Community Building in Naha Shintoshin, Okinawa From the View of Gender Studies

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Abstract The purpose of this paper is to describe the relationship between the nuclear family and the housing environment from a perspective of residential space in Okinawa, Japan, focusing on the processes of community building in Naha Shintoshin. This is an analysis of a redevelopment project in the former residential district of the U.S. Armed Forces Base. The district was returned to Okinawa Prefecture, Japan in 1987. Naha City and landowners have been jointly participating in the community building since the 1989 official redevelopment plan’s approval. The research presented here partially supports the idea that residential space can reinforce gender inequalities. However, in this paper I argue that residential space can be an arena for the changing of gender relations. By describing how landowners take part in that development and how residents participate in community building in this area, I argue that many movements for community building tend to have an influence on power relations within the private residence and play an important role in deciding the basis of the ordering of daily life. In Okinawa there has been a custom of strict male familial succession, totome, in the patriarchal system. It is said that this custom has affected community building processes traditionally. But this reproduction space in the form of the community building may be an alternative space for active women to potentially change their power relations with men since the community building movements take place outside of the patriarchal system.

Key words community building, gender, Naha Shintoshin, totome, the former U.S. Armed Forces Base

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this paper is to describe the relationship between gender and ‘residential space’ in Okinawa, Japan, focusing on the processes of community building in Naha Shintoshin. ‘Residential space’ has been culturally and socially created as a living space where the residents can live actively and creatively (Kageyama 2004). ‘Residential space’ is an integrated space between production space and reproduction space, and it is a place where residing persons who are active in integrating production and reproduction can continue to act creatively even by simply living in the residential area. Production space means space in which the production of fortune, service and manpower are reproduced, and reproduction space means space in which manpower is entirely reproduced, in this research (Kageyama 2004). In this sense the urban space is formed by uniting production space and reproduction space for the first time, because human life in the urban area is constructed actively by residents there (Lefebvre 1970; Ueno 1990). It is argued that it is one of the important themes in urban studies to clarify the structure of urban space by focusing on the interrelationship between production and reproduction. Reproduction space has been assumed to be inferior to production space where capital accumulation is performed. Reproduction space is gendered and regarded as a subordinate position where women are forced to engage in domestic labor (Kageyama 2004). In this paper the process of how the urban area is spatially formed is interpreted as a gendered process. Gendered space means that sexual differences are permeated in various social phenomena to construct power structure in social relations (Burnett 1973; Tivers 1978; Monk and Hanson 1982; Women and Geography Study Group of the IBG 1984; Rose 1993). In Japan, those situations have sometimes been remarkable not only in connection with the labor market but also within the social environment (Kageyama 2002; Wakabayashi et al. 2002; Yui et al. 2004; Yoshida 2007). This paper will discuss an emerging phenomenon of ‘residential space’ by investigating the process of the new urban community building project in Naha City with a special focus on traditionally-gendered customs there and active women’s participation in local activities for that development.
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The Current Study

Method

The current study was conducted from February, 2005 to December, 2005. One-on-one, open-ended 1–6 hour, one-time interviews were audio recorded while the researcher also took notes during the interview process. One interview participant did agree to meet on three separate times to give additional information regarding the project.

Participants

A total of seven people agreed and consented to be interviewed for this research (two females, five males). Three were municipality workers in the redevelopment project area. One was an active member of that district's landowner's association. Three were involved with the Mekaru district community building residence space.

Development of Naha Shintoshin

Naha Shintoshin was developed to form the new center of a Naha City with diversity of urban functions. The area is located about 2 km within the central business district of Naha City, located between the National Route 58 in the west and the National Route 330. The developed district was requisitioned forcibly as United States Armed Forces civilian employees' residential area by The Land Expropriation Law of 1953. Then, the area was provided to the United States Armed Forces as Maki Minato Naha Residential Quarter, and in 1975 its partial return to Japan began. It was not until 1987 that the entire district was returned to Japan. The Development of the Naha Shintoshin Project was started in 1992. The substitution of land lot ended in 2005 (Okinawa Prefecture 2013).

The first feature of this development is that the developed site was the returned area from the United States Armed Forces. After the site was returned, landowners requested that the Japan Regional Development Corporation and the current Urban Renaissance Agency should develop the site for them. As a result, it was decided that both Okinawa Prefecture and the Naha City, as administrative bodies in charge, would initiate and plan the project along with the Japan Regional Development Corporation.

The second feature of the development was to offer land substitution and shared use of the land. The Japan Regional Development Corporation executed the offer of land substitution in which landowners could propose how to divide the land lot after the development had been completed. This is one of the allocating policies of large-scale residential area development. Although this method requires a complicated procedure and great amount of time, landowners are likely to be satisfied with it. This method necessitates cooperation with the landowners during the process and enables them to participate in the development project. The Naha Shintoshin planning association was established in 1993. This is composed of Okinawa Prefecture, Naha City, Japan Regional Development Corporation, and the Naha Shintoshin landowners’ association. That association has worked to achieve the goals and the conditions of the city planning.

The Land Owners' Participation in Development

The landowners' participation in the development was achieved through the landowners' association. This association was evolved from the American Armed Forces Rent Landowners’ Association, and consisted of twenty to thirty delegates representing the districts of Ameku, Mekaru, Aja, Kaminoya and Omoromachi in Naha City. The first president of the association, as the former president of the American Army Rent Landowners' Association, engaged in negotiations with the Defense Agency which grasped the situations of both the United States Armed Forces and the American Army Rent Landowners' Association. The second president was active in the final decision-making process of the development and the third president achieved the offer of land substitution after the development had been decided. It was necessary to achieve the offer of land substitution as the landowners' consensus, but it was more difficult to achieve as the number of landowners involved had increased. Landowners and leaseholders added up to about 1,700 people when they requested the development for the Japan Regional Development Corporation, but they increased to about 3,500 when the announcement of the land substitution was made (interview at Urban Renaissance Agency). It was extremely difficult to consider 3,500 landowners' intentions and coordinate them but a series of briefing meetings was held in public halls in such cities as Osaka and Tokyo as well as in Okinawa. This proved to be a necessary step as many landowners involved had already moved away from Okinawa to urban areas.

In February, 2005, I conducted an interview with Mr. A, an active member of the landowner’s association. Mr. A said, “The Japan Regional Development Corporation tried to describe a picture at a desk and imposed it upon
us” and “Nothing was carried out though what they said was correct.” Thinking of the need to make their decisions for themselves, he tried to organize management of the landowners association by creating the different functions of president, vice-president, manager, and secretariat. He said that one of the important traits of the president is “to talk in a strapping voice, to speak plainly and to have determination and courage.”

When the United States Armed Forces residential area was returned, he didn’t have any real feeling that the military ground would disappear. Just after his rental income stopped, he found it necessary to begin the development for the first time. He did not have any intention to become active at first. But once the development project actually started, he made every effort to establish the Naha Shintoshin with a keen mission. He also said that as long as he is involved, he would make as much effort as he could.

However, it is not necessarily easy for general landowners to have access to any information regarding the development. Because landowners are mainly householders, that is, men, very few women had chances to participate in the development process. The role that women played in the development was so minor that the process of the development already contained a strong gendered-power structure.

**The Few Roles that Woman Landowners Play**

Of the few female members with the landowners association, one agreed to be interviewed for this study. In February 2005, I met Ms. B and interviewed her about the relationship between the Naha Shintoshin Development Project and women.

Ms. B reported that there was almost no opportunity for any individual landowner to have access to the information about the development. She decided to be active in the land readjusting process in order to obtain the information about the development by participating in the development itself.

She was able to become active in the organization of the project since very few people expressed interest in doing the extra work involved. According to her, the land readjusting project had almost completed its functions as the consulting and approving organization during the first five years. During the second five years and after that the main function of the active members was to approve the problem concerning the court disputes and the contracts but they did not need to make decisions on important landowner issues since it was not related to the development of the residential space.

Even though Ms. B involved herself in the development of the land readjusting council, she did not feel that she had contributed to the development well enough. She told me that even though she had easier access to much more information than others, she said she could not feel any sense that she had contributed to the development together with the other members because when she became involved most of the planning of this area had already been decided. As a result, she endeavored to establish self-government in the Mekaru district where she lived by making the most of the obtained information and the social network that she established with all the individuals who were in charge in the city and the prefecture in Japan Regional Development Corporation, and other landowners as a member of the land readjusting project.

In general, according to Ms. B, women in Okinawa were not supposed to stand out in the presence of others. She had many difficulties in establishing the self-government of the district because people did not agree with women’s active participation in such matters. When she visited some residents there to request for their cooperation by explaining the significance of the self-government of the district, some of them said, “You do so because you like it,” with a disapproving expression implying that women were not supposed to do so. One of those women with whom she worked gave up her activities because of these types of reactions. Ms. B wished, “I don’t dare to expect others to be cooperative with me but I at least hope that they will not thwart what I do.”

Ms. B had a special chance to access the development unlike other women in Okinawa. She had the right to state her opinion because she was a landowner. In addition, she was married with someone who was born outside Okinawa though she was born and had grown up in Okinawa. She realized that the action and the idea shared by women in Okinawa was locally socialized in Okinawa through her experiences with the PTA (Parents-Teacher Association) activities in Tokyo when she lived there being quite more open. In addition her husband always said to her “Do anything as you want” and did not restrict her behavior.

In Okinawa there is a custom named totome which is a memorial tablet, the object of ancestor worship, which the eldest son is supposed to inherit. The son who inherits the totome also inherits the family property. Therefore, any inherited property is rarely distributed to women. Even if the property is distributed to a married woman, the official owner of the property is very likely to be her
This method of succession is based upon the tradition of the patriarchy of the Meiji Era Civil Law, and the toteme, the preferential treatment of the eldest son in this memorial tablet and property inheritance is regarded as a product of the modern age in Japan. There are a lot of people who still keep this custom though it is obviously a problem of discrimination against women (Miyagi 2000).

Ms. B's father did not follow this custom and divided his land of about 1,650 m² among his five children; sons and daughters. Ms. B's father was the eldest son but he inherited his father's land by purchasing it. It was natural for him to inherit his father's property without any payment but he wanted to own and manage his land as he wanted. When he divided his land among his children including Ms. B, he did not accept any criticism from people around him because he bought the land from his father, not just inherited from his father.

It is unusual that women inherit land and a woman become a landowner in Okinawa (Miyagi 2000). Despite being a woman, Ms. B became a landowner and acted as such and she could view the Okinawa customs as something to do with others because of her special experiences in Tokyo, which led her to active participate in the development while she made the most of her situation. Although “Naha Shintoshin development project was made merely at the desk,” but “the town can be a town in its true sense of the term when residents there gather,” thus it is important “to make the town suit ourselves though our individual power is small.” Ms. B hopes “to make a town in which the children who are born can grow up in a place they can be proud of.”

Even though Ms. B was involved in the Naha Shintoshin development as an active member of the land readjusting project, she could not necessarily contribute to it well enough. She was active in establishing the self-government of the district, not in the development itself. She was given her gendered role and focused her activities upon establishing the self-government of the district (Kageyama 2008).

**The Establishment of the Self-Government in the Mekaru District**

The self-government of the district in the Mekaru district was established in September, 2003. Its activity was begun with the streetlight installation to prevent minor crimes such as bag-snatching because there were a lot of dark streets at night and a lot of undeveloped places in the process of the development. Those active people including Ms. B made their effort to establish the self-government of the district in order to request the city government to provide streetlights. It was not difficult to increase members of the association but women's active participation in public was not necessarily accepted as a desirable behavior because it went against Okinawa's tradition. The members increased because women and young children had become victims of American soldiers (Takasato 1996). Thus, not only household residents but also residents in the apartments felt they needed to save their school-aged children and joined the self-government of the district increased. The association started night patrols and made "crime prevention maps” by getting cooperation from the self-governments in the surrounding districts and so expanded its activities. In 2004, it began area cleaning activities and promoted residents' consciousnesses about a new town. When the self-government was established, there was no gathering space in the Mekaru district, therefore the board meetings of the government were held by borrowing the gathering place owned by the other associations. A bulletin board installation was demanded to publicize announcements and informations to residents in the district. Currently a simple bulletin board is installed but since Okinawa becomes stormy very easily, notices and announcement on the bulletin board can be torn away very easily. The self-government is currently trying to improve on it.

In 2005 the self-government of the district had about 110 householder members. Main members of the board of directors were in their thirties and forties. Their meetings were usually held once a month on Sunday mornings. There was one woman out of the nine members on the board of directors and three out of eight group leaders were women. The membership fee for the self-government of the district was 500 yen and the fee was used to maintain the streetlights, among other things.

In 2005, a new elementary school was also established in the district. In the school's gym, the traditional dance mekarushi was performed by children as a memorial event for establishing the school. This dance was based upon a folk tale in which a heavenly maiden came down to a river behind the school from the sky and the dance was very appropriate as a memorial event. The elementary school sponsored it, and the self-government of the district cooperated with this. Thanks to this event, the school PTA and the self-government of the district are planning a cooperative association to build a new town. The newly built elementary school has become a space in which the members of the self-government of the district have various kinds of activities. The president of the self-
government said that the board of directors would make the most use of the school.

The self-government of the district promotes activities which residents themselves can initiate, such as streetlight installation and holding a children-centered traditional dance in the new gym. Moreover, the information exchange with the self-government of the district in other districts besides Naha Shintoshin was promoted. Even though the activities of the self-government of the district were still in their infant stage, it has been spreading among residents in the district.

Such activities as the streetlight installation and the bulletin board installation should be regarded as activities in which the residents themselves demand their needs and propose their disagreement with the structure of existing space that others made for them. Moreover, the performance of traditional dance should be regarded as a movement to create a new tradition while making the best use of the tradition inherited in the area. It is also an activity which involves not only children but also adults so that this activity can deepen their consciousness of attachment to their district. It can be said that it will advance a sense of hometown-making with the aim of suiting the residents themselves.

The Formation of Residential Space and Gender in Naha Shintoshin

The houses in the urban areas are part of the built environment; products of the modern age. This space has been invented to locate women in reproduction space. The space is separated by its differentiating functions under modern capitalistic modes of production though production space and reproduction space are intimately connected. The space is separated because its functions are differentiated. In Okinawa, essentially customs like totome continue and locate women in reproduction labor. This ideology reflects a patriarchy. Women who are located as reproduction laborers aren't considered to be active actors to create their own space. However, their daily behaviors are not restricted in the reproduction space but they are likely to extend themselves to various activities in the society including production labor, and thus, we are witnessing an emerging phenomenon in which women have become active in constructing their own space.

As is discussed in this paper, few women could participate in the Naha Shintoshin development, which was mainly led by landowners. This is true of the development of any area. Large-scale development is likely to alienate women's participation in Japan (Kageyama 2004). Moreover in Okinawa a lot of people tend to show opposing attitudes toward woman's leadership and participation in community-building development. Women's participation chances were not open, which was mainly caused by unequal distribution of power on the basis of gender in Okinawa. On the other hand, people such as Ms. B reported that as a women they felt limited by the present conditions in being able to participate in large scale development. However, Ms. B pressed on through this environment and worked activity.

From the view of the level of life space, residents have been active in making social networks by organizing self-government in the Naha Shintoshin district. Residents there have extended their social network and deepened their sense of hometown ownership, which influences their consciousness of actual life space and newly constructing 'residential space' in their lives. It is the residents there who construct their space. These residents have not accepted their residential area as their existing gendered reproduction space made by others as it is, but have been trying to transform their space by acting upon their own initiative.

The gender biased customs like totome, are embedded in the process where urban spaces are formed as a power relation. Even in metropolitan areas such as Tokyo, large scale development projects tend to exclude women even though users of such communal areas are often women. This wall is not limited to Okinawa, but is still in need of being climbed in other areas of Japan. This kind of activity is hopefully already happening and there is a need to document further progress. With further documentation and research in this area we may be able to argue that the residents as active agents are able to change the relation between production and reproduction in urban space by developing such activities as new community-building and thus the gendered space can be restructured.

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Community Building in Naha Shintoshin, Okinawa From the View of Gender Studies


(J) written in Japanese