles, the middle aged and elderly, people whose family ties had been cut off, people whose jobs were very unstable or people afflicted with handicaps were channeled into the livelihood assistance centers that were temporary housing facilities.

It was mainly the relief centers that filled this role of temporary transient housing that could be utilized by the people who today we would call homeless or houseless. In many cases they were located adjacent to the places where homeless people appeared, and one can say that in many cases they were located near train stations or so-called *yoseba*, neighborhoods of flop houses where day laborers were congregated. The number of these facilities reached their peak in the mid 1950s when there were about 100 centers with a total holding capacity of over 10,000 people. After that however, with the overall improvement in employment conditions and the reduction in unemployment, the demand for the relief centers and relief housings gradually declined.

This kind of temporary transient housing was not seen as housing in the strict sense and was dealt with separately from the policies for supplying housing such as public housing or Japan Housing Corporation's that were centered mainly around the Ministry of Construction, but rather were consigned to the Ministry of Health as social welfare facilities. From the mid 1950s onward, these interim facilities began to be expanded as elderly care facilities and then as rehabilitation centers. The former became nursing homes for the elderly under the stipulations of the Elderly Welfare Law that was enacted in 1963. The latter, the rehabilitation centers, were set up in every prefecture throughout Japan, and in the 1990s they had increased to more than 170 such facilities with a capacity to accommodate more than 16,000 people. By contrast, the relief centers were continued only sparingly, remaining only in the six largest cities, with about 20 facilities that had a capacity to accommodate about 2,000 people.

The rehabilitation centers, which were known as the last safety net, were receptacles for vulnerable people. They are facilities that accommodate individuals who need assistance, who have severe physical or mental problems, and cannot maintain everyday life by themselves. The number of people who, because multiple handicaps, it is difficult to accept in other kinds of facilities, is increasing, and these are facilities that can accept a broad range of people who have a variety of handicaps. They have come to function as receptacles for people who have been refused admittance to facilities that are regulated according to the Elderly Welfare Law, the Mentally Handicapped Welfare Law, and other laws, the handicapped who have nowhere to go, and those with a variety of physical and social handicaps. "The rehabilitation centers are the last place of refuge for people who have been doubly and triply left behind by the advance of society," and as such they have continued to exist in the shadows. Until the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century when the major role that these interim facilities play in escaping from homelessness was noticed, little attention was paid to them, not only were they not discussed in the context of urban problems, even in the area of social welfare they were treated as residual forms of welfare.

## **5. Were Inner City Problems a Chance for Renewal?**

From looking at facilities, let us turn our eyes once again to localities. The way in which the problem of segregation attracted the most attention was in relation to the inner city problems of the largest cities during the 1970s. The inner core of the large cities of Europe and North America at that time were occupied by people with low incomes and immigrants from former colonies, they were turning into slums, and urban decay was becoming a social problem. This is what attracted attention to the problems of the inner

city. Three aspects of this were economic decay, the aging and deterioration of facilities, and social disadvantages, and they could be seen glaringly in the inner ring of urban neighborhoods, with the exception of the downtown core, that had been formed up until the time of the 1930s. A decline in population as the younger generation fled the city in search of better housing, aging of the population, a decline in purchasing power, the weakening of community bonds... as well as the aging and decay of housing and urban infrastructure, the worsening of the living environment through such factors as mixed land uses, the reduction in the number of employees due to the relocation of secondary or manufacturing industries, etc.... These were all lumped together under the name of urban neighborhood decay and created a sense of crisis as the problem of the inner city from the late 1970s onward.

The inner city problem, seen from the viewpoint of the housing safety net, was a problem of the aging and deterioration of prewar *nagaya* wooden row houses and poor quality multiple-family wooden dwellings built during the early period, and increasing vacancies and abandonment. In areas where dealings in the housing market failed to materialize and there were few redevelopment incentives for the private capital market, there was promotion of the development of large scale housing projects by the public sector, using mostly the land of abandoned factory sites. In places where this large scale clearance type of improvement was impossible, as model projects for the improvement of dense neighborhoods of deteriorated housing, long term improvement projects were initiated that combined public facility infrastructure development such as roads and parks together with promotion of the rebuilding of decrepit housing. That said, it is no exaggeration to say that the results, for the most part, were manifested in projects aimed at the problems in *dowa* (or *buraku*) communities.

Nevertheless, there was a sense that, in terms of the visual cityscape, the façade of decay was erased through the development of *manshon* condominium/apartment buildings and office buildings by developers in the inner ring as well that accompanied the penetration of the bubble economy of the late 1980s. Although there were clearly problems with the physical environment, it was not acknowledged that conditions had deteriorated to a degree economically that could be called decay, and the inner city areas were not in a state requiring special consideration in relation to the social problems and deterioration in public safety that had become such problems in European and American cities.

## **6. The Present State of Segregation**

Since the collapse of the bubble economy, the impetus for urban neighborhood renewal through the construction of large scale *manshon* condominiums by private capital in the inner city has plummeted. At the same time, with the end of the *dowa* improvement projects, renewal through clearance type projects has come to a halt. The problems that the inner cities are facing have not changed since the 1970s, but the possibilities for dealing with them through clearance type renewal have greatly diminished. While any decisive mechanism is lacking for the physical improvement of the dense urban neighborhoods, there is no strong pressure for redevelopment as in the cities of other East Asian countries, and there is a gradual, incremental improvement here and there in such

areas resulting in wooden three-storied single family dwellings or small scale developments of buildings with one room apartments. Also, as for the welfare housing sector of public housing, while it has become a receptacle for vulnerable people, the adoption of a sliding scale rent payment system based on ability to pay has resulted in a rapid exodus of people with comparatively higher incomes away from public housing. Looked at in terms of income level, the segregated condition of public housing areas has become strongly apparent.

Figures 1 through 3 are maps drawn up by the author based on information about the distribution of total annual income and deposit per household in 2008 in the three metropolitan areas of Osaka, Nagoya, and Tokyo that first appeared in a Japanese business magazine under the rather sensational title of “Neighborhoods where the rich live, and neighborhoods where the poor live.” (Source: <http://president.jp.reuters.com/article/2010/01/28/AB199888-04D0-11DF-B598-E4D63E99CD51.php>).

It can be seen that the circumstances of segregation according to income level differ greatly in the three metropolitan areas. The distribution of high income people in the Tokyo Metro Area can be seen strongly within the ring of the Yamanote Train Line which surrounds the urban central areas, and also across a wide area in the southwestern part of Tokyo’s 23 wards. Outside the 23 wards, a distribution can be seen spreading from the western to the southwestern part. On the other hand, except for the southwestern margins of the Yamanote Line, the distribution of low income people surrounds the outer margins of the Yamanote Line in a fairly dense ring and in particular comparatively densely distributed in the east, north, and northwestern parts. By contrast, in the Osaka Metropolitan Area, only a very sparse distribution of high income people can be seen within the Osaka Loop Line that surrounds the city center and to the south of it, but within the boundaries of this map their distribution can be seen to be concentrated in the area between Osaka and Kobe and in the northern part of Osaka suburb. The distribution of low income people is in virtually all areas, and can be seen strongly concentrated over a very wide area outside the Osaka Loop Line. The Nagoya Metropolitan Area appears to be midway between these two. A distribution of high income people can similarly be seen in the central city and especially in the southwestern direction, but there is almost no concentration of low income people, and one can discern a condition of social mixing in that middle income people widely surround the urban center.

The degree of segregation seen from differences in income is quite pronounced in both the Tokyo and Osaka Metropolitan Areas, but its characteristics differ greatly in the two cities. At least this is true within the boundaries of these maps, but in both Tokyo and Osaka Metro Areas, as seen from the aspect of income and deposit in the inner city, the residential housing areas of vulnerable people concentrated in a ring shape have extended over a considerable area, and even within the Osaka Metro Area, in Osaka City and its immediately surrounding cities, the concentration of only people with relatively low incomes has become deeply entrenched.

## **7. A Vision of an Inclusive City**

Grasping the reality of segregation in Japan seems to have advanced with one look through the precision and beauty of illustrations using GIS and other techniques. While the grasping of that may have advanced a step, from the standpoint of devising policy tools aimed at vulnerable people, since the end of the *dowa* projects, the things that we should be seeing do not exist. The author has been involved with assistance for helping people to escape from homelessness for a period of ten years, and has the feeling that the current problem of homelessness has exposed the fragility of the housing safety net, but at the same time it points the way towards the possibility of an inclusive urban form that skillfully makes use of the conditions of segregation and social mixing in Japanese urban spaces.

The number of pages I can use is limited, so I will try to describe this succinctly. Assistance for escaping from homelessness is assistance in returning people living on the street and people who have lost their homes to apartment life or living in appropriate interim facilities. In order to do that, all kinds of housing are necessary to be provided. What is important is that this housing assistance be accompanied by job seeking assistance, medical care, insurance and care-giving aid, house keeping assistance, and aid for the nurturing of living skills, all linked together as after-care assistance to help people live by themselves in their localities. In response to the trends in society to see this kind of activity as the 'poverty business,' there is a pressing need for academics to create appropriate guidelines.

In the segregated areas of the inner city described above, one new development is that real estate markets are coming into being whose customers are people escaping from homelessness, using relatively large sums of livelihood welfare payments. By having the practice of aiding the homeless back up such real estate markets, as housing assistance for inhabitants who are easily isolated, it has become possible to guarantee people a settled life. If it is possible for assistance to be tailored to fit people having trouble with their livelihood or trouble working, one can expect that minimally adequate housing will be supplied and a kind of self-helped neighborhood renewal of low rent housing districts will move forward. A number of areas in Metro Area would try experiments as ways of dealing with an inclusive form of urban renewal. This is a unique attempt at an alternative form of local renewal and urban renewal that will give birth to renewal of the inner city, especially in socially disadvantaged areas.