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## *Aged Newtown* Problems on Greater Tokyo Outskirts:

### How Can Policymakers and Movements Cope with the Compressed Cycle of Urban Growth and Decline

Hideo Nakazawa  
Chuo University, Tokyo  
nakazawa@tamacc.chuo-u.ac.jp

#### Summary

I presented a paper on Tokyo's spatial restructuring toward a "gentrification", at the ISA-RC21 Vancouver conference 2007. This paper shall show the other side of the coin.

In Greater Tokyo, the contrast between empty-nested suburban detached-house dwellers and young generation living in high-rise condominiums at central districts is being spotlighted (Some city planners call this phenomenon as "the population return to center"). However, now graying outskirts, which consists 30-60kms radius circle from central Tokyo, were once called as *newtowns* at the era of high growth in 1960s, absorbing the emigrated workforce as Tokyo developed into world's largest city-region. This urban growth with long distance commuting can be described as the first case of Primate City formation in Asia. Also it is in the Asian context because these *newtown* constructions were often state-led projects<sup>1</sup>. Then how can the policymakers cope with recent shrinkage of suburbia, which casts long shadow resulting from this pendulum-like effect of compressed growth? Actually they can't fully, because the problem is so wide-ranged both in social and geographical sense. Eventually the buck is thrown back to grass-roots practices, on which I try to describe the possibility and difficulty of the urban movements in the shrinking phase.

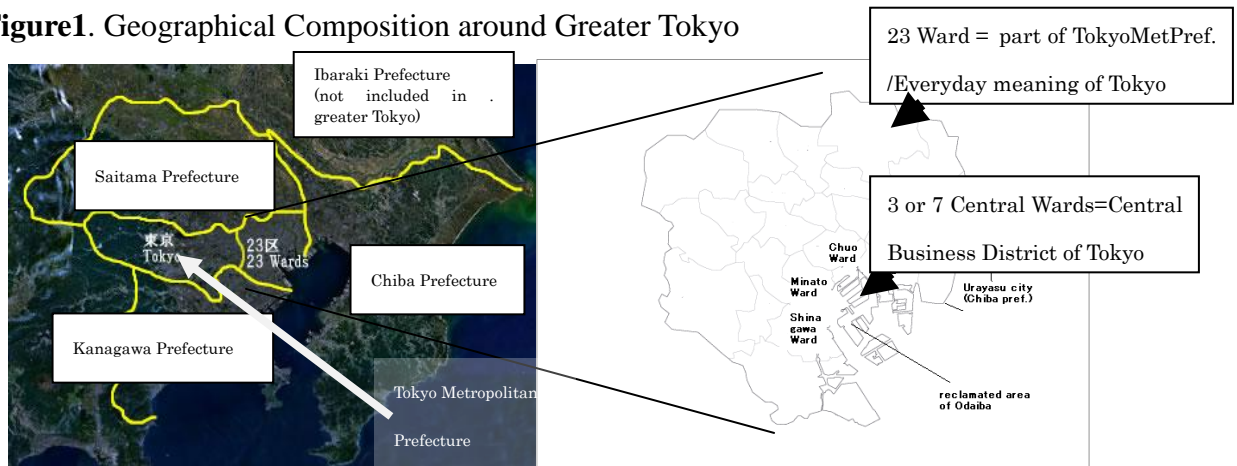
Tokyo's experiment will teach lessons to many (south-) East Asian cities, which will face the same aging problem soon. And we can discuss what "shrinking phase" means for these unprecedented experiments of global city-regions, where always bright side of the growth has been exclusively spotlighted.

My presentation shall be based on some official stats, several survey and interview data conducted in Chiba and Tama, both areas neighboring to central Tokyo.

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<sup>1</sup> Professor William A. Robson, who was invited from University of London in 1969 by the Japanese government board, issued "Robson Report" that said Japan's *newtowns* are "wrong in the basic philosophy" and very different from Ebenezer Howard's ideal.

**Figure1.** Geographical Composition around Greater Tokyo



\*The bold line on the map shows the borders of 4 prefectures which consists of greater Tokyo source: author's own

### 1. Contexts: *Newtowns* on Greater Tokyo outskirts

In the ISA-RC21 Vancouver conference in 2007, I presented a paper titled “Tokyo’s ‘Urban Regeneration’ as the final phase of spatial differentiation”. In that paper I concentrated on central Tokyo’s spatial reconstruction boosted by the relaxation of urban development regulations by then Koizumi government. This urban redevelopment can be compared with gentrification processes in the USA or in Europe, but this is not the main topic of this paper at all.

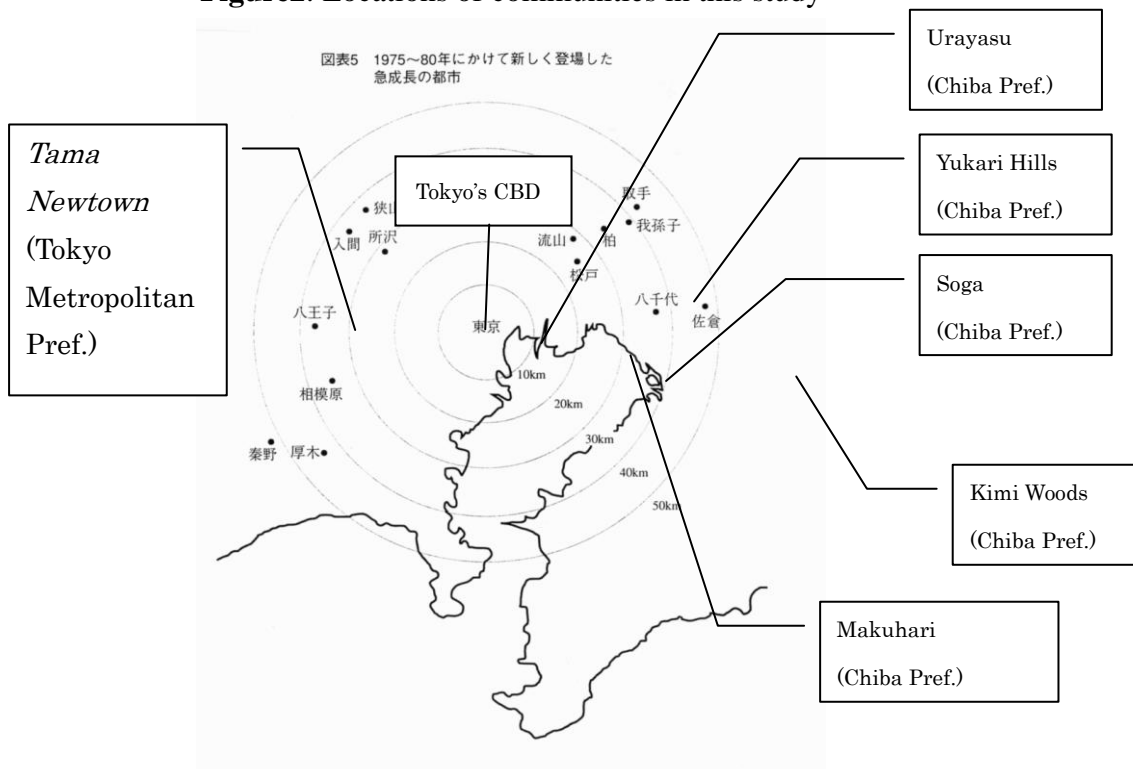
This paper shall show the other side of the coin of the spatial construction in changing greater Tokyo. I’ll pay attention to the outskirts—which consists beyond 20-30km radius from the center and roughly administrated as Tama area of Tokyo Metropolis and neighboring prefectures of Kanagawa, Saitama, and Chiba (see **Figure 1**). This ring developed both in terms of population and infrastructure after WWII.

In this high growth era, many *Newtowns* were built on these rings to accommodate emigrating population from all the hinterlands in Japan. Tokyo was the center of the recovery aftermath the war, and the workforce propping the economy was provided domestically--very different situation from European counterparts. **Figure 2** shows this longitudinal trend of inflow and outflow, and I will provide detailed accounts of it in the next section, but you can see recent steep decline of the outflow from the center to the suburb. This end of suburbanization is the focus of this paper.

The structure of this paper is as follows; in **Section 2** I will try to visualize the whole scheme of this social transformation of shrinkage, using population stats, history of urban law regime, discourse analysis in newspapers and related academic literatures.

Then in **Section 3** I will give grass-rooted case study at *Tama Newtown*, located 30km west from the CBD. This case study will provide readers with the realities of the outskirts shrinkage problem in the country of compressed modernization. At the **Section 4** some implication will be drawn especially in the sense of lessons for East Asian cities which will face the same problems soon.

**Figure2.** Locations of communities in this study



source: author's own.

## 2. Facts: population flow and dwellers' perception

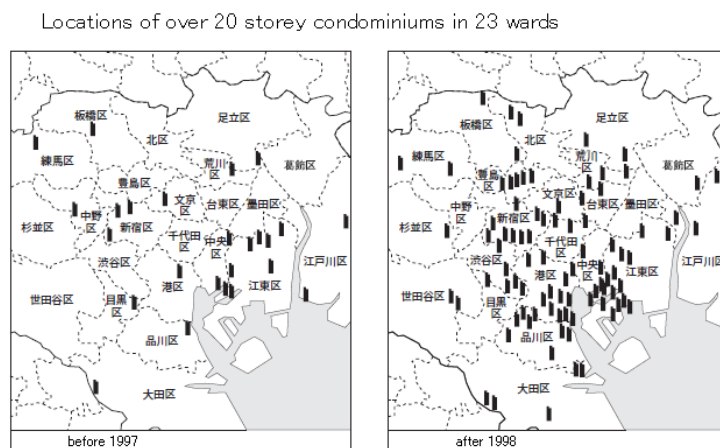
**Figure 3** illustrates the continuing population increase in greater Tokyo area from 1950s on, despite of the shrinking and graying Japan as a whole in the last decade. This trend shows how Tokyo is successful as a global city-region, which holds headquarters of high-tech manufacturing TNCs. But when you look into the figure closely, the pattern of the flows differs by every decade. In 1960s, Tokyo Metropolitan Prefecture and neighboring municipalities (along 20-30kms radius ring) accommodated young generation with high fertility rate. As housing plots along this ring being occupied with pre-dwellers, next decade saw centrifugal explosion of housing development along 40-50kms ring.

Then the advent of the “bubble economy“, which made housing prices skyrocketing. To acquire affordable housing, ordinary people paid their attention even beyond the greater Tokyo borders. For example, in the late 1980s *newtowns* in even Ibaraki prefecture (which is beyond the greater Tokyo border and sometimes over 80kms away from the CBD<sup>2</sup>) recorded a good sell—of course dwellers still intended to commute to CBD Tokyo from there.

The burst of the bubble economy in 1992 and concomitant depression of 15 years made the situation offset. After the late 1990s investors concentrated their attention to central Tokyo to built high-rise apartments and condominiums. As I suggested in the beginning and as I discussed at Vancouver conference, this dynamic spatial transformation invited young couples in central Tokyo (as suggested in **Figure 3**<sup>3</sup>). On the other hand, land prices beyond 30km ring have plummeted. Moreover, the generation living outside 30kms remains the same—generation now entering into retirement age. They bought the suburban dwellings in 1960s-80s at the age of 30s or 40s, and all the *newtown* neighbors were same age-group families. Then these facts will naturally lead the *aged newtown* problems on the outskirts Tokyo, which is now under journalistic light only after turn of the century.

The problem list under *aged newtown* headline is quite long: dilapidated streets without shops to buy daily goods; inactive communities lacking young generations power; crisis of welfare service supply system; single person’s body found inside long days after his/her actual timing of death; fiscal crisis of municipalities dominated by pensioner residents; I will paraphrase this list in the **Section 3**.

**Figure 3**

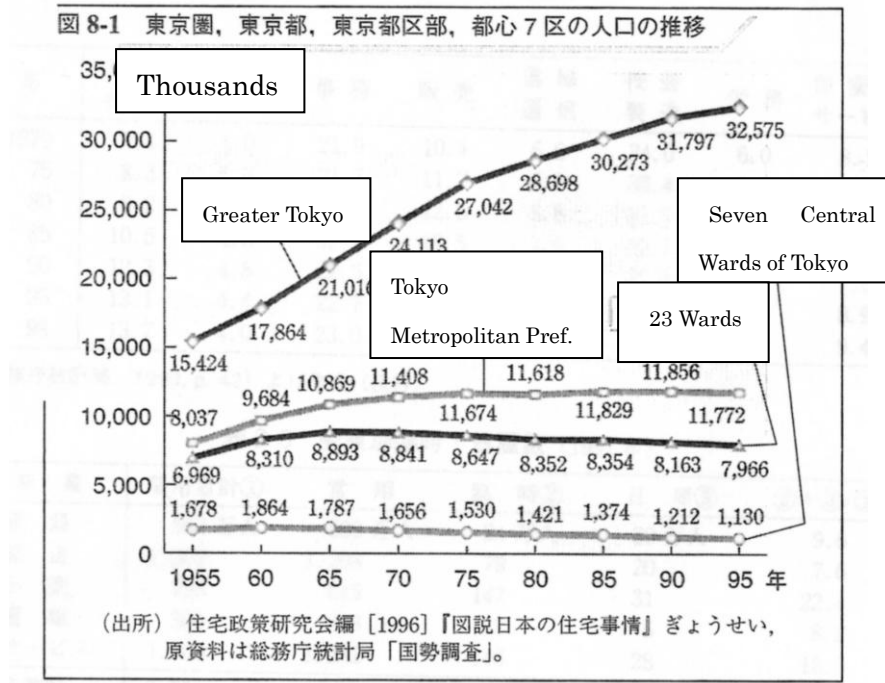


<sup>2</sup> Some planners call these over 60kms zones as “hyper-suburb”.

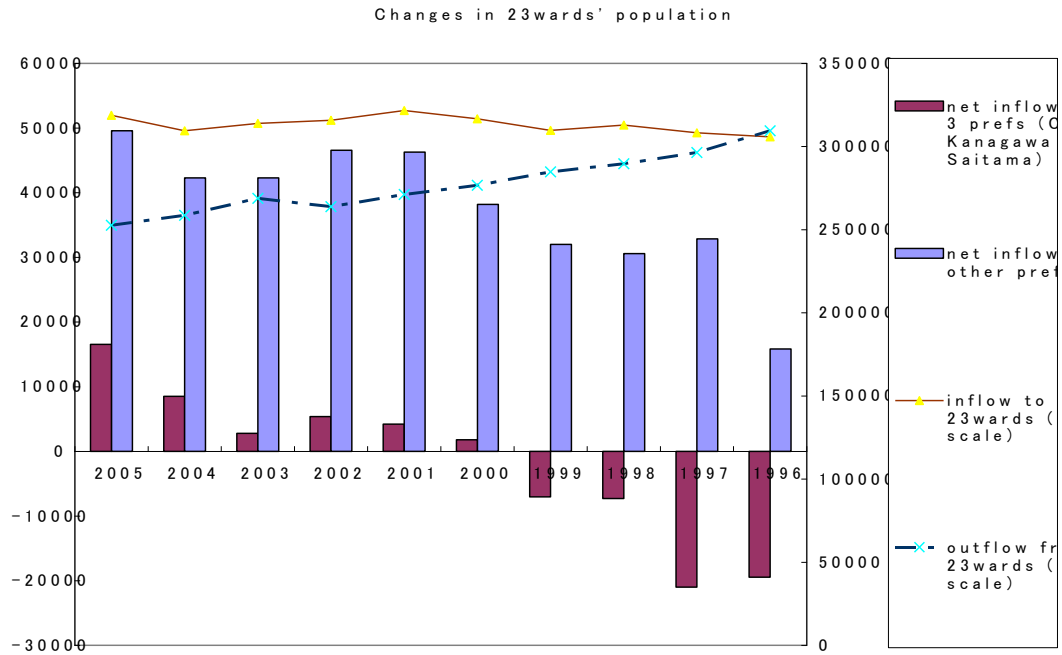
<sup>3</sup> Readers may think more evidence should be provided but I discussed this in Vancouver paper so I’ll skip this point in this paper.

Source: Yosuke Hirayama (2006).

**Figure 4** Numbers of migrants in and out of central Tokyo, by year



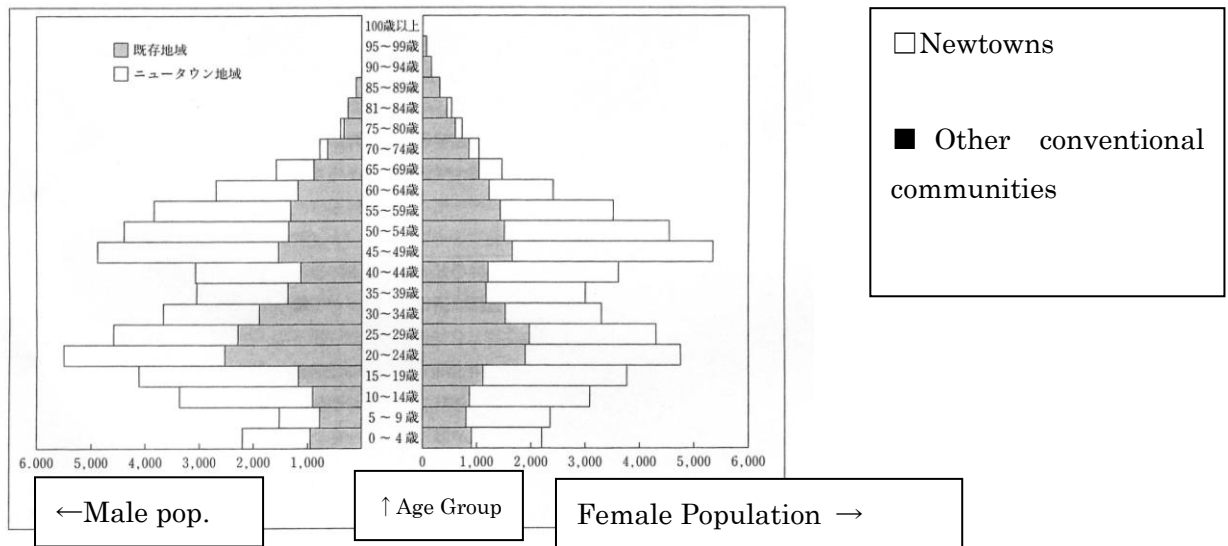
**Figure 5** Trends of population inflow to 23 Ward Tokyo, by year



Source: the author made from TMG's migration report each year on

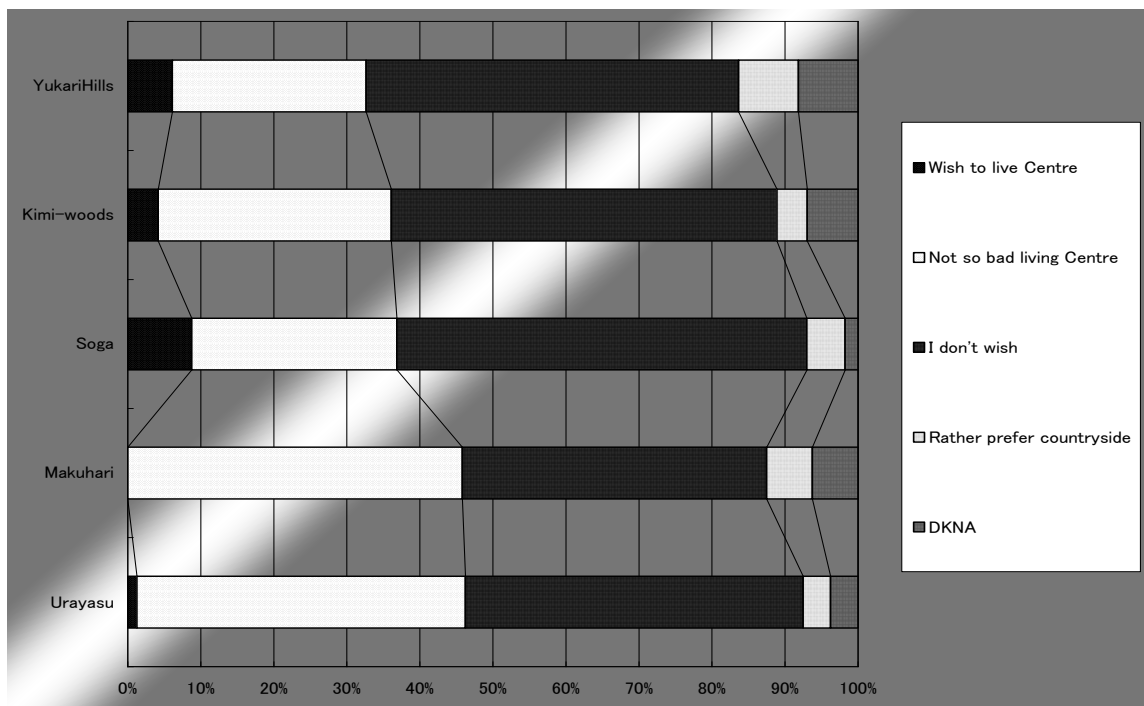
<http://www.toukei.metro.tokyo.jp/jidou/ji-index.htm>

**Figure 6** Population Distributions by Age Groups, Tama City, 2001



But dwellers still want to live and die at the aged *newtowns*, as **Figure 7** suggests. Then how can policymakers and communities can tackle with this shrinking situation? That is the question I will try to answer in the next section through the case study of *Tama Newtown*, some 30km west of CBD Tokyo.

**Figure 7** Answer to the survey question, “Would you like to move to Central Tokyo?”

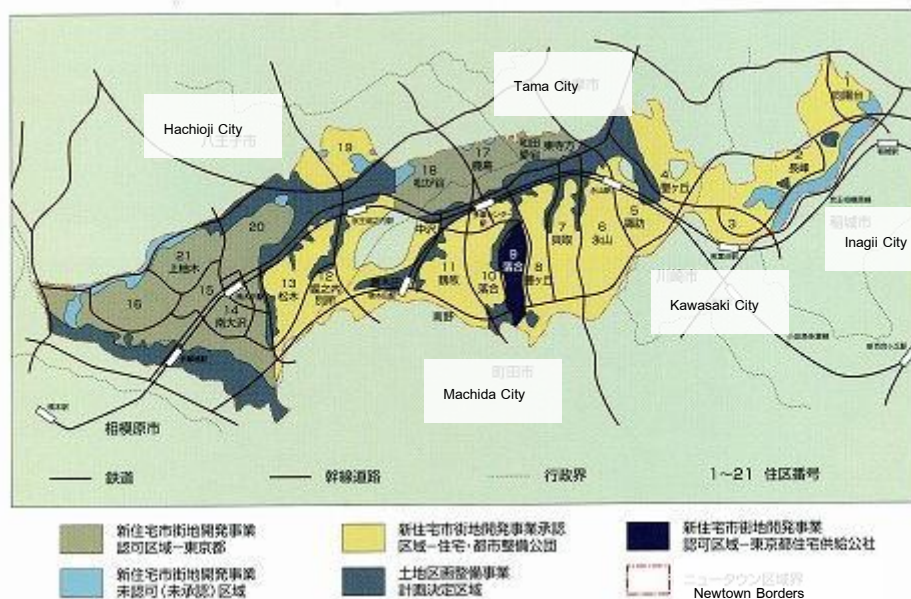


Source: author's own survey in 2005

### 3. Case Study: The Struggle of *Tama Newtown*

I shall describe the quick cycle of development and shrinkage, taking the case of *Tama Newtown*. Please note that geographical conception of “Tama” is very confusing<sup>4</sup>. There’s Tama City, which includes part of *Tama Newtown* districts within its jurisdiction but not fully correspond. Also, part of Hachioji City, Inagi City, Kawasaki City, Machida City have *Tama Newtown* districts within their borders. So, *Tama Newtown* is not a municipality, nor has any incorporated entity. But you can identify the borders of this *newtown* clearly on the map, because it is designated under a state law called “Newtown Development Law” (Shin-ju hou, 1961)<sup>5</sup>, and had a branch (Tama Newtown Branch) of a central government quango “Japan Housing Agency (*Jutaku-Toshi Seibi Kodan*)”<sup>6</sup>. Please see **Figure 8** about the geography.

**Figure 8** Geography of *Tama Newtown*



<sup>4</sup> This is not effecting to my discussion but sometimes the western half of Tokyo Metropolitan Prefecture, without 23 Ward, is called “Tama Area” even by the TMG (Tokyo Metropolitan Government), which is of course very different conception of what I am talking.

<sup>5</sup> But to make a caveat, some plots within the border are not encompassed with the law. Some districts are developed under “Land Plot Rearrangement (Kukaku-seiri)” law. This kind of un-integrity made Professor Robson frustrated and critical toward Japanese *newtowns*.

<sup>6</sup> This body changed its name frequently and now is called “Urban Regeneration Institute (UR)”, but still remains as one of the big quangos in Japan.

Source: Tama Newtown Branch, Urban Regeneration Institute

I'll describe the growth and decline story of 40 years of this town, quoting some stats, interview data and other archival articles.

### **"Danchi" and "Mansyon" Collective Housing**

Before embarking on the idea of *Tama Newtown*, the government established a quango body called "Japan Housing Agency (*Jutaku-Toshi Seibi Kodan*, henceforth JHA)" in 1955 to provide collective housing to accommodate growing population in a few city-regions, especially in Greater Tokyo.

Since the pressure of inflow was strong and the available land limited, JHA invented new housing container architecture, called "danchi". *Danchi* are the collective housings buildings looks like match-boxes. In the building installed hundreds of dwellings, furnished with small kitchen, dining room and one or two bedrooms (straw-mat room without beds actually), the size of each dwelling altogether was smaller than 50-60m<sup>2</sup>. JHA named this style "nDK"(D means Dining, K means kitchen, n means number of bedrooms) model, and it became the convenient module for post-war Japanese housing. At the beginning, these dwellings are only for the rent, but soon JHA decided to sell each cell of these buildings as condominiums. To make things confusing, these dwellings began to be called as "mansion" in Japanese-English, but remind you, it's just a small condominium-like dwellings but not so luxurious. Henceforth I will name these collective but owned dwellings as "*mansyon*"s, according to Japanese pronunciation. For most of the salaried-man families in Tokyo at that time, their aim of life would have become to purchase their own *mansyons*. Comparing their income level with land prices, the realistic choice for the average is to buy *mansyons* on 30-40kms ring until 1970s, then on 40-50kms ring in 1980s. Built from 1959, *Tama Newtown* has been an abundant provider of these *mansyons* on the 30-40kms ring.

### **Developing Tama Newtown**

The southern half of today's Tama City area—now known as the center of *Tama Newtown*—was very rural until 1950s, with farmers living sporadically, cultivating the land of their ancestors. Because of the strong tie between conservative farmers and of its mountainous geography, private developers were not tempted to touch their hands although Tama City belonged to Tokyo Metropolitan Prefecture (thus having the advantage of "Tokyo" brand). The only developer to appear in 1959 was JHA who was eager to find a abundant amount of land to build their *danchi* and *mansyons*. I have an

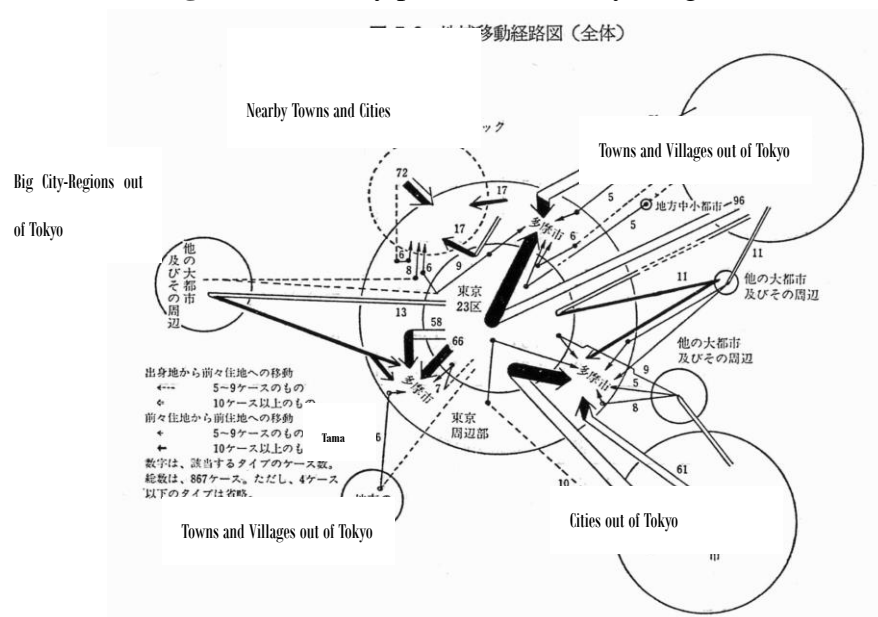


interview transcript<sup>7</sup> of Shozo Minegishi, who was one of the famer here. He says,

“The man from JHA visited me every night, begging to sell my farmland for *Tama Newtown*. As I returned alive from the tragic battlefield in the WWII, I felt it was my responsibility to cooperate with the state for the revival of Japan. I decided to sell, but when I witnessed bulldozers scratching my farmland and cutting down every my trees, I moved to tears feeling sorry for my ancestors. JHA would never understand my feeling.”

JHA planned to accommodate up to 300 thousands of people in the Newtown zone. The development began from the eastern district in 1961, then the construction stretched to the west until 1980s. The period of westernmost area development was when bubble economy was at its peak, then even post-modernistic architecture of *mansyons* tested to attract buyers. This town has been the great showcase of *mansyons* for architects and city planners working in JHA.

**Figure 9** Mobility path of Tama City emigrates, 1965



Source: Kobayashi and Urano(1978)

People flooded into this town, as connecting railway to CBD installed—two operators build stations both heading for Shinjuku. As **Figure 9** shows, most of the families are originated from non-Tokyo cities and eventually purchased their sweet home at Tama

<sup>7</sup> This interview was performed by Koichiro Hayashi. I appreciate his approval to quote this precious interview.

after living in apartments at 23wards-Tokyo. Most of the parents were baby-boomers born in 1945-50. *Tama Newtown* was also one of the Japanese *newtowns* dominated by same age groups. As young and energetic salary-man families propping Japan's economic miracle, they didn't care about hilly geography, long commuting distance, and rooms without trace of their cultural roots. Also, it was their last expectations that the *mansyons* would need refurbishing or even rebuilding only after 20-30 years.

### **The graying Tama Newtown and policymakers**

One of the pitfalls of *mansyons* is inflexibility to the changing family pattern. When the baby-boomers' children grew up, young generation choose to leave the *newtown*, because there are no room for adults in nDK model. And when these 1970-80s born cohorts reached adult age of having own family, they are likely to buy central Tokyo condominiums rather than ones in *newtowns*, as housing market now has abundant central Tokyo supply as I discussed in the **Section1**.

Then in the last decade, Japanese media began to describe *newtowns* as aged and obsolete towns. The population grays and elementary schools keep closing down. Municipalities realized they have more pensioners and fewer taxpayers. Silver couples without kids are fed up of the inactiveness of the town and some decided to move to center. Then the fringe areas of *newtowns* become less populated, witnessing many empty dwellings, reminds residents of the fear of crimes. Shops in the districts are naturally forced to close down since the purchasing power of residents decreases, and also because of prevailing roadside shops (General Marchandizing Stores). Again I will quote the interview data of Shozo Minegishi. After selling his farmland to JHA, he became an owner of a bookshop at *Tama Newtown* using the compensation money.

“I forced to close down the bookstore in the danchi in 1978, losing the competition with big stores along the trunk road. When my shop retreated from the danchi, JHA demanded me to sign a memorandum testifying ‘I will never demand any money or anything to JHA henceforth’. I protested and appealed, saying ‘Read again the article 20 of the Newtown Development Law’. Article 20 guarantees JHA's support for pre-farmers' new means of living. But JHA people don't know the article, nonetheless originally JHA staff wrote the draft of the law. They are just bureaucrats, rotating their post and once they are out of the job nobody take the responsibility. It's scandalous isn't it? But pre-farmers are not united, now living far away each other, local authorities of their belonging differ, then no way to change the situation. Now I realised Tama Newtown is really an ‘experimental town’”.

Policymakers didn't take responsibility for the problems resulting from the graying *newtown*. JHA disbanded in 2003 because of administrative reform by the Koizumi administration. The following body of JHA, UR, focuses their job to maintain *danchi* rent houses. Not only many Minegishis betrayed, but also *mansyon* owners now needs to tackle their problems with their own.

### **The struggle of local movements**

Recently it revealed that, *Mansyon* owners facing with the aging problems in their neighbourhood also needed to tackle with their building structure problem as well. All the *danchis* and *mansyons* are made with concrete (without exception, because if made by wood it is not called *mansyon*). In 1950-60s it is said concrete can last permanently but the statement was wrong, partly because in that period architects and builders were in experimental phase, and also partly because in some cases the building process had serious flaws pertinent to high-growth era, like using sea sands in the concrete. And if maintained improperly, the rotting goes quickly after just 20years from the creation. Some *danchis* in *Tama Newtown* are under discussion for reconstruction, but obviously it takes long and winding process of consensus making among the owner of the every cell. As I suggested earlier, UR isn't willing to support them, so the responsibilities are fallen on owners' union, formed in every *mansyons* according to the "mansyon cell property law". Each union is struggling, seeking for few opportunities under the sluggish economy.

Then obviously this shrinking town needs the idea of area management. I will introduce a case study of a NPO body in my presentation day of 9<sup>th</sup> July, though I don't have time to paraphrase fully in this version. "NPO Fusion" is based at Nagaike Nature Center in a park owned by Hachioji city but the operation is commissioned to this NPO. The mission of this NPO is to tackle with every problematic aspect stemming from this new but aged town, ranging from housing issue to education down to transcribing the history told by many Minegishis.

Can they solve the every problem; can they succeed to get answer? Nobody knows. But we can confirm that, obviously there were many flaws in the initial phase of planning this town. These structural constraints make things much difficult and complicated.

## **4. Conclusion and Implication**

The situation which Japan's *newtown* faces is unprecedented, because it experienced

compressed up and down and also because it is basically a problem of just one generation. To say it correctly, it is a problem of the cohort born in 1940-50s; and a problem which Tokyo's outskirts witnessed within just a generation's time, from 1960s to 2000s. But this will not be the unique experience to Japan; many other (south-) Eastern Asian cities trace the same path to Tokyo. Population burst in the high-growth era and public and private struggle to catch up with the transformation, then faces the shrinking phase as population grays. Compressed cycle of growth and decline should be the common experience in Asia. Then how can the other cities draw lessons from the forerunner, greater Tokyo?

Firstly, then can draw lessons from the formation phase. Tokyo can be described as the first case of Primate City formation in Asia. Also it is in the Asian context because these *newtown* constructions were often state-led projects. Then Tokyo's case would seem very similar to the latecomers and they will know the pitfalls.

And secondly, of course they can also draw lessons how Tokyo's *newtowns* declined and how have it tries to tackle with the problem. I developed some good practices in section 3, but before adopting these practices it is important to plan the city so that they can avoid the same problem.

### Acknowledgements

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