

Residential Choice of Condominium Residents in the Central Area of Local Cities
: A Case Study of Mito City, Ibaraki Prefecture, Japan

Tomoko KUBO (Graduate student, University of Tsukuba)

Introduction

Condominium development increased rapidly after the late 1990s in Japan. This vast development which occurred in Japan has led to the dramatic urban land use changes and the residential transformation in quantity and volume.

In Japan, this phenomenon was researched from these view points. First of all, population recovery in Inner city, mainly in Tokyo. There is a lot of literature about population recovery and the characteristics of the residents in inner city. And the following household types are confirmed in each housing submarket. Single female households, double income couples with no children (DINKS) were the dominant types of the owner-occupant residents. Low income households were confirmed in public housing sector. Two-generation families were confirmed in rented apartments. After 1980s, large supply of condominiums, affordable apartments and public housings were supplied in inner Tokyo. Increasing housing supplies and the diversified residential needs lead to the population recovery in inner cities. Similar implications were confirmed in large local cities.

Along with the population recovery, the local economy and community was revitalized. This was confirmed in small local cities.

And these themes are also important. High-rise apartment supply and urban landscape change (Kagawa 1988). The Increase in residential areas lead to urban functional change (Dahms and McComb 1999).

Condominium supply and its distribution are main interests in Geography. Condominium supply is Concentrated in Metropolitan area (Matsubara 1985). There are great Differences between suburb and central area about the forms and prices and the characteristics of the residents of condominiums (Preston 1986). Therefore, Preston compared the characteristics of their residents among Metropolitan areas in USA (Preston 1991).

However, most of the research about condominiums and its residents were limited to the Tokyo Metropolitan area, and these view points were based on population recovery or condominium supply. We need to explore their roles in middle sized local cities. Traditional houses are a very common residential form in these cities. Therefore

the results should contribute to comparison with the literature. This research aims to clarify the role of condominiums as a residential form in the central area of local cities.

Research Methodology

This research explores the households' decision-making processes on residential choices of present residents.

Questionnaires and interviews were applied to collect data from condominium residents in the research area. The questionnaires were sent to 591 households and 139 households answered. Among these answers, 121 ones of the households who own their condominiums were used for this analysis. 39 households cooperated for the additional interviews.

Study area is Mito city in Ibaraki Prefecture, Kanto area. Mito city is 100km from the Tokyo Metropolitan area. Its population is approximately 260,000. Mito city is also the Capital city of Ibaraki Prefecture. When it comes to the condominium supply, about 2000 units, that is 40 condominiums were supplied in this decade in Mito city. Recently the number of suburbs is also increasing. In the central area, luxury condominiums are mainly built. In Canadian dollars, their prices would range from 3 hundred thousand dollars to a million dollars. In the suburbs, large and affordable condominiums are built. They possess a lot of parking spaces.

Results

Residents were classified into three types by the household size and their life stages. The first type is family type. The married couples and the parenting couples are included in this type. Most of their husbands are working in neighborhood area. The second type is single type. The working single headed households are included in this type. The third type is elderly type. The married couples whose families have already left their home, retired people are included in this type.

Most of the husbands are working in Ibaraki Prefecture, especially in Mito City. They moved into Ibaraki Prefecture when they were employed. There are some big plants like Hitachi electric company in Ibaraki, so well educated people with professional skills move into Ibaraki. Many husbands left their parents' houses when they entered universities or obtained jobs in the Tokyo Metropolitan Area.

Therefore, the residents were divided into two groups by the residential experience. The first group is those who grew up in Ibaraki Prefecture, left home when

they entered universities, and returned to the hometown to get their jobs. That is called U-turn households. The second group is those who moved into Ibaraki prefecture to get their jobs, especially in big companies. Most of them had never lived in Ibaraki Prefecture. When they have to leave company houses, they seek new houses. However, they have little housing information available. They also have limited knowledge about biosphere including institutions, shopping centers, hospitals. Therefore, the condominiums in Mito city were preferred. Mito city is attractive for them because of the concentration of urban functions. Condominiums are evaluated by easiness of moving in, and the locations in convenient areas.

The reasons of moving in are different among three types. Family type evaluate their family members ' preferences for their housing and the place to live, husbands ' working places, conveniences of the central area, the image of their residential areas. They pay attention to the education system for their children, too. Single type has strong desire for homeownership. They also evaluate the conveniences of the residential area, especially shopping area and transformation system. Most of the elderly type has owned houses in the past, and experienced the difficulties to maintain houses. Therefore, they evaluate the security, conveniences of the condominiums. They are anxious about their independent life because of their aging. Therefore they tend to live in condominiums close to hospitals and shopping complexes. Transformation system is also important.

The move between owner- occupancies is regarded as a symbol of status. So, neighborhood and the value of property are also important. The value of property effects the possibility for future move. If the property remains valuable, it becomes easy to sell or rent, so the resident can move. Therefore, all of the types evaluated this point. As a symbol of status, many people mentioned these two points. First point is, good Images of the Central area of Mito city. This is made by long history, trails, historical landscape of the area. This was evaluated by elderly type. Concentration of education systems, attendance units and cram schools was evaluated by Family type.

Second point is the high price of the condominiums in the area. Most of the condominiums in the central area were very expensive, but this price was also important part for residents. The price enhances the value of specific condominiums in the central area of Mito city.

Conclusion

From this research, the roles of condominiums could be summarized in these

points.

First of all, condominiums satisfy their residents because of domination in location, affordability, security and flexibility compared with other housing submarkets in Mito city. And, condominiums accept any kinds of households. In the Japanese housing market, non-nuclear family households were marginalized. However recent condominium supply enhanced the households who can own their home.

Next, Preference for Condominiums is closely related to the evaluation for the attractions of central area Mito city accepts many people working in some industries in neighborhood areas. They judge Mito city as an attractive and convenient city weighed with other cities in Ibaraki. And for the people grew up in Ibaraki, Mito is regarded as an enchanting place. Therefore the central area of Mito city is selected as a residential area. Central area of local city possesses convenience, attractive urban functions and depth of culture. The most important parts of their residential choice were the values of condominiums as a residential form, and the attractions of the central area.

References

Kagawa, T. 1988. Changes within the surrounding area of CBD as affected by the construction of condominiums: A case study of Osaka City. *Geographical Review of Japan* 61(Ser. A) -4: 350-368.

Dahms, F. and McComb, J. 1999. 'Counterurbanization', interaction and functional change in a rural amenity area - a Canadian example. *Journal of Rural Studies* 15:129-146.

Preston, V. 1991. Who lives in condominiums and cooperatives? : an empirical investigation of housing tenure. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 82(1):2-14.