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Abstract: Recently some single women are purchasing their own houses and the number of houses owned by single women is increasing in Tokyo. The article aims to clarify why single women tend to purchase their houses in Tokyo. The author uses the experience reports of housing ownership by single women in the Tokyo metropolitan region. These experience reports contain their economic conditions, their working conditions and their lifestyle. We can understand the housing demands of single women from these reports, because these sources are collected for marketing research. Furthermore the author tries to clarify the background of housing problems for women in the Tokyo metropolitan area. Single women continue to work after they own their house and want to avoid housing problems in their old age. It is important that they can save housing cost by purchasing houses, because housing loan becomes cheaper than rent, which was caused by low rate of interest rent policy. However all women who purchase their houses are not so rich. They want to own their houses because they are not satisfied with the expensive rent price in Tokyo, the costly and cumbersome charge of broker's procedure and anxiety regarding their old age. Furthermore many single women want to enrich their life by ownership of a house. Because of lack of housing policy for them, single women tend to try to reduce their housing problems in future and to change their life.

Key words: single women, housing, gender, urban geography, Tokyo

Introduction

Recently late marriage and the number of unmarried people have remarkably increased in Japan. In the 2000 Japanese national census, looking at the movement in the ratio of unmarried persons nationwide (Table 1), this ratio had increased for all age groups compared to 1995. Particularly in inner Tokyo (the territory of 23 wards), the ratio of unmarried women was extremely high; its rate is 40.6% for ages 30–34, 24.6% for ages 35–39, and 17.6% even for ages 40–44. The ratios of unmarried males in the same age groups were even higher, at 55.8% for ages 30–34, 34.2% for ages 35–39, and 26.0% for ages 40–44.

The progressive nationwide trend toward late marriage or remaining single is a major reason for the increase in the ratio of single persons, but we can assume that in the background to the increase of single people in metropolitan areas, there are aspects unique to these large cities. For example, in metropolitan areas, there have always been employment opportunities that create an inflow of newly graduated single working people from rural areas, and compared to such rural areas, one does not receive as much criticism from others for being unmarried. Another reason is that due to the trend toward late marriage or remaining single, the “second generation baby boomers” born in the 1970s and living mainly in the Tokyo metropolitan area tend not to get married even when they reach marrying age. In this regard, Yamada (1999) has said that the second generation of persons who moved to the Tokyo metropolitan areas from outlying areas during the years of the rapid economic growth in Japan represents a major factor in the growth of “parasite singles”—that is, unmarried persons who continue to live with their parents even after reaching adulthood.

On the other hand, it is clear from the 1995 national census that there were also many single
persons in the Tokyo metropolitan area who became independent from their parents. More than 40% of the non-married females aged 30–39 living in Tokyo at that time were “non-parasites” (unmarried persons not living with their parents), indicating that “non-parasites find it easy to live in metropolitan areas from a psychological perspective as well” (Yamamoto 2001).

From the mid-1990s, there have been a large number of cases in which single women are purchasing condominiums mainly in the 23 wards of Tokyo, and there has been increasing activity in the supply of condominiums for single persons in metropolitan areas by real estate agents that predicted this demand (Yui 2000, 2003a). The housing supply and demand conditions surrounding single women are thus changing, and we can assume that one of the background factors here is a change in awareness of housing among these single women.

In the past, the author has presented a series of research papers related to the formation of gender space in the Tokyo metropolitan area, from the perspectives of housing location preferences and housing issues faced by single women in metropolitan areas. Although this previous research has dealt with housing issues, analysis from the perspective of supply and demand related to these issues was insufficient. The goal of the current research is thus to focus on the socioeconomic and regional background to the housing issues facing women in large metropolitan areas, to examine the formation of “gender space” in metropolitan areas (the “genderization” of space), and to clarify various aspects of this trend. To accomplish this, we will use articles describing the experiences of housing buyers as a clue to the current state of housing purchases by single women, and clarify new perspectives in the housing market and housing issues in the Tokyo metropolitan area that form the background to this state of affairs.

### Characteristics of Materials Used for Analysis

For the analysis materials, we used articles describing the experiences of housing buyers published in “Housing Information for Women” (HIW: “Josei no tame no Jutaku Jouhou”; Recruit Co., Ltd.) and questionnaire surveys of HIW readers and of participants in “Condominium Exhibitions for Women.” The articles outlining the experiences of housing buyers, which were published in various issues of “HIW,” described, among other things, the attributes of women who

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had purchased condominiums, such as age and income; what these women emphasized in making their purchases; and the changes in lifestyle before and after the purchase.

In the "Weekly Housing Information" ["Shukan Jutaku Jouhou"] reader questionnaire material, Recruit Co. tabulated the attributes of condominium buyers based on a survey postcard inserted at the end of each issue. The questionnaire materials targeting participants in the "Condominium Exhibition for Women," gathered by Recruit Co. through a survey of exhibitions' participants, covered attributes of the participants such as age and occupation, as well as market survey content such as the types of locations that the respondents were seeking.

The original editorial policy of the "HIW" periodical used as materials for this study was to "offer proposals for housing selection from the perspective of women." For this reason, from 1996 (when the first issue was published) to 1998, the expected readers were housewives, women in two-income families, and single women, and the publication provided housing information to each of these reader groups. The content of the publication emphasized efficient use of storage space, kitchen and bathroom space, and other areas of the residence, as well as housing selection from the perspective of women, for example offering suggestions on condominium lifestyles.

In order to differentiate this information from housing information for families, however, "HIW" gradually narrowed its focus down two reader groups: single women, and double-income married couples with no children (DINKs). Accordingly, in 1998, the name on the cover of the publication was changed to "Housing Information for Working Women"HIWW: ["Hataraku Josei no tame no Jutaku Jouhou"], and the content and structure changed. As a result of this change, information targeting housewives disappeared from the articles describing the experiences of buyers, and from the 1999 New Year's issue onward, the largest part of the content and structure comprised articles describing the experiences of single women.

From the point where this publication narrowed its focus to target single working women and DINKs, the publication began to frequently introduce "high prestige areas" such as Hiroo and Azabu (in central Tokyo). These articles sent a message about creating comfortable lifestyles for living in "coveted locations" such as those that offer lifestyle convenience in areas close to the center of the city. This publication thus provided information about "lifestyles" for people living in these locations and the surrounding environment rather than simply on the housing locations themselves.

According to the editors of this publication, the reason for developing a housing information periodical that excludes men as target readers was that the number of single women who purchase housing is overwhelmingly larger than the number of single men who do so. In a Recruit Co. survey of new condominium buyers in the Tokyo region, just under 20% of new condominium buyers were single, and half of these were women.

According to Kishimoto (1997), single women accounted for half of the buyers of condominiums sold in 1995 by Tokyo Tatemono Co., Ltd., a mid-sized land developer. According to materials from Asahi Tatemono Co., Ltd., single women accounted for about 70% of the roughly 1,000 condominiums supplied targeting single persons (Yui 2000).

Furthermore, according to Recruit Co. materials and the survey report of sales staff at land development companies, men consider marriage to be the time at which one generally purchases a home, so they have very little interest in housing information while they are still single. Why, then, have single women come to have such a high interest in purchasing housing? What types of social and economic background conditions have led to this phenomenon?

**Housing Issues Surrounding Single Women in Metropolitan Areas**

The increase in housing purchases by single women cannot be explained through a simple connection with the increase in housing demand resulting from an increase in the number of unmarried females. We must also take into consideration housing issues affecting single women. First, because the income of single women is less than that of men, a larger burden is generated
by housing costs. Second, regarding company housing, which is intended to relieve housing problems, in many cases this housing is provided for married workers or families, or as residences for single male workers. Few companies offer well-equipped company housing or residence facilities for single female workers. For example, there is a bias in industries as well, as residences for women tend to be provided only by department stores or companies in the manufacturing industry. The third issue is that public housing is not provided for young and single persons, so these persons must select housing in the private sector rental housing market.

Furthermore, single persons are often shunned by landlords as they get older, and in many cases seniors dependent on a pension income face serious financial problems in the payment of expensive commission fees and deposits. Single women in particular, who are in a low income bracket relative to men, must be aware of housing problems during old age as one concern for the future.

In contrast to these housing issues, however, housing issues for single women are unique in that they are difficult to express as "social issues." The results of an interview survey (Kinoshita et al. 2002) targeting women working in three wards in central Tokyo (Chuo Ward, Chiyoda Ward, and Minato Ward) showed that many large companies tend to employ recently graduated females who can commute from their own homes, and that in some cases women from outlying areas who will have to rent a residence may be shunned at the time of employment. In other words, by hiring single females commuting from home, who have a low probability of facing housing problems, these companies are minimizing welfare costs related to housing.

Also, as demonstrated by Wakabayashi et al. (2002) and Nakazawa (2003), because there are many workplaces for single women in the center of the Tokyo metropolitan area, and because these women often return home late at night after working overtime, they must emphasize access to the workplace in their selection of residence locations, resulting in a strong trend toward locations that are close to stations, and that emphasize safety and crime prevention. These types of issues may be considered to be housing issues specifically related to gender.

**Supply of Condominiums to Single Women**

**Changes in number supplied**

Looking at the trends in the supply of condominiums in the greater Tokyo area during the 1990s, we can see a rapid increase in the 23 wards of Tokyo—from 245 buildings in 1990 to 824 buildings in 1999—as a result of increased supply activity due to falling land prices. The areas with the highest supply were Koto Ward and Setagaya Ward, where land prices were comparatively low. In the greater Tokyo area overall, there was an increase in "4LDK" condominiums (4 rooms + combined Living room/Dining room/Kitchen; same abbreviations used below) for families, on the other hand in the 23 wards of Tokyo, there was also an increase in one-room and 2DK or 2LDK (2 rooms + combined Living room/Dining room/Kitchen) condominiums targeting single people and DINKs.

And there are many "investment condominiums" which are for rent for single people. Most of them are defined as single units with an average private area of 30 m² or less. Recently the market has diminished, however, due to progressive asset deflation resulting from falling land prices, and sales have dropped dramatically leaving an increasing amount of leftover stock because of the effects of large financial institutions' reluctance to lend, as well as the increasingly strict screening process for buyers applying for loans.

**Location**

Many condominiums for singles are supplied in bustling commercial districts facing large streets—conditions that are generally avoided by families. Developers aiming to utilize commercial areas tend to supply these condominiums as small units for singles in order to keep the selling prices down. This is because in commercial areas with high land prices, spacious residences for families become very expensive, and because families seeking quiet living environments avoid commercial districts with poor living environments.
Condominiums for singles have an advantage for developers as well, in that because there is no need to secure parking space, which is required for family-type condominiums, it is not necessary to look for a parking lot along with the building land. The rapid drop in land prices in commercial areas has also made it possible to acquire the above land at a low cost.

Characteristics of Participants in “Condominium Exhibitions for Women”

There are two types of “condominium exhibitions for single women”: those held by developers while keeping the name of the sponsor hidden, and those conducted as part of sales activities, in which the developer’s name is shown. The main goal of these exhibitions is not only to sell property, but to gather information related to the demand among women, especially single women.

Recruit Co. began offering these exhibitions in the fall of 1994. At that time, there were over 700 applicants for participation in each exhibition, and actual attendance was booming. From 1999 onward, however, the number of applicants has been around 200, with between 100 and 200 attending the actual exhibitions. The contents of these condominium exhibitions include advice geared toward individuals about taking out a loan, as well as lectures by persons who have purchased condominiums in the past or by well known non-fiction writers who are well acquainted with single women’s housing issues. In some of these exhibitions, after the seminars are completed, participants are taken on a tour of several condominium locations.

Below, I will attempt to clarify the characteristics of condominium purchase demand among single women, based on the results of a questionnaire survey conducted by Recruit Co. targeting participants in these “Condominium Exhibitions for Single Women.”

Attribute of participants of “Condominium Exhibitions for Single Women”

Age Following is an outline of the age breakdown of participants in condominium exhibitions for single women. In the first survey, conducted in November 1994, the largest age group was 25-29 at 35%, followed by 30-34 at 34%. In the 16th survey, conducted in June 1999, the number of participants in their 20s had dropped by half, while the ratio of those aged 30–34 had increased to 42%, and the ratio of participants aged 35–39 had grown to 22%. We can assume that this reflects a shift from those who were attending mainly out of curiosity to those in an age range where an actual purchase is a possibility (Table 2).

Occupation Looking at the occupations of participants in the first exhibition, clerical posts ranked highest at 44%, followed by sales at 13%, and medical or welfare fields at 9%. Other occupations included those related to computers, publishing, and editing, indicating a great diversity in the occupations of women attending the exhibition.

Annual income Looking at annual income, it became clear that young women with modest incomes were interested in purchasing condominiums: 34% of participants in the first exhibition earned less than 4 million yen per year, while 33% earned between 4 million and 5 million yen. In the 16th exhibition, the number of persons with annual incomes of 8–9 million yen and 10 million yen or more increased slightly, but the largest number of participants earned between 4 million and 5 million yen per year. This indicates that the single women participating in the exhibition with a desire to purchase a condominium are not, as one might expect, in an elite class with high incomes. As can be seen from an examination of housing purchase capital, this is because these young women have access to a large amount of personal capital: an average of just under 8 million yen in the case of women attending the first exhibition, and more than 6 million yen even in the case of women attending the 16th exhibition. This personal capital accounts for 20% or more of the purchase amount. In addition, these women are by no means highly dependent on their parents, as the largest part of this personal capital is in personal savings, with only 2 million to 3 million received as support from parents.

Purchased units According to Tokyo-to (2001), the purchase price desired by exhibition participants is between 20 million and 30 million yen. About two thirds wanted a “2LDK” condo-
Table 2. Age of buyers of single women appearing in “Housing information for working women”

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<td>1997 Spring</td>
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<td>1998 Autumn</td>
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<td>1998 Summer</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>8</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: “Josei no tame no jutaku-joho” and “Hataraku Josei no tame no jutaku-joho”.

views on marriage A preference for condominiums with a small living area, which would not be purchased by a family, is related to factors such as location and the ability to make loan payments, but there is also a strong correlation with plans to marry in the future. According to a questionnaire on marriage plans, many women replied “If the opportunity arises” or “I intend to marry sometime,” suggesting that expectations are vague and unclear; nevertheless, only a few women replied that they had no intention to marry. Asked when they planned to make the purchase, many replied “undecided,” because in the event that they got married, the once single women could share the lodgings or rent out the property, and even if they didn’t get married, they would have secured a place to live in their senior years.

Search behavior According to a survey of large developers, in addition to the fact that single women do not necessarily need to purchase a home, they tend to be very insistent about their own preferences with regard to such factors as sunlight, location, and layout, and tend not to make compromises. For this reason, women may make an immediate decision to buy if they find a unit in an attractive area that satisfies their conditions, but many women will wait very patiently until they find a unit that they like. During this time, they gather information, for example by looking at a great many model houses, reading housing information publications, or attending condominium purchase seminars.

Real Housing Purchases by Single Women

Attributes of single women who actually made purchases

Age of buyers According to a survey of single persons conducted by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government (Tokyo-to Seikatsu-bunka-kyoku 1995, 1997), more than 60% of single women live in private sector rental housing, but compared to single men, a large percentage (12%) live in private sector condominiums.

According to the “1997 Survey of Condominium Dweller Trends in Tokyo” (Foundation of Urban Housing 1998), although single persons accounted for a low percentage of condominium
buyers (6.9%), this figure had increased by 2.1% over the previous year, and 61.8% of single persons who purchased condominiums were in their 20s and 30s.

According to the results of a reader survey (via postcards) published in “Weekly Housing Information,” the number of single women’s buyers of new condominiums in their 20s and 30s increased from the three-month period from October to December 1998 to the three-month period from January to March 1999. New condominium purchases by single women aged “between 35 and 39” or “40 and over” in particular increased by nearly 100%. Looking at the age structure of single women who purchased new condominiums, women in their 30s accounted for more than 70%. We assume that this is because when a woman reaches her 30s, she has accumulated some degree of home purchase capital, and is receiving an income that enables her to pay back a loan while working.

**Purchase prices**  According to Recruit Co. survey materials, purchase prices in the case of single persons are not necessarily in the low range; the average price is around 38 million yen, and purchase prices between 30 and 39 million yen accounted for about 45% of purchased units, while purchase prices between 40 and 49 million yen accounted for about 25%. Moreover, because the area of these units is around 60 m², which is small in comparison to family condominiums, many of these units are expensive in terms of price per unit area.

According to Recruit Co. survey materials, single women who purchased condominiums are not necessarily in a high income bracket: 19.6% earned less than 4 million yen per year; 21.5% between 4 and 4.9 million yen; 30.4% between 5 and 5.9 million yen; and about 25% earned more than 6 million yen per year. Furthermore, according to a reader survey published in the autumn 2000 issue of “HIWW,” about 60% of monthly loan payments were less than 100,000 yen, and more than 90% of these payments were less than 150,000 yen. The burden of living expenses after the purchase was roughly the same as before; in more than 60% of cases, rent was less than 100,000 yen before the purchase was made (700,000–990,000 yen: 38.5%; 500,000–690,000 yen: 25.5%).

The unique characteristic of loan payments by single women was that about half made these payments without using regular semiannual salary bonuses. This tendency toward low monthly loan payments and non-use of these “bonus payments” results from the large deposit amount paid when the home is purchased. This trend occurs because single women have substantial savings and because they receive assistance from their parents, who often save money for the daughter’s wedding.

**Concerns regarding the purchase**

The most common concern expressed by single women with regard to the housing purchase is regarding their ability to continue making loan payments. According to a reader survey in “Weekly Housing Information,” about two thirds of respondents had concerns about the repayment of housing loans. The next greatest concern, expressed by about half of respondents, was with regard to money; for example, personal capital and future income. Many respondents also expressed concerns about maintaining a certain standard of living, and changes in lifestyles resulting from marriage or sharing lodgings with parents.

Although the numbers were comparatively small, some respondents were concerned about the responses from their surroundings. For example, some women were concerned that because they had purchased a home, they might appear to have given up on the idea of marriage, or, as pointed out by Kishimoto (1997), their fathers had said “instead of looking for a condominium, look for a man who’ll buy you one,” or they were worried that “others will think I will continue to work until the loan is paid off.”

As employment of women becomes increasingly polarized, the number of women receiving high incomes with an ability to pay housing loans is increasing, but at the same time many women have low incomes in comparison to men, and are in unstable employment situations. Particularly in the midst of the extended economic downturn, employment of women is also seen as flexible (i.e., a kind of “employment adjustment valve”), and thus the ability to continue making loan payments is a major source of concern for women thinking about purchasing a home.
Analysis of Articles Describing the Experiences of Housing Buyers Published in “Housing Information for Working Women”

Characteristics of “experience” articles

The most distinctive aspect of the information provided by the periodical “HIW” and “HIWW” can be found in the articles describing the experiences of housing buyers. The titles and content of these articles are extremely interesting, and closely related to the intent of the editors. The largest number of “experience” articles can be found in the early summer 2000 edition. The content of this edition included information on the units purchased (locations, convenience, and regional characteristics), and about the room interiors (storage space, etc.). It also featured many expressions that emphasized the comfortable lifestyle of women who had purchased condominiums—a theme that is closely in line with the editors’ intent to stimulate housing purchases. We summarized comments made in articles describing purchase experiences related to purchased units, location and environment, work and everyday lifestyles, and created a database of this information. The results of an analysis of this database are shown below. The experiences of 68 buyers were described in these articles, but three of these persons were excluded from the tabulation due to insufficient information.

The single women described in these articles can be divided into two main groups: one characterized by “opulent lifestyles,” who had purchased high-priced units and were very interested in interior decorating, and the other with lifestyles of a more average appearance, where loan payments were comparatively low. This illustration of two antithetical lifestyle experiences exemplifies the diverse types of condominium buyers, from the “coveted” to the “realistically achievable.” More than 10% of these buyers had become independent from their parents, but in stark contrast to the “parasite singles” who continue to be dependent upon their parents’ income or lodgings, these single women are in the process of self-definition.

Attributes and locations of single women described in “experience” articles

Attributes of buyers The age structure of single women described in the “purchase experience” articles is as shown in Table 2. The largest number of buyers were between 30 and 34 years (about 40%), followed by 35–39 years at about 25%. In other words, about two thirds of these articles described women in their 30s who could acquire their own homes, and were thinking realistically about breaking away from an extended rental housing lifestyle.

More than 60% of these women worked as “company employees,” and it is assumed that many of these hold clerical posts in private corporations. The next largest groups included public servants and employees of foreign capital companies in the financial industry and other fields, as well as persons in specialized professions. About half of the “company employees” were between 30 and 34 years of age, and half of the public servants were between 35 and 39 years.

Locations The locations of the condominiums purchased by these women shows different pattern by age groups. In each of the age groups, most women purchased units in highly convenient locations within nine minutes walk from the nearest train station in Minato Ward (one of the three wards of central Tokyo), Shibuya Ward (in the Yamanote area), or in southern Tokyo (Shinagawa Ward or Ota Ward).

Looking at the locations by age group, women in their 20s purchased condominiums in central Tokyo wards such as Minato Ward, Shibuya Ward, and adjacent areas, and the three wards of central Tokyo (Chiyoda, Minato and Chuo) were most popular among women aged 30 to 34 years, followed by Shibuya and Shinagawa Wards. These figures indicate that the younger the buyer, the greater is the tendency to purchase units in commercial areas in the center of Tokyo or in surrounding areas. In contrast, many women in the 35- to 39-year age group purchased units in Setagaya Ward, a residential area, suggesting that older buyers have a greater tendency to purchase condominiums in areas that focus on residential applications, and where many families live. While many families prefer to
live in Kanagawa and other prefectures surrounding Tokyo, single women have a strong tendency to purchase units in locations near to the city’s center.

It is interesting to note that single women have a strong awareness of location when selecting their new home; they tend to place an emphasis on the characteristics of the living area at the time of purchase, and then to look at the layout of the condominium itself second. Furthermore, single women have an overwhelmingly strong preference for locations within Tokyo’s 23 wards. While these women like to be close to the nearest station that they are currently using, they also have a strong desire to secure a residence within these highly convenient 23 wards.

Condominium purchase prices and housing loans

As shown in Table 3, in two out of three cases, condominium purchase prices for women in their 30s was between 30 million and 39 million yen. Although condominiums purchased by single women are less expensive than those purchased by “DINKs” or families, many of these units are located in high-priced commercial areas, so could be considered comparatively expensive in terms of price per unit of area.

Most of the condominiums purchased by single women are priced between 25 and 40 million yen for 1LDK units, and between 30 and 40 million yen for 2LDK units, but it is not necessarily true that women in the higher age groups are purchasing the more expensive units. Rather, the price of the purchased units can be categorized
by the income brackets of these single women.

Many women in their 30s took out loans for between 20 and 30 million yen. This amount is related to the ability to repay the loan, and as shown in Table 4, more than 80% of women were making monthly loan payments of less than 100,000 yen, with no visible difference among age groups.

Despite a large variation in the purchase price, the monthly housing loan payments were concentrated between 75,000 yen and 100,000 yen. These figures seem to correspond with the rent for rental housing. The burden of loan payments is comparatively small because the deposit paid by these single women at the time of purchase was large (between 5 million and 14.99 million yen), and because they have substantial savings. Few of these women apply semi-annual bonuses to the loan payments (those who do not use bonus payments account for 42.9% of the total). In this way, loan payments are paid as though they were rent, and in some cases, the purchase of a condominium means that the monthly burden of housing expenses is even reduced in comparison to the cost of rental housing.

In a questionnaire survey of participants in a condominium exhibition for single women, many women expressed concerns about whether they could continue making loan payments. In spite of this, however, in the articles describing the experiences of persons who had purchased housing, there is absolutely no indication of concern regarding the loan payments, which is only to be expected considering the character of a housing information magazine. By providing examples in which there is almost no difference between housing loan payments and rent payments as discussed above, these magazines are attempting to alleviate concerns regarding housing loan payments at the time of purchase to the greatest extent possible.

Characteristics of purchased units: layout and area

About 40% of the purchased units were “1LDK” type; when one-room condominiums are included in this same group, units with a single living room account for close to 60% of the total. This trend in selection differs from the preferences of DINKs or families, which tend toward larger units (2LDK, 3LDK or more). Of the total, 28.6% purchased 2LDK units, but buyers in higher age groups did not necessarily purchase units with larger areas. Even when these women selected 1LDK or one-room units, about half of these units were between 40 and 50 m², while the most common area for 2LDK units was between 50 and 60 m². Single women who in the past had been living in small residences with an area of around 20 m² are satisfied with an area of 40 m² or more, even if the condominium is a 1LDK or one-room unit.

The reason that single women select one-room or 1LDK units with few rooms despite having an area of 40–50 m² or more is that there is no need to secure several rooms, however small, as in the case of a married couple with children. Most single women select convenient locations even if the units are small, and think of these units as an investment, in that they can be rented or sold even if the owner gets married in the future. Some women, meanwhile, make the decision to purchase a 2DK unit, coming to the conclusion that even if they get married, they could share the unit with their spouse.

Lifestyles of condominium buyers

As mentioned above, the content of purchase experience articles present the lifestyle status of condominium buyers while emphasizing the fact that these buyers are fully enjoying the lifestyle that comes with living in the city center or surrounding areas. It is very interesting that many women select a location close to their parents’ homes, even if they had been living in rental housing in the inner metropolitan area before purchasing the condominium, and despite becoming independent from their parents. These women express an extremely strong attachment to the areas in question, as seen in comments like “The popular areas haven’t changed,” and “It’s close to my parents’ home, and I’ve become very familiar with it over many years.” In addition to these comments, there was abundant evidence of bright, new lifestyles: for example, that the reduced commuting time resulting from living in the city center offered more free time for activities after work and on holidays; that it was safer to come home late at night after working overtime; that it was easy for friends to stop by
because of the convenient location; that the buyers could hold their own house parties in their spacious Living/Dining/Kitchen; that the windows were large and bright and that the rooms got plenty of sunlight; and that the rooms were satisfyingly furnished and decorated.

Unlike rental housing that is simply “a place to sleep,” these condominiums offer the enjoyment of a relaxed lifestyle in one’s own home near the city center, and this is why condominiums attract the attention of single women. By describing various lifestyles of various condominium buyers, experience articles promote a type of “longing” among readers, and emphasize the economic aspects of loan payments as undercutting rent payments. Another intention of the editors of these publications is to propose new lifestyles that can be achieved through home ownership.

In this way, by showing that “average” women—not necessarily only career women—can enjoy “opulent” lifestyles in central Tokyo, “HIW” and “HIWW” have succeeded in stimulating a desire to purchase condominiums among single women, who are considered a new buyer group.

Even while presenting examples of “impulse buyers,” such as persons who visited a model home and made an immediate decision to buy, these “experience” articles frequently describe condominium exhibitions and information gathering through visits to model home. These articles provide a clear picture of the unique characteristics of single females’ housing purchase behavior and women’s high level of awareness with regard to housing purchases, as well as the intent of the information providers to create new demand for condominiums.

**Reasons for the Increase in Purchases by Single Women**

Based on the above, the reasons for the increase in condominium purchases by single women can be summarized as shown in Figure 1. According to a survey of “Weekly Housing Information” readers, the reasons that single women purchase housing can be divided into two main categories—external factors surrounding the buyer, and internal factors related to the buyer’s own desire to make the purchase—with the most common factors being: dissatisfaction with regard to rent (paying rent is a waste of money), concerns about old age, dropping prices, 

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Figure 1. The background of purchasing house by single women.
and decreasing interest. Here, we will examine some of the reasons that single women have begun purchasing housing.

Changes in the price of condominium compared to rent

The mid-1990s, when condominium purchases by single women increased, was a period characterized by an emerging feeling of affordability in condominium prices that resulted from the drop in housing prices following the collapse of the Japanese “bubble” economy. This resulted in a dramatic change in the interrelationship with rents of inner Tokyo metropolitan area. According to Tokyo-to (2001), the average rental fee for rental condominiums in the Tokyo area continued to rise after the collapse of the bubble economy, reaching 145,000 yen in the 23 wards of Tokyo in 1999 (an increase of 13,200 over the previous year). According to the “February 2000 Tokyo Housing White Paper,” there was a downward trend in the number of new rental units on which construction began after 1990, as this new construction dropped by 40% from 1990 to 1998.

The rent of apartments and condominiums within the Tokyo metropolitan area is on the increase, in part due to a continuous decline in the stock of the type of new buildings preferred by many single women and other renters. Looking at the movement of apartment rent up to February 2001, rent of a 1DK unit was between 54,724 yen and 73,534 yen; the upper limit had increased by 223 yen (Tokyo-to 2001). Given that there were increases of 3,078 yen in the upper limit and 2,639 yen in the lower limit between February 1998 and February 1999, it is clear that although the increasing trend in rent had for the most part stopped by 2001, there was no sign of a drop in rent as in the case of condominium prices.

Apartment rent of 2DK units in 1999 was between 75,379 yen and 104,017 yen, representing increases of 6,017 yen and 4,995 yen respectively in upper and lower limits, but in 2001 the price range was 75,362 yen—102,276 yen, which represented a decrease of 1,259 yen in the upper limit, but an increase of 121 yen in the lower limit.

The upper limit of rent of rental 2DK condominiums increased by 7,762 yen (6.6%) between February 1998 and February 1999, and the lower limit increased by 6,165 yen (7.1%), but the range in February 2002 was 90,172 yen—122,810 yen, a drop of 2,948 and 2,983 in the upper and lower limits respectively. In contrast to the rapidly dropping prices of condominiums that accompany the heavy decline in land prices, the decrease in rental condominiums and other private sector rental units was slight.

Expansion of housing loans to single persons, and reasons for this expansion

The second factor involved in the increase in purchases by single women is the changes in the real estate market and the housing loan system. That is to say, based on ultra-low interest policies, financial institutions that had been reluctant to offer loans to single persons were now enthusiastic about doing so. The Government Housing Loan Corporation expanded loans to include single persons in 1981, but at that time there was an age restriction in that these single persons had to be 40 years of age or older. These age restrictions were relaxed to the level of “35 years of age or older” in 1988, and age restrictions were eliminated completely in 1993. Nevertheless, the upper limit for loans to single person households remained lower than for average households. The upper limit for loans to single persons was abolished in 1998.

Because units that satisfy the loan conditions for the Government Housing Loan Corporation have an area of 50 m² or more, these units are rather large for a single person. Unit costs are necessarily higher in commercial areas characterized by high land prices, but some single women choose layouts that allow for more than one person in case they get married in the future, and so will purchase condominiums intended for families, but which are slightly smaller than the average.

Among the housing loans provided to single persons by financial institutions, development and release of housing loans to single women began around 1995, with products such as “Hanako’s Freedom Plan,” which was offered by a major commercial bank, and “Venus,” which was offered by a credit company. Asahi Tate-mono Co. requested the assistance of a credit company when planning its “Freedio Series” tar-
targeting single women, but after that, it strengthened ties with developers and financial institutions in projects that did not meet the loan requirements of the Government Housing Loan Corporation.

Banks expanded the scope of housing loan recipients to include single women because women are a low risk. Single persons are able to allocate a larger amount to loan payments than married persons with an equivalent income, and credit companies thus offer a more relaxed upper limit on the ratio of loan payments as a part of total monthly income (40% for single persons as opposed to 35% for regular loans).

Sales activities by developers

The highly convenient commercial areas in the 23 wards of Tokyo preferred by single women have selling prices that reflect high land prices. Nevertheless, even if the price per unit of area is high, the total selling price can be kept low if the floor area is small, so developers are able to set selling prices in a range that is affordable for single women.

Some developers that had succeeded in providing studio type units with a 1LDK layout to single women (Yui 2000), and other developers have begun conducting sales activities for which the target has expanded to include single women as well. Units intended for single persons have always had lower living standards, for example in terms of poor exposure to sunlight. Single women, however, have a strong tendency to consider sunlight conditions more than noise (because soundproofing measures can be taken), so it became clear that the “leftovers” of units intended for families will not sell as a supply for single persons.

Most major real estate developers create “Friendship Associations,” actively conducting PR activities through direct mail and other media, but only a few small and medium-sized developers have created such “Friendship Associations” specifically targeting single women. Some large real estate developers, however, have created project teams targeting single women, planning sales strategies with an awareness of women in collaboration with cosmetic companies. These developers also offer services including seminars on “Feng Shui” and other housing-oriented trends; financial consultations and other events; and staff trained specifically to respond to the needs of female customers. The intent of developers’ “Friendship Associations” is not so much to provide sales information for marketing activities as it is to gather information through surveys of consumer trends.

Changes in awareness among single women

According to a reader survey in “Weekly Housing Information,” among the reasons that single women purchase homes are concerns about their senior years and the feeling that paying high rent or contract renewal fees is “a waste of money.” This is also a reflection of the fact that single women in particular who consider purchasing a home based on feelings of concern about the closed nature of the rental housing market for elder single persons take this strategy not so much because they are pessimistic about the possibility of getting married in the future, but because they have no intention of getting married.

The ratio of single women who purchased homes because “it’s a waste of money to pay rent” or because “interest rates are low” was roughly the same as the ratio of families who made purchases for the same reasons, so these reasons cannot be seen as being unique to single women. As an example of the characteristics of single women, many respondents replied that among their reasons for purchasing a condominium were an awareness of investments (“I want to own property”) and a pursuit of convenience (“I want to live in a location where transportation is convenient”).

The factors that have given rise to women’s desire to purchase a home are also related to their insistence with regard to housing preferences. As indicated in the articles describing experiences of buyers, women do not see condominiums simply as a place to sleep; rather, they express a strong determination to create a home as a place where they can pursue a richer lifestyle, for example by paying more attention to interior design or holding house parties.

Furthermore, for single women, buying and living in a condominium is an expression of a strong will to live near a workplace in the city center and to continue working. As conveyed by
the above-mentioned intention to remain unmarried, single women are securing their own living space so that they can continue working indefinitely.

**Conclusion**

In this paper, we clarified the current state of housing purchases by single women in the Tokyo metropolitan area, and the background behind these conditions, based on the attributes of home buyers and articles describing housing purchases published in housing information magazines, as well as interviews with developers and financial institutions.

The results showed that when single women purchase residences, they take the following items into consideration: high rents and the current low living standards of apartments; dissatisfaction with paying contract renewal fees; and the avoidance of housing problems during their senior years. The results also demonstrated that this phenomenon is related to a wide variety of factors, including an increasing level of demands among women with regard to housing, and consideration for investment.

In addition to these factors that are internal to the buyers, external factors have also emerged; for example, developers' plans to take advantage of dropping land prices to utilize commercial land that tends to be avoided by families, and the expansion of loans by financial institutions to include single persons in an attempt to open up a new housing loan market. All of these factors have combined to energize the supply of condominiums to singles in metropolitan areas.

The diversification of today's households—and particularly the trend toward late marriage or the decision not to marry, which is related to the increase in the number of working women that has accompanied an increase in service industries—has resulted in an increased demand for housing in the city center.

The purchase of housing by single women is possibly related to changes in employment structures accompanying the advancement of women in society, and could be seen as a phenomenon unique to metropolitan areas. Condominium buyers, however, are not necessarily career women with high incomes, a situation in the background of dissatisfaction with housing and housing market conditions which arise whenever one changes locations or renews a contract, and concerns about old age, which are common to single persons.

From the perspective of the background of existing systems, there is a lack of public housing policies targeting single persons. For this reason, another factor is concerns about the future in terms of the burden of rent after one's income has decreased. Specifically, single persons cannot use public housing unless they are seniors or disabled, and because entry into public housing is determined through a selection by lottery, not all of those facing housing difficulties are able to utilize public housing.

In this sense, it would be problematic to simplistically tie the phenomenon of increased housing purchases by single women to the increase in the number of career women earning high salaries, seeing these women as being responsible for a kind of "gentrification" like that seen in large cities in Europe and the United States.

Nevertheless, there are factors outside of the economic perspectives described above. The comments made by single women in articles describing the experiences of housing buyers are overflowing with references to the attraction of enjoying life in a home that one owns, and to the creation and enjoyment of a unique personal lifestyle.

In terms of future issues, it will be necessary to conduct deeper analyses related to changes in family relationships, lifestyle space, and the social and economic environment surrounding housing problems faced by single women in metropolitan areas. These analyses must also incorporate studies of women's position in the context of metropolitan housing, in relation to the changes in women's employment conditions.

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References


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