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Community Building in Naha Shintoshin, Okinawa from the View of Gender Studies
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1. 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 its residents can live actively and creatively. "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 in even living in the residential area.

In this sense this paper will discuss an emerging phenomenon of "residential space" by investigating into the process of the new urban community building in Naha-city with a special focus on traditionally gendered customs there and active women's participation in local activities for the development.

2. 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 2km within the central business district in the Naha city. The developed district was requisitioned forcibly as United States Armed Forces civilian employees' residential area by the land expropriation law in 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, and it was in 1987 that the entire district was returned to Japan. The Development of Naha Shintoshin Project was started in 1992. The substitution of land lot ended in 2005. The completion of the liquidation period is scheduled in 2010.

The first feature of this development is that the developed site was the returned area from United States Armed Forces.

The second feature of the development is to employ "offer land substitution" and "sharing use of the land". This is one of the allocating policies of
large-scale residential area development. Although this method takes a complicated procedure and a lot of time, landowners are very unlikely to be dissatisfied with it. For the method enables the landowners to be cooperative in the process and actually participate in the development project. The Naha Shintoshin planning association was established in 1993. This is composed of Okinawa Prefecture, the Naha City, Japan Regional Development Corporation, and the Naha Shintoshin landowners’ association. That association has worked to achieve the goals and the condition of city planning.

3. 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. It was necessary to achieve the offer land substitution as the landowners' consensuses but it was more difficult to achieve it as landowners increased. Landowners and leaseholders were about 700 people when they requested the development for the Japan Regional Development Corporation but they became about 3500 people when the announcement of the land substitution was made. It was extremely difficult to consider 3500 landowners' intentions and coordinate them but he held a series of briefing meetings in public halls in such cities as Osaka and Tokyo as well as Okinawa.

In February, 2005 I conducted an interview with Mr. U who has served as the third president of the association since 1993. Mr. U 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 needs to make their decision for themselves, he tried to enforce the landowners association by creating the different functions of president, vice-president, manager, and secretariat. He said that one of the important traits as the president is "to talk in a strapping voice, to speak plainly and to have determination and courage, and I am fit for the position".

When 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 intension to become the president 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 in his presidency, he had been make effort as
much 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 have chances to participate in the
development process. The role that women played in the development was so minor
that the process the development contains a strong gendered power structure.

4. Few Roles that Woman Landowners Play

Two women were found listed as the members of the land readjusting council
by my investigating into all the women who were officially involved in the landowners
association and the development project association. In February 2005, I met one of
them, Ms. S who belonged to the council and had an interview with her about the
relationship between Naha Shintoshin Development Project and women.

Ms. S served as a member on the land readjusting council during the second
and third terms. Since she found that there was almost no opportunity for any
individual landowner to have access to the information about the development, she
decided to run for the committee of the land readjusting council in order to obtain the
information about the development by participating in the development itself.

According to her, the land readjusting council had almost completed its
functions as the consulting and approving organization during the first term of five
years. During the second term and after that the main function of the council was to
approve the problem concerning the court disputes and the contracts so that the
council did not treat any important issues.

Even though Ms. S involved in the development as a member 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 an easier access to much information than others as a member of the council unlike ordinary landowners in general, she could not have any sense that she contributed to the development together with the other members. As a result she endeavored to establish a self-government in the Mekaru district where she lived by making the most of the obtain 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 land owners as a member of the land readjusting council.

In general, according to Ms. S women in Okinawa are 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," giving despising eyes on her as if women were not supposed to do so. One of those women with whom she worked gave up her activities because of others' negative eyes on her. Ms. S wishes, "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. S has a unique background unlike other women in Okinawa. She got married with the person who was born outside Okinawa though she was born and has grown up in Okinawa. She realized that the action and the idea shared by women in Okinawa were peculiar with Okinawa by having her experiences with PTA activities in Tokyo when she lived there because of her husband's office. In addition her husband always said to her "Do anything as you want" and does not restrict her behavior.

In Okinawa there is a custom named Totome which is a memorial tablet, the object of the ancestor worship, which the eldest son is supposed to succeed. The son who succeeds to Totome inherit the family property. Therefore, any inherited property is not basically 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 husband.

The this method of succession is based upon the tradition of the patriarchy of
the Meiji era civil law, and the Totome, the preferential treatment of the eldest son in this memorial tablet and property inheritance is regarded as a product of modern ages in Japan. There are a lot of people who still keep this custom though it is obviously a problem of discrimination against women.

Ms. S’s father did not follow this custom and divided his land of about 1,650 m² in Asato district among his five children: sons and daughters. Ms. S’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 pay but he wanted to own his land as he wanted. When he divided his land among his children including Ms. S, 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. Despite of being a woman, Ms. S became a landowner and acted as such and she could view the Okinawa customs as something “others” because of her special experiences in Tokyo, which led her to active participation in the development while she made the most of her situation. Even though, “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”. And she hopes “to make the town which those children are born and grow up can be proud of”.

Even though Ms. S involved in the Naha Shintoshin development as a member of the land readjusting council, 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.

5. Then 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 are a lot of dark streets at night and
a lot of undeveloped places in the process of the development. Those active people including Ms. S made their effort to establish the self-government of the district in order to request the city government for 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 the Okinawa's tradition. Women and little children became victims so that not household residents but also those residents in the apartments who felt needs to save their school aged children joined the self-government of the district increasingly. The association started night patrols and made "crime prevention maps" by getting cooperation from the self-governments in the surrounding districts and expanded its activities. In 2004 it began area cleaning activities and promoted residents' consciousness about a new town. When the self-government was established, there was not gathering space in Mekaru district, the board meetings of the government were held by renting the gathering place owned by the other associations. The bulletin board installation is demanded to publicize announcement and information to residents in the district. Currently the simple bulletin board is installed but since Okinawa becomes stormy very easily, notices and announcement on the bulletin board can be torn very easily. The self-government currently tries to improve on it.

Currently the self-government of the district has about 110 householder members. Main members in the board of directors are in their thirties and forties. Their meeting is usually held once a month on Sunday mornings. There is one woman out of nine members on the board of directors and three out of eight group leaders are women. The membership fee for the self-government of the district is 500 yen and the fee is used to maintain the streetlights and so on.

In 2005 a new elementary school was established in the district. A gym traditional dance "mekarusi" was performed by children as a memorial event for establishing the school. This dance is performed 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 the memorial event. The elementary school sponsored it, and the self-government of the district cooperated with this. Because of 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 in which residents themselves can initiate such as streetlight installation and holding a children-centered gym traditional dance. Moreover, the information exchange with the self-government of the district in the other districts besides Naha Shintoshin is promoted. Even though the activities of the self-government of the district are still in its infant stage but have been spreading among residents in the district.

Such activities as streetlight installation and the bulletin board installation should be regarded as the 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 the hometown-making suiting those residents there.

6. Formation of "Residential space" and Gender in Naha Shintoshin

The houses in urban area as the built environment are products of modern ages. 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. Especially in Okinawa, the custom like Totome continues and locates women in the reproduction labor. This ideology reflects a patriarchy. Women who are located as reproduction laborers aren't considered to be active actors to create their 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 and the production labor and thus we are witnessing an emerging phenomenon in which women have become active in constructing their space.

As is discussed in this paper, few women can participate in the Naha Shintoshin development which is mainly led by landowners. This is true of the development of any area. The large-scale development is likely to alienate women's participation. Moreover in Okinawa a lot of people tend to show opposing attitude toward woman's leadership and participation in the community-building development. Women's participation chances are not open, which is mainly caused by unequal distribution of power on the basis of gender in Okinawa.

In the view of the level of "life space" residents have been active in making social network by organizing the self-government in the Naha Shintoshin area. Residents there extended their human network and deepened their sense of home town, which influences their consciousness of actual life space and have just begun constructing "residential space" in their life. It is residents there who construct their space. The residents there will not accept 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 initiative.

The gender relation like Totome, the custom of Okinawa, is embedded in the process that urban space is formed as a power relation. However, it can be argued that the residents as active agents are able to change the relation between production and the reproduction in urban space by developing such activities as a new community-building and thus the gendered space is restructured.