ATOMIZING THE URBAN: SOCIAL CHANGE, SINGLE HOUSEHOLDS AND SPATIAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN TOKYO

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ABSTRACT: In recent decades Japan has undergone some quite radical socio-economic changes after a prolonged era of rapid but stable growth. Some fundamental shifts have become increasingly evident in the organization of households and progression through life courses, which have become highly fragmented and disassociated from the 'standard family careers' typical of post-war generations. Characteristic of urban life has been a decline in family formation featuring increasing numbers of 'never marred' people and single households. In Tokyo, single dwellers now make up for as much as 43 per cent of households. As a result of intensive rates of urban renewal, this transformation is beginning to take its toll on the urban landscape. This paper considers social changes in Japan in terms of an increasing atomization of both space and urban social life, with transformations in residential space in Tokyo as a particular focus.

KEYWORDS: housing, single households, atomization, never-marrieds, life course

1 INTRODUCTION

Japanese post war urbanisation was shaped by the rapid advance of owner-occupied housing consumption, which promoted the nuclearization of families and the formation of a largely homogenized urban middleclass (Hirayama, 2007). Life-course and household patterns increasingly revolved around 'standard' family formation, a largely predictable housing and occupational ladder, and considerable socioeconomic stability. However, the economic recession that Japan entered in the 1990s, following the collapse of the 'bubble economy', augmented a period of destabilization. This era, now known as the 'lost decade', instigated a diversification of housing pathways and life-course trajectories. New household and urban patterns are following diverse household formations and pathways that have become increasingly fragmented and atomized.

The generations born in the 1970s and 1980s, who entered adulthood during the 'lost decade', have experienced a fundamentally different and unstable socio-economic environment. Frustrated access and differentiated treatment in the labour market along with the destabilization of housing markets have been key factors. This group, known as the 'lost generation', is following different pathways into adult life, demonstrating new sets of values and more variegated and unstable patterns of household formation. The outcome has been a sharp increase in single and couple-only households and a marked decline in marriage and fertility rates reflecting how the social order and has become increasingly individualized (see Ronald and Hirayama, 2009; Mathews and White, 2004).

In this paper, we explore emerging patterns of individualization among young people in Japan with particular reference to shifting socio-economic conditions and the reorganization of dwelling and urban space in terms of the home. In Tokyo, single dwellers now make up for as much as 43 percent of households. As a result of intensive rates of urban renewal, this transformation is beginning to take its toll on the urban landscape. This paper considers social changes in Japan in terms of an increasing atomization of both space and urban social life, with transformations in residential space in Tokyo as a particular focus. The first part considers traditional household formation, the housing system and urban development in Japan. The second addresses social changes that are driving the fragmentation, individualization and atomization of households. The last part considers the outcomes on urban space and social life.

2 THE HOUSING SYSTEM

In the unprecedented period of industrialization and urbanization between the 1880s and the 1980s, during which the ratio of urban population grew from 15 to 80 percent and the economy became the world's second largest, the social and spatial organization of the home was dominated by two forces. On one side was the ideal of the pre-modern, 'traditional' family, on the other was a more western notion of household associated with intimate nuclear families and modern family life (Ueno, 2009). The early modern architectural forms and housing system which emerged reflected both (Sand, 2002). Despite spatial changes, or perhaps because of them, the house and home remained a symbol of social integrity and continuity, and a locus of socialization processes. The domestic ideal however, was increasingly modern and middle-class. New gender roles (of homemakers and breadwinners) and domestic practices (such as family meals), emerged which provided substance to images of modern Japanese families and homes (Koizumi, 1979).

The houses that became popular among pre-war urban middle-classes reflected both indigenous and western features. Developments in architecture, the growing focus on conjugal family privacy and the rapid pace of economic and urban growth increasingly normalised houses as consumable objects. The middle-corridor house (*nakaroka-shiki*) became a standard type of middle-class urban housing in the interwar years. The internal corridor was important because it separated private, back stage spaces from public, front stage ones. Types of living-room-centered houses (*ima-shiki*) also became popular in which a single large central room was the focus of both family activities and receiving guests. Nonetheless, private bedrooms were rare and families continued to sleep together or separated only by removable paper walls. While the middle class preference was for detached houses with walled gardens and located in ever more suburban areas that followed the expansion of railway networks, working class communities formed around *nagaya* terraced housing in central urban areas. These were largely rented, wooden structures and slum conditions were not uncommon.

Following World War Two industrial rebuilding, housing became a focus of government urban and social reconstruction. The restructuring of the urban and residential system through the establishment of the Japanese Housing Corporation (JHC) and the Government Housing Loan Corporation (GHLC) in the early 1950s, along with rapid economic growth, promoted the formation of a 'social mainstream' orientated around the achievement of middleclass identities, family self-reliance and economic productivity (Hirayama, 2007). The expansion of home ownership was central in this orientation and became a key mechanism by which to place and normalise nuclear families around middleclass lifestyles. While GHLC loans provided a means for young households to get on the property ladder, the 'company system' of employment provided income stability for families as well as company rental housing for young employees and company housing loans for older ones, which reinforced the formation off an owner-occupier housing ladder.

The Rent Regulation Ordinance implemented at the end of the war, by discouraging the provision of private rental housing, also stimulated an increase in owner-occupied housing construction. A large disparity emerged in the physical condition of housing between the owner-occupied sector and the rental sector. It was next to impossible, therefore, to obtain a good quality family dwelling in the rental housing market which stimulated home purchase preferences. People were encouraged to move from a rental dwelling to an owner-occupied dwelling and from a condominium to a single-family home with its own land. The subsequent aggregation of moves up the 'housing ladder' swelled the 'homeowner society', and by the end of the 1960s urban home ownership rates had settled at over 60 percent compared to 22 percent in 1941 (Hayakawa and Ohmoto, 1988).

A spatial transformation was also involved in the post-war modernisation of families, homes and cities. The construction of more modern, concrete multi-family apartment blocks (*danchi*) by the JHC created domestic spaces with individual private bedrooms, which replaced mixed sleeping arrangements, and dinning-kitchens (or DKs) with tables and chairs, which replaced more traditional *chanoma* family rooms. The popularity of modern family living spaces (see Waswo, 2002) drove the transformation of neighbourhoods and the expansion of suburbs. The construction of new homes reflected a particular image of the modern nuclear family, with a breadwinning father and homemaking mother. Long commutes became normal with the growing popularity of suburban communities where modern apartments and houses could be constructed. DK arrangements gave way to LDK arrangements with the expansion of (L)iving rooms as well as numbers of bedrooms.

The mainstay product of the private construction industry was initially ready-built detached housing. The dominant providers were small family businesses who also supplied custom built dwellings for households with their own land, seeking to rebuild (scrap and build). As land became more expensive in the 1970s and

80s, larger companies, who could take better advantage of factory produced housing components and vertical and horizontal networks of subcontractors, advanced. Such companies could offer considerable variety in housing design, manufactured, delivered and erected on the customers own land within a few months. By the 1990s, the number of homes being scrapped and rebuilt on site using customised construction techniques accounted for 75 percent of new-build detached housing (Oizumi, 2007). By the 2000s eight major housing companies dominated production, each providing a broad product range including up to 300 hundred adaptable house designs, utilising advanced prefabrication as well as concrete, steel and wood components .

As in other countries, sharp and prolonged periods of house price increases promoted the production and exchange of housing properties as market goods. The sharp economic downturn in the 1990s revealed key differences in Japanese housing construction and consumption practices. Speculative investment was a feature of housing markets in the 1970s and 80s, with house prices driven by land price increases. As Japanese housing requires expensive maintenance and a cycle of rebuilding in order to maintain quality standards, housing units have functioned as consumption rather than investment goods. Since the 1990s housing values have hung on the age and quality of the built unit, which declines rapidly: new-built houses are typically worth less than they cost to construct within 20 years and normally require to be completely rebuilt within 30 or 40. There has thus been a significant differentiation between types of housing, especially between new and old, detached houses and condominiums, in price declines. In 2007, the ‘200-Year Home programme’ was initiated by the government in order to promote the construction of more durable housing. So far, measures are limited and are unlikely to advance the average life-span within the Japanese housing stock considerably.

Since the 1970s, has been a decline in detached housing output in favour of condominium production. The first high rise construction became possible after 1965 with the repeal of restrictions on building heights to 31 meters. As high rise neighbourhoods then proved problematic to construct in established urban areas, mostly smaller scale private sector rental apartments, or *manshon*, were built. In the 1960s and 70s legislative changes made *manshon* condominium purchases viable for families who couldn’t afford a house on its own land. In the 1970s *manshon* output increased 10 fold in urban centres and values began to balloon. In the post-bubble 1990s, prices declined considerably especially for used condominiums. Production of new apartment dwellings, however, has advanced even more rapidly. Figures one and two illustrate the growing proportion of apartments and high rise dwellings. A particular factor has been planning deregulation and intensified promotion of housing construction associated with ‘urban renaissance’ policies in the 1990s (Igarashi and Ogawa, 2003). The provision of tower condominiums in particular, encouraged housing market hotspots and renewed desire for city centre living. Urban housing has entered a new era characterised by taller apartment buildings and more compact urban dwellings.

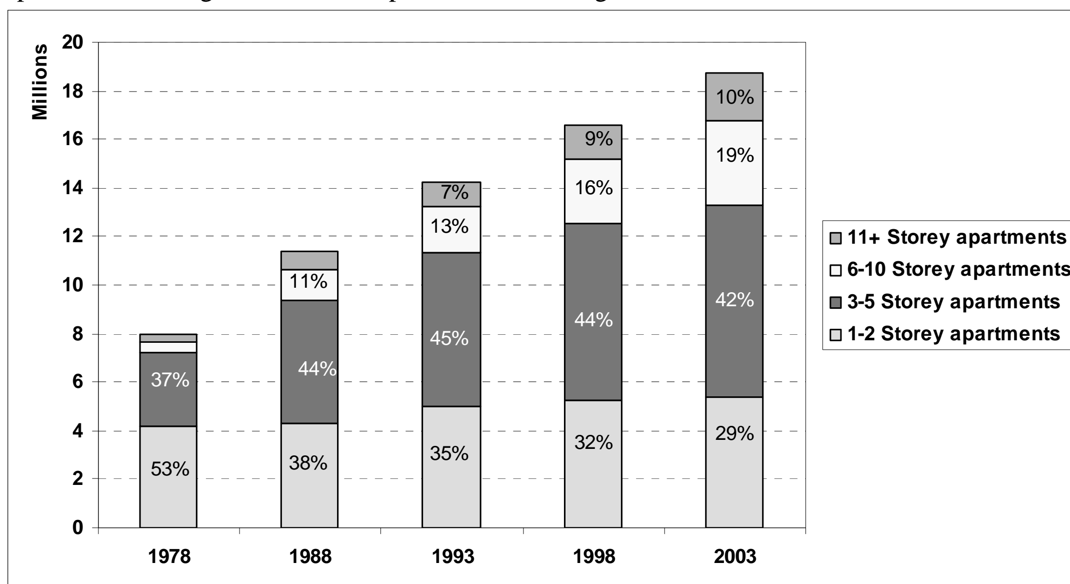

Figure 1: Transformation in types of apartment buildings in Japan
Source: MLIT various years

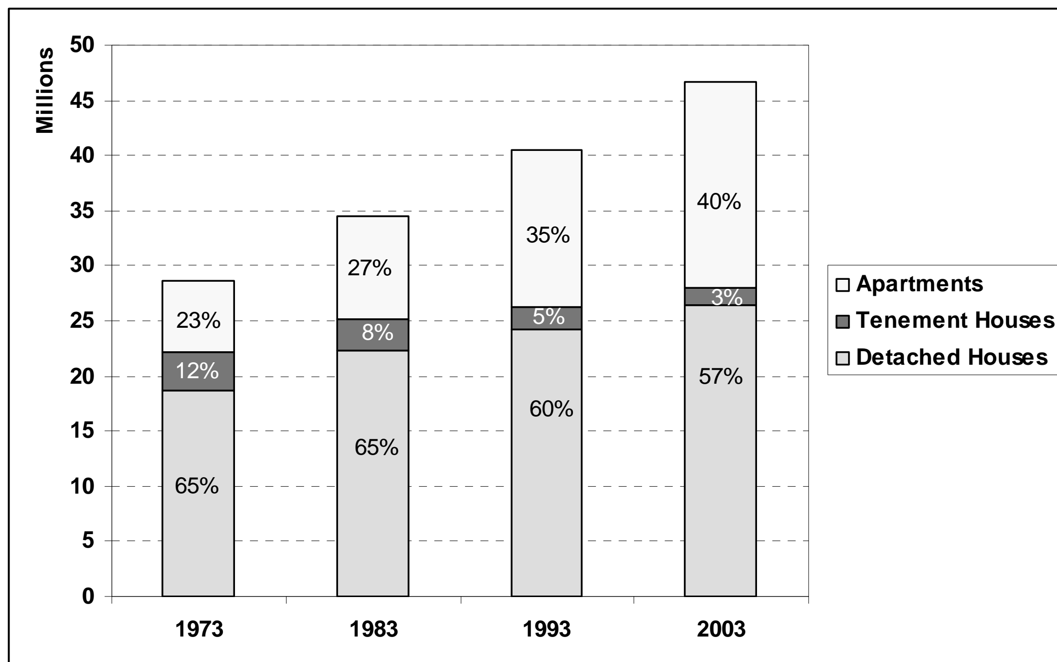

Figure 2: The changing constitution of the housing stock in Japan
Source: MLIT various years

Two factors have become central in reshaping of homes and housing conditions. Firstly, the rate of renewal in the Japanese built environment continues to be exceptional. At the beginning of the 2000s, more than half of urban buildings were less than 20 years old. Secondly, there has been a notable decline in family formation with increases in smaller and older households. The ratio of single and couple-only households increased from 21.8 percent in 1970 to 49.1 percent in 2005. With such a rapid rate of renewal in the built environment, urban and domestic landscapes are adapting quickly to changes in families and lifestyles involving much more atomized and fragmented households and domestic spaces.

3 SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS

Behind the transformation in households have been the drastic socioeconomic changes that followed the bursting of the economic bubble in 1989. By 1990, driven by over-inflation in land and stock values, the bubble reached its limits and subsequently burst. The following 'lost decade', as it has become known, began with a sharp decline in economic values followed by a sustained recession. The stock market shed more than 80 percent of its value between 1989 and 2003, while housing properties lost between 40 and 50 percent of their value. Owner-occupiers consequently experienced major capital losses, which fundamentally undermined the asset base of household security. The corporate sector was also thrown into disarray as the scale of post-bubble losses became evident, which undermined lifelong employment practices. Families thus not only faced harsh new economic realities, but also a new social context where the certainties of the Japanese system began to unravel. Inevitably, the integrity in the standard family system was undermined. This decade forged new patterns of relationships between families, companies and society with households adopting new, more fragmented and atomized shapes and following less predictable pathways.

Once owner-occupied housing began generating capital losses, the number of homeowners trapped in negative equity ballooned along with increases in mortgage defaults. The timing of entry into the owner-occupied housing market became crucial in determining household economic fortunes. In terms of asset accumulation and mortgage burdens, a sharp contrast developed between cohorts who entered the home ownership market before the bubble and those who purchased during or after the height of the bubble (see Hirayama and Ronald, 2007b). Older people who bought their homes earlier and paid off their loans retained

considerable housing equity. Younger homeowners, on the other hand, found themselves in expensive properties with little expectation of capital gains.

Currently, even though housing values dropped, buying a home still requires taking on substantial debt, while job security and seniority based wage increases, necessary for servicing a mortgage debt have also been undermined. Consequently, there has been substantial divergence between young and old in rates of home ownership, which fall sharply among the young. In 1978 over a quarter of those aged 25-29, and nearly half of those aged between 30 and 34, were homeowners. By 1998 this had dropped to one in eight for the former group and around one in five for the latter, whilst the overall level of home ownership (which was expected to expand) stayed about the same. Many young people have evidently become frustrated with the housing situation and more cautious about becoming an owner-occupier. Market entry is increasingly being delayed in the lifecycle or avoided, even among those who are better-off or in more secure positions.

Family and Household Shifts

Along with the impact of the long term recession and transformations in the housing system, household formation and life-courses have rapidly diversified in recent years. Specifically, rising marriage ages, falling fertility rates and increasing longevity have become characteristic, and have begun to strongly influence intimate relationships and the organisation of the home. The propensity is for increasing numbers of single households and couple-only households without children. According to the Population Census, the proportion of nuclear households (married couple and children) dropped below 30 percent in 2005, while the number of single and couple-only households has almost doubled since 1980 and now account for half of all households.

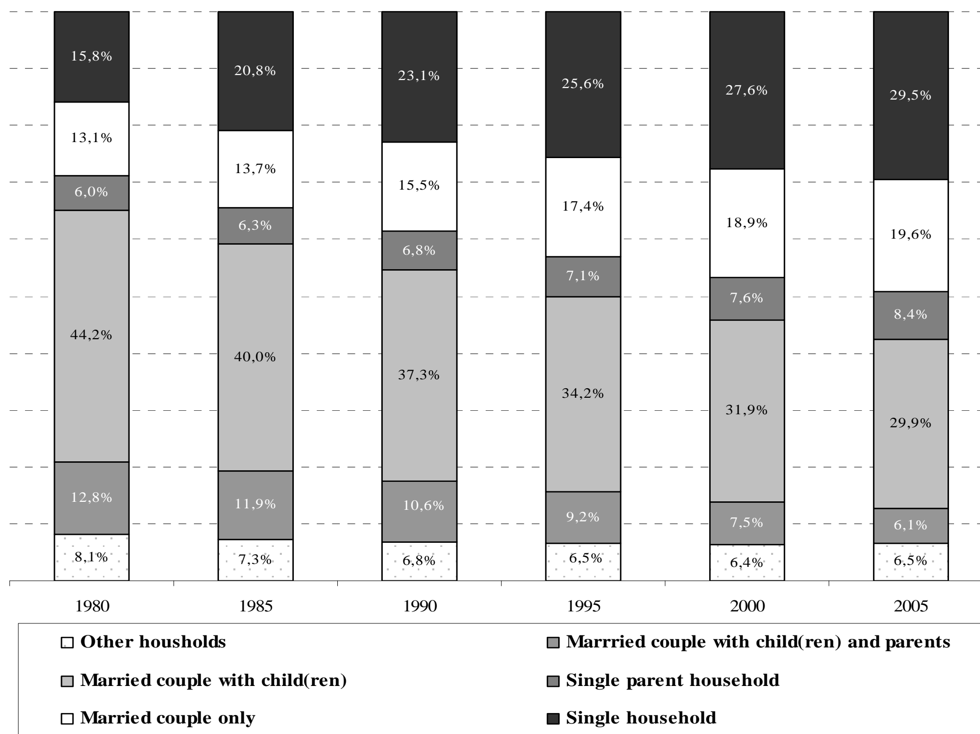

Figure Three: The changing constitution of households
Source: Population Census

As generations of Japanese have developed an expectation of buying a home as a necessary step in starting a family, problems in the housing system appear associated with delays in family formation. Mulder (2005) argues that societies with a strong home ownership norm combined with low accessibility to owner-occupied housing impose greater restrictions on couples in forming marital or non-marital partnerships, in

bearing children, or even just moving out of the parental home. The central issue is accessing housing that a couple considers necessary for starting a family.

In many societies a plentiful supply of good rental housing stock at affordable rates provides a means for couples to form their own household away from the family home, as well as the stability necessary for childrearing. Despite Japan's considerable stock of rental housing (around 39 percent), the structure of the rental sector impedes rather than enhances family formation. Firstly, the size and quality of rental housing is largely inferior to owner-occupied housing. Owner-occupied homes have an average floor-space of 124m² per unit, whereas rental homes have 46.3m² (in 2003). This compares to a respective ratio of 124m² and 76m² in Germany (1998), 114m² and 76m² in France (1996) and 95m² and 75m² in Britain (2001) (Oi et al, 2007). The large majority of rental housing in Japan is constituted of small units designed for single or couple-only occupancy (see figure 6). There are few units suitable for families and consequently a rather low turnover in this type of accommodation. There is and estimated shortfall of 2.5 million units of suitable family rental housing (with 50m² or more of floor-space for a two-person household) in the major cities (MLIT, 2007). Although public rental housing, which constitutes less than seven percent of all housing, provides some housing suitable for families, it is largely residualised and stigmatised.

Younger people appear to be increasingly delaying or avoiding marriage and consequently the formation of independent households. The proportion of still-unmarried people in their early thirties has almost doubled since 1980 (see Hirayama and Ronald, 2007). Critically, there is evidence of a significant shift in attitudes towards marriage, with a substantial decline in the consensus around the inevitability of marriage and having children (see NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute, 2004). Moreover, while in many western societies cohabitation of non-married couples is common, in Japan it is relatively rare (around 2 percent), although attitudes are changing. Female headed, single parent families are also relatively uncommon and only constitute four percent of all households with children.

The demographic distribution of the Japanese population has become increasingly distorted since the 'lost decade' which has further exacerbated conditions for younger people. Fertility has become a central issue in Japan's aging society. Fertility rates peaked in 1947 with 4.3 children born on average to every woman. In 2004 this figure had dropped to 1.29. The proportion of working to dependant population has thus grown consistently, and more than 20 percent of the population is now over 65. A fundamental imbalance has developed between the old and young, as while post-war generations had stable jobs during a period of consistent economic improvement, and were able to build considerable owner-occupied property assets, post-bubble generations have experienced a primarily unstable labour market, volatile economic conditions and limited access to secure independent family housing. Essentially, the restructuring of the lost decade has detached young people from the established routes into family formation and home purchase.

The Decline of Company Society and Economic Security

The organisation of employment and economic security in post-war Japanese society primarily revolved around 'company society'. Most corporations adopted a lifelong employment and seniority system for wages and promotion, forming a model of 'company as a family', which enabled employees to assume a steady increase in income and substantial financial stability. Company employment, especially with larger corporations with the largest benefits, has long been central to aspirations and life-plans of young people and provided a route into the middleclass, social mainstream. The 'lost decade' however, fundamentally weakened company society resulting in substantial casualization of the labour market. In context of post-bubble losses and an increasingly competitive business environment, the labour market has been reoriented towards short-term contracts and part-time workers. While the government once protected employment security, since the 1990s it has begun to support labour market casualization in response to corporate pressure. The first wave of corporate restructuring took place in 1997 and 1999 signifying an end to the policy that 'whatever happens, corporations will maintain their employees jobs' (Yamada, 2002, p 128). Along with the decline in the 'company as a family' model, many corporations have unloaded employee-housing and discontinued housing loan schemes and employee benefit programmes.

It was primarily those in their 20s who were pushed out of the lifelong employment system. Among Japanese workers, the average rate of casual and part-time (non-regular) employees rose from 15.8 to 30.6 percent between 1982 and 2006. During the same period, the rate of non-regular employees aged 20-24 increased sharply from 11.4 to 41.2 percent. The casualization of employment and the erosion of economic status has also been related in Japan to unmarried rates. A 2002 Survey showed that the unmarried rate of

men in regular employment aged 30-34 was 41 percent, while for those in non-regular employment it was 70 percent (MHLW, 2006). For Genda (2001) corporate restructuring has fundamentally eroded the conditions and opportunities of new company recruits (p 57).

The 'Freeter' Generation

With the decline in regular employment opportunities in the youth labour market a new category of worker and correspondent lifestyle has emerged. A *freeter* (or *furiitaa*) is a non-regular worker aged 15-34. They work in casual positions and follow irregular life-courses. Their failure, or refusal, to enter a regular employment may undermine their ability to support a family for life. The emergence of *freeters,* along with their unemployed counterparts, NEETs (Not in Employment, Education or Training), have been treated as a social problem. According to Labour Force Surveys, the number of *freeters* increased from 0.5 million in 1982 to 1.01 million in 1992, and 2.17 million in 2003, though it declined slightly in 2005 to 2.01 million. The number of NEET aged 15-34 rose from 440,000 in 2000 to 640,000 in 2005 (MHLW, 2006).

The term *dokushin kizoku*, appeared in the 1980s to describe urban unmarried people who purchase luxury goods, travel, and generally enjoy a culture of dependence on their parent's wealth. In the 1990s, the 'selfish life of singles', particularly women, became associated with the 'problems' of belayed marriage and declining birth rates (Nakano and Wagatsuma, 2004). Unmarried women over 30 without children have consequently been labeled *makeinu*, or loser dogs (Sakai, 2003). In reality, many young unmarried women enjoy little freedom and live lives dictated by the will of their parents (Haruka, 2002), and have economically restrained choices.

For Tsuya (2000) women have become increasingly frustrated by the limitations of the breadwinner family model, with delayed marriage reflecting the growing ability of women to control their own lives through improved education and employment opportunities (p 319). Indeed, growth in female employment has been part of post-bubble corporate restructuring. However, increased female participation has neither enhanced equality nor security. Japanese working women only make 66.8 percent of the wages of employed men, on average, and more that 40 percent are part timers without company benefits (MHLW, 2003).

Ochiai (1994) suggests that as economic growth has slowed, young people have been increasingly unable to imitate their parent's marital choices. In the postwar period women's middleclass status was achieved by making a 'good marriage' to a man in a regular salaried job. More recently, shifts in expectations of marriage have accompanied the decline in the security of marriage as a path to middleclass status and living conditions. Nakano and Wagatsuma (2004) identify a significant shift in expectations between generations. Young women have much more freedom and family support than their mother's generation, but also face more insecurity. Their mothers' generation had reason to expect that their lives would improve materially along with rapid economic growth. However, married life no longer promises a means of material security while the labour market also holds risks.

4 NEW HOUSING TRAJECTORIES AND URBAN FORMS

Combined with breakdowns in the housing-ladder and family formation, the erosion of employment pathways has re-orientated many younger people in terms of networks of security and inclusion, and life-courses. A radical transformation is occurring in the meaning and shape of home for new generations. This is beginning to reshape urban environments around more atomised forms, in turn reinforcing the proliferation of single person dwellings and fragmented households.

Parasite Singles

Yamada's 1999 book coined the phrase 'parasite single' to describe adult children living indefinitely in their parent's home. Between 1980 and 2005, the rate of 'parasite singles' increased from 23.9 to 42.6 percent for those aged 25-29, and 7.6 to 24 percent for those aged 30-34 . Some 60 percent of *freeter* live with their parents and the instability in employment pathways, which has accelerated the increase in *freeters* and NEETs, can be considered a central factor in the increase in parasite singles. Parasite single behaviour has functioned as a buffer against a decline in social stability. Nevertheless, the growth in numbers has arguably been facilitated by Japanese practices of family reciprocity. Due to the sustained promotion of home ownership, the current generation of parent's of adult children have largely acquired spacious homes and built-up assets and savings, which enable the younger generation to live with them as a 'parasite'. It is

likely that ‘parasite singles’ expect a decline in the quality of life should they become independent or get married.

In light of the prolonged recession and the reorganization of the labour market, it is reasonable to regard ‘parasite single’ behaviour as economically rational as much as a cultural phenomenon (see Hirayama and Ronald, 2007b). Due to the instability of the economy and frustrations over employment conditions, many young people have no choice but to live in their parents’ home.

Social and physical arrangements in Japanese homes themselves are also conducive to ‘parasite single’ lifestyles, and facilitate substantial independence and privacy within family space. The increase in the number of independent rooms is a feature of modern housing and some units even include multiple entrances, with the main family, co-habiting grandparents and adult children accessing their own spaces within the home separately. Daniels’ (2001) identifies the contrast in Japanese homes between discourses on shared family space and the separation between the lives and personal projects of those who inhabit them. Although much is made of family interaction and household harmony in relation to more competitive relationships outside the home, family members largely follow their own routines and interests. The rooms used by each household member to relax are strongly differentiated with TVs in different rooms, with the father in control of the main set in the living room. For Suzuki (2001) the advancement of media technology and specifically mobile phones has erased family spaces and convivial gatherings in favour of more dynamic, atomised spaces. Gender and generational differences are central to differentiated activities within, and orientations toward the home. Young singles are thus able to pursue more individualistic lives without having to establish their own separate household. Internally, therefore spaces within detached family homes have become fragmented, and reflect social atomisation underway in society at large.

1K’ers and Single Renters

Apartment units in Japan are normally described in terms of numbers of rooms plus kitchens, dinning rooms and living rooms (e.g. 3LDK). The smallest type of unit is the 1K, or even the 1, which is constituted of a tiny floor-area of sometimes less than 20m² with, usually, a self-contained, pre-fabricated bathroom and simple cooking facilities for one. With the growth of single-person and couple-only households the construction and take-up of smaller rental units in *mansion*-apartment developments has advanced, especially in central urban areas. The number of such sized units now accounts for more than 40 percent of rented housing in Tokyo (see Figure 6). 1K units are particularly designed to cater for the emerging market of one-person households. While small studio apartments are found across the world, the Japanese 1K is arguably more individualized and isolated. The principle is to provide within the smallest possible living unit the facilities required for complete self-sufficiency. Hinokidani (2007) thus observes that ‘it seems that lifestyles have been progressing along with the individualization of living units… Living in such a small dwelling without shared facilities adds to the increasing sensitivity to privacy and autonomy of individual life among urban residents’ (p 118).

The architectural inspiration for these super-compact living units originates with the Metabolism movement of the 1970s. The urban dweller in their self-contained capsule was to be liberated from the family and set free across the city. In reality the growing provision of one-room units has been largely a response to the market demand for privacy and individual living. It also tends to attract those on low-incomes and rent levels have adjusted accordingly. For Suzuki (2001) this kind of residential living has been made possible by the development (specifically in Tokyo) of a comprehensive and sympathetic infrastructure.

> Convenience stores (*conbini*) stock all kinds of groceries, alcohol and other beverages, underwear, sundry goods and books. They even provide facilities for paying bills. Thanks to *conbini*, one-room mansion dwellers have no need to cook a meal or launder their underwear. They are sophisticated consumers who do not require a living room, dinning table or kitchen. The infrastructure dispenses with the necessity for family or local community (p 25).

It has been argued that while residential living has been fragmented and atomized, family bonds remain. Psychological relations are argued to be more important than the spatial ones in the consolidation of family ties, and the presumption that home is a place exclusively for communal family life has progressively lost its salience (Kim and Omi, 1994). The scattered residential practices of families that were once encouraged by company secondment practices in Japan (*tanshin-funin*), where husbands and fathers would be sent to distant

company branch offices for years at a time, have been considered in terms of 'network living' as family members kept intimate mutual interrelations while living separately. This may possibly be the case for young singles in one-room apartments, and there may be some reconciliation occurring between individual living and the dominant family norm.

Internet Café Refugees

A recent phenomenon in Japan is a new form of homelessness. The rapid rise in homelessness in the lost decade was characterised by middle-aged homelessness among single men employed as day-labourers (see Iwata, 2007), who, without families to fallback on, were the first major casualties of the recession. However, homelessness in Japanese cities has more recently expanded among different social groups. The new breed of homeless frequent 24-hour internet cafés where they can cheaply access basic washing facilities, hot drinks and snacks, electronic media, and also snatch some sleep in the warmth. They have become branded Net-Café-*nanmin* (Net-Café-refugees), although a category that sleeps in all-night fast-food restaurants has also been labelled Mac-*nanmin*. These *nanmin* are made up from different age groups but are characteristically younger. The government has announced its intention to investigate this phenomenon, but there are already estimations of more than 5000 homeless *nanmin* in Japan (Japan Today, 2007).

Condominium Climbers

Rented one-room apartments are the main option for young unmarried people on leaving the parental home. Between 1983 and 2003 the number of independent households aged 25-29 renting in the private sector increased from 53 to 71 percent, while for those aged 30-35 the increase was from 33.5 to 55 percent. The number of homeowners among under-30s halved over the same period and decreased by around a third among 30-35 year olds. Nevertheless, many younger people, despite increasing economic adversity, have maintained established pathways into regular employment and home ownership although there is evidence that household patterns and housing preferences have shifted somewhat in response to changing conditions.

A particular feature in cities has been an intensified fragmentation of residential space. Since the mid-2000s housing prices have recovered, but primarily in the 'hot-spots' of central urban areas, while property demand in the distant suburbs has continued to stagnate (Hirayama, 2005). Whereas in the 1970s and 1980s suburban houses were often the preference for younger owner-occupier households, since the late-1990s there has been an upturn in the population of city centres and the condominium sector has seen the strongest growth. There has been a particular expansion of high rise condominium towers of 20 floors or more (see Hirayama, 2005). This has also been facilitated by the sponsorship of 'urban renaissance' policy since the late 1990s, with the aim of stimulating economic recovery. A series of measures promoting housing construction, urban redevelopment and the deregulation of urban planning have been put into practice (Igarashi and Ogawa, 2003). A feature of tower condominium developments is their segregating impact. High rise residential units are relatively new in urban Japan and normally form gated enclaves with self-sufficient facilities. They thus tend to enhance separation between atomized households.

While construction used to target 'standard' nuclear families, there has been a growing trend among developers to provide more diverse housing types, particularly for singles and couples (see Hirayama, 2005). One type which has proliferated is the compact condominium unit with just 30-50 m² of floor space. Another type is a SOHO (Small Office Home Office), combining a small office and living space. The proliferation of smaller housing units for smaller households is more noticeable in the central city areas. A survey of condominium buyers in the Tokyo metropolitan area revealed a propensity for single people rather than nuclear households to purchase homes in the central ward-districts than in other areas. The respective ratios of singles and nuclear households were 22 percent and 34 percent in the ward-districts, and 9 percent and 51 percent in other, less central areas (Recruit, Co., Ltd., 2005). Increasing numbers of unmarried women are also influencing the urban condominium market with a particular concentration in central city locations (Matsumoto, 1998).

5 CONCLUSIONS

Arguably, the changing practices and preferences of young urban homeowners reflect changing opportunities and expectations following the restructuring of lost decade. There appears a fundamental shift from the standard family housing pathways of the past and a significant atomisation and individualisation of households, both socially and spatially. There has been a notable impact on urban life and residential urban

environments, with a growing concentration of smaller households in compact apartment units dwelling in the city, separated from the communities surrounding them. The shifting structures of employment, family formation and urban living may well be enhancing the ability of young singles to atomise and centralise in the metropolitan centre, as well as pulling them towards it.

The Japanese urban environment is responding rapidly to change, as can be witnessed in the swift expansion of tower condominiums in central urban districts since the mid 1990s. The demand for small rental units is also considerable and is rising as more and more young people, who tend to accumulate towards the urban hub, become excluded from regular company employment and subsequently the owner-occupied housing system. If current trends in single living continue, while rates of childless urban couples advance, it is likely that the construction sector will enhance further their initiatives in compact apartment construction. This provides somewhat of a conundrum for the state which has encouraged a liberal urban residential planning regime through zoning legislation and urban renaissance policies at the same time as it has sought to enhance the family home ownership base. The former has led to increasing amounts of small units inappropriate to rearing children while the expansion of the owner-occupied family housing sector has been in reverse.

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