

Branding of Horie, Nishi Ward from the Viewpoint of Long-term Residents : A Case of Urban Change in Osaka City after the Collapse of the Economic Bubble

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Branding of Horie, Nishi Ward from the Viewpoint of Long-term Residents: A Case of Urban Change in Osaka City after the Collapse of the Economic Bubble

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Keywords: Osaka City, bottom-up redevelopment, loss of place identity, use value of space, place branding

Explanatory Note

The aim of this paper is to understand post-bubble urban change in Osaka City, by observing this process at the level of a downtown neighbourhood called Horie in Nishi Ward, Osaka City. With reference to the concepts of post-industrial city, gentrification and neoliberal urbanism, this study comprises an analysis of narratives of long-term residents and people who have been affiliated with the area for a long time regarding changes in the neighbourhood. In the summer of 2013, based on references from a neighbourhood hall in the area, fifteen in-depth interviews were conducted by snowball sampling. Despite its close proximity to the central business district of Osaka City, Horie has a residential character, except for its old shopping street of furniture stores, Tachibana Street, which was renamed Orange Street in the 1990s. The shopping street revitalization was initiated by local business owners, and later developed through the use of outside capital. Consequently, the identity of the area changed, as young people were attracted to the new shops, which sold primarily apparel brands and accessories. Horie's current atmosphere is similar to the Western examples of gentrified neighbourhoods, with up-market condominiums, Western-style cafes, specialty stores, and trendy, young people strolling around. Nevertheless, this new atmosphere is not so welcome for older residents who feel alienated by it.

The aim of this research is to understand the process of urban change in Osaka City over the last 30 years through an analysis of changes that have occurred in the downtown neighbourhood of Horie, located in Nishi Ward. The transition from production and sales of furniture and timber to provision of other goods and services in Horie after the 1990s is interpreted as a partial commercial gentrification. The change from wood craftsmanship to services induced a change in the area's residential environment. Building of condominiums is designated as *mansionization* in this paper, based on the meaning of "mansion" as apartment or condominium in the Japanese context. According to official statistics of Japan, new construction of houses increased by approximately 198% in Nishi Ward in 2007-2012. In addition, Nishi Ward with the highest increase of more than 20,000 people from 1990 to 2010, is one of the centrally located wards with a growing population. Horie in Nishi Ward is interesting for both its young, growing population and its similarity to the Western examples of neoliberalized, gentrified neighbourhoods, with its up-market condominiums, Western-style cafes, and specialty stores committed to fair trade.

Horie was chosen in this study to answer the following question: What are the consequences of Horie's post-bubble change in terms of the physical and social - neighbourhood community - aspects from the perspective of people who have a long-term affiliation with the area?

I. Theoretical Background

Since the 1970s, a process of deindustrialization started to evolve in the cities of industrialized nations, resulting in a post-industrial society (Bell 1973, Harvey 1990, Smith 2007). Cities have been in decay since deindustrialization.

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Therefore, they have been changed under the schemes of urban restructuring, revitalization, redevelopment, and so on. The post-industrial city was characterized by “a new visibility and domination of the finance and service sectors in the city’s economy and urban landscape” (Candan and Kolluoğlu 2008, 12).

After the 1980s, the capital that had once fled from the city, returned and began “extracting value from the city” (Weber 2002, 519) through “gentrification, high-end condo construction, and ‘Disneyfication’” (Harvey 2012, 35). Cities followed the neoliberal path, including a shift to a service economy, consumerism as a way of life, homogenization of urban spaces, socio-spatial polarization, and urban entrepreneurialism. Neoliberal urban policies, also known as “urban neoliberalism” (Wilson 2004), “neoliberal urbanism” (Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2013) or “neoliberal city” (Hubbard 2004, Kern 2010), were meant to adapt the city to the free market ideology. In this way, the principles of capital began to outweigh people’s right “to reinvent the city more after their hearts’ desire.” (Harvey 2012, 25)

The more specific phenomenon of gentrification as a social upgrading of the inner city manifested itself in, for example, increasing property prices and new service establishments for the new-middle class. The core elements of the gentrification process consisted of “(1) reinvestment of capital; (2) social upgrading of locale by incoming high-income groups; (3) landscape change; and (4) direct or indirect displacement of low-income groups” (Davison and Lees 2005, 1170). Nonetheless, gentrification was not a single, homogeneous phenomenon but rather had different types and characteristics that depended largely on geography. For this reason, scholars have criticized hegemony of the “Northern/Western experiences of gentrification” (Lees, Bang Shin, and Lopez-Morales 2015, 2).

Although some actors gained from the process of gentrification, this did not correspond to a general rise in social welfare. Therefore, gentrification was also considered a “neighborhood expression of class inequality” (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2008, 80). In the case of commercial gentrification:

Gentrifiers’ consumption patterns, translated into boutiques, cafes, and bars by new retail entrepreneurs, clash with those of long-term residents, and act as both a visible sign of safe capital investment and a force of cultural displacement. New retail establishments and trendy restaurants create a perfect storm of commercial gentrification that is just as influential as its residential twin. (Zukin 2010, 232)

Japanese scholars have conducted research on both gentrification and the underclass areas of Japanese cities, such as Osaka City (Fujitsuka 2015, Mizuuchi 2006) and Yokohama City (Yamamoto 2014), in addition to doing fieldwork abroad, such as in New York (Sasajima 2015) and in cities in France (Kawano 2008). On the other hand, foreign scholars conducted studies in Japanese neighbourhoods, observing the “often subtle and muted struggles between insiders and outsiders over those most ephemeral of the community’s resources, its identity and sense of autonomy” (Bestor 1990, 2).

II. Data and Methods

Following initial contact with the area’s neighbourhood association, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Horie’s residents in 2013. Twelve long-term residents, accessed by snow-ball sampling, were interviewed. Additionally, three people who are not residents at present but observed the area’s change from different standpoints were interviewed. This paper focuses on this small group of interviewees because they knew the area before the change, and they are considered representatives of the use value of space, in contrast to the area’s commercialization. This research departs from previous studies of Horie, focusing on economic, cultural, and historical aspects (Kimoto 2012, Kawaguchi 2008, and Yoshikawa 2008), by seeking to understand the changes in Horie from the viewpoints of its long-term residents.

Pseud-nym	Occupation	Work condition	Residence-year approximately	Age -July '15	Gender	Interview time-place
A	Retired timber dealer	Former head of Horie Joint Association	50	79	M	Horie, 12 July 2013
I1	Retired office employee	Current head of Horie Joint Association	41	75	M	Horie, 5 Aug. 2013
I2	Retired nurse	Not working	35 (Lives in Shinmachi)	64	F	Horie, 7 Oct. 2013
J	Housewife	Tea ceremony teacher	10-20	~65	F	Horie, 4 Oct. 2013
K1	Housewife	Head of Horie Women's Association	62-63	73	F	Horie, 7 Aug. 2013
K2	Housewife	Watching Coordinator for the elderly	47	72	F	Horie, 26 Aug. 2013
K3	Housewife	Head of Horie Children's Association	Born in Horie	59	F	Horie, 26 Aug. 2013
K4	Retired insurance company agent	Not working	45	83	M	Horie, 21 Oct. 2013
K5*	Engineer	Working	4 (Newcomer)	39	M	Horie, 8 Feb. 2014
M1	Retired company employee	NPO founder	Only worked in Kita Horie	72	M	Horie, 11 Oct. 2013
M2	Interior design business owner	Working	Born in Horie	60	M	Horie, 18 Oct. 2013
N	Liquor shop-owner	Working + Horie Social Welfare Council	Born in Horie	78	M	Horie, 28 Aug. 2013
O	Housewife	Neighbour. hall's office clerk + yoga teacher	35	66	F	Horie, 7 Aug. 2013
R	English teacher	Working	50+	52	F	Horie, 8 Aug. 2013
S	Housewife	Wife of a temple priest	40	66	F	Horie, 18 Oct. 2013
T	Retired Japanese confectionery store owner	Building renter	Born in Horie (Lives in Nara)	64	M	Horie, 30 Aug. 2013

Figure 1. Interviewee Profiles

III. Historical Background

In Osaka, the “boom of condominium development (the so-called *Manshon* boom) in the early 1970s” (Sorensen 2002, 254) caused conflict between residents and developers. In the 1980s, the previous trends of higher regulation and social welfare spending were reversed. As a result of these deregulatory economic policies and land speculation, land and stock prices rose from 1986 until 1990. During the bubble economy, large projects were initiated in Osaka. When the economic bubble burst, Japan entered into the “lost decade” with many business failures. The birth of town-making (*machizukuri*) movements for improving the local environment was a significant development of the 1990s.

The history of Nishi Ward, located in western Osaka, dates back to the first half of the Edo Period (see *the mock painted picture of the great Osaka*). The furniture business emerged in the area in the early 1600s as demand rose for ship cabinets. Tachibana Street in Minami Horie had already become “the number one furniture town” (Sagara 2004, 126) in Osaka in the late 1920s. The area’s renewal after the Second World War continued until the early 1960s (see *Overview of Nishi-ku*). Following a post-war economic growth period in Japan, the area entered a period of economic decline and suburbanization. Tachibana Street was redeveloped after the 1990s, and particularly attracted the young. According to official statistics of Japan, people belonging to the category of twenty to thirty-nine years old increased the most in Nishi Ward in 2000-2010.



Figure 2. The Location of Nishi Ward in Osaka City (Source: Colliers Halifax)

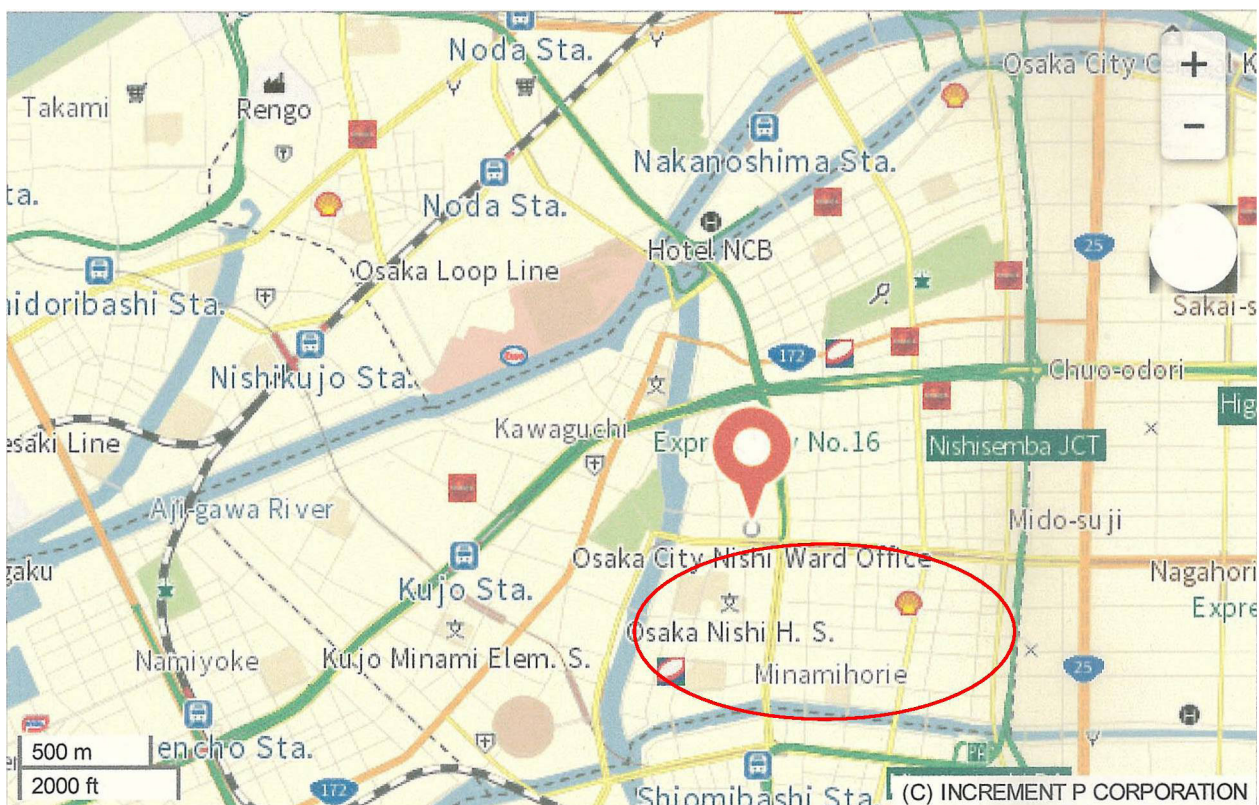


Figure 3. The Location of Horie in Nishi Ward, Osaka City (Source: MapFan Japan Guide)

IV. Horie's Change in the 1990s

In the 1990s, Tachibana Street, once dominated by furniture shops, changed its name to Orange Street and became more diversified with service-sector businesses. According to official statistics of Japan, there were: 1.161 retail stores (including 294 dry goods, apparel and accessory retail stores, 272 food and drink stores, etc.) and 1.161 eating and drinking places, in addition to 24 large-scale retail stores in Nishi Ward in 2011. Although the early 1990s marked the beginning of redevelopment efforts by the Tachibana Street Activation Committee (1991), the reasons for the changes were rooted in earlier, political-economic changes that triggered social changes in Japanese people's lifestyles.

A) A Change in the Demand for Furniture

The change in Japanese people's lifestyles created a shift in demand for furniture. Previously, there had been a perceptual shift from furniture as luxury - before the Meiji period - to furniture as necessity with rapid urbanization. Therefore, Minami Horie had become a "big supplying base for furniture" (M1 2013). Additionally, wood was indispensable for post-war reconstruction; at that time, "people in the business became rich, and Horie, getting its way, was redeveloped and enlivened" (N 2013). People used to buy marriage furniture as a tradition. They could buy marriage furniture only in "Tachibana, Sennichimae, and Nipponbashi" (M2 2013) in Osaka. Many customers bought high-priced furniture at Tachibana Street because of the restricted supply and high quality of the furniture.

After the 1970s, furniture became less necessary. This change was related to a change in the government's housing policy: "Housing Corporation was established in 1955, and from approximately 1965, big public housing was built all over Japan" (M1 2013). The change in the type of housing removed the need for some furniture items, such as wardrobes for kimonos ('tansu') because closets were built-in in apartment buildings. Therefore, the history of furniture in Japan sees furniture first as a luxury; next as a necessity; and finally as an unnecessary commodity.

A second factor was heightened competition with the entry of large players into the furniture market, such as large road-side stores in the suburbs. The resulting price competition reduced the flow of customers to furniture shops inside the city. The entry of large companies was not only a threat to individual furniture shop-owners, but also to any type of small business:

With [economic] liberalization ... because large businesses as our rivals also enter, the way of life of the individual commerce gradually narrows down. It was not limited to liquor shops, but concerned all retail businesses. (N 2013)

B) Changes during the Bubble Economy

The bubble era was a rapid turnover period in terms of people, housing, and businesses. When "Horie's prosperity gradually collapsed" (M2 2013), furniture shop-owners whose businesses were struggling sold their houses, and moved to the suburbs. Hence, they adopted a lifestyle of working in one place and living in another, which was different from the past. According to official statistics of Japan, the percentage of people who left Nishi Ward (40.29%) outnumbered those who came in (17.55%) in 1999-2012. Moreover, people "working in the same city, town or village (including working at home)" decreased by approximately 23% in Nishi Ward in 1980-2010. Condominiums were built on the land the furniture shop-owners left behind. Nevertheless, some could not adjust to suburban life. An interviewee returned to Horie from Kobe, where he moved in approximately 1965, because he "couldn't live without a car, since shopping places and hospitals were not available in the vicinity" (A 2013). Those whose houses had already "passed into other's hands" (K4 2013) could not return.

Some interviewees who continued to reside in Horie after the bubble rebuilt their single family houses, so that they could rent the first floor as a shop. Or, they reconstructed their houses into condominiums, where they continued to live and began to rent. Still others resisted the *mansionization* of their properties by developers, who made money by a "crash and build" strategy. For example: "In our case, there was also talk like, 'Would you sell for 3 billion yen?' but we kept this building by enduring" (M2 2013). Another also rejected such negotiators because he was "too

old to pay back a loan” (A 2013) for reconstruction on his land with a 3-storey house and a storehouse. However, the land prices bubble brought only trouble to the people who stayed in the area without change because of the increased property tax. Accordingly, the bubble’s influence on Horie’s residents depended on whether they used or exchanged their properties at that time.

After the bubble burst, many local business owners retired, and rented their shops to other service businesses. An interviewee who had owned a Japanese confectionery store in the past is now “living on rent” (T 2013) from his building on Yotsubashi Street. The interviewees had different opinions regarding business closures. One argued, “For the furniture shop-owners who were troubled for not being able to sell, I think it was good that they rented” (O 2013). Another interpreted such new business adventures by furniture shop-owners during the bubble as, “seeking comfort in rent” and “dabbling in other professions”. They were doomed to failure otherwise: “They received money, but lost their jobs” (M2 2013).

C) Agents of Revitalization

Horie began to decay towards the end of the economic bubble, with almost no customers on Tachibana Street. Under these circumstances, the second generation of furniture businesses became prominent in the redevelopment process. They organized themselves under the umbrella of the Activation Committee. They began with a naming campaign, followed by other marketing events. According to an interviewee: “... it was not something done by big capital like in Kita or Abeno Wards; [but] ... worked in a guerrilla style” (M2 2013).

Other important agents got involved. For instance, financial institutions provided loans for condominium-building. It was a gesture regarded as a sign of their confidence in the rising popularity of Horie, but they also put pressure on the furniture shops to rent or sell. Additionally, Tokyo capital eventually entered the area through some apparel brands at the initiative of the Activation Committee. Individual agents, as trend-setters of the process, were represented by a woman business developer, Higiri-san, who was well-known for developing the neighbouring America Mura [Village], before rolling up her sleeves for Horie. The interaction between these various agents determined the nature of Horie’s redevelopment.

V. Community Ties

According to official statistics of Japan, “self-employed, employing others” and “family workers” decreased by 53% and 69% respectively, and “employees” increased by 46% in Nishi Ward in 1980-2010. During the same period, while “persons employed in the secondary industry” decreased by 24%, “persons employed in the tertiary industry” increased by 20%. Horie’s identity, once built on similarity, that is, “... a merchant’s town, with people having similar interests, loss and gain relations, positions, lifestyle” (N 2013), lost its foundation with the area’s change. This diversity created conflict of interests or simply a lack of interaction among residents.

A) Familiarity

Many interviewees mentioned knowing others and being known by them, and how this reciprocal knowing was seen as “natural” in the past, unlike “the privacy issue at present” (A 2013). The reciprocal knowing was now replaced by “a feeling like, what is the neighbour doing?” (K1 2013) or “if it’s a mansion, one meets with somebody in front of the elevator in the morning” (K4 2013). For those who left the area for the suburbs during the bubble, there was a general consensus about negative experiences, including loneliness, nostalgia, illness, and even early death because of a loss of their social network. Among the long-term residents however, the old familiarity still continued to some degree.

The local social network not only helped one’s psychological well-being, but was also helpful materially, such as in providing childcare support or assisting local business survival. An interviewee whose liquor shop suffered from supermarket and convenience store competition said, “In the past, there were shops, and residents had a tendency for familiarity. We could also sell through such feeling” (N 2013). He defined the long-term residents with

local sensitivities as the “Indians of Horie” (N 2013). Another interpreted this attitude of the long-term residents as “repayment for kindness” (T 2013) by assuming local duties, when it was their turn. However, young people who were not born in Horie were considered more “indifferent” to area matters because they lacked “affection” (T 2013) for Horie.

B) Aversion

The lack of communication with newcomers was explained by their lack of participation in the neighbourhood association and area events (For a comparative analysis of Horie’s long-term residents and newcomers, see Kirmizi 2015). One reason for the non-participation of newcomers could be the difficulty of entering the in-group, formed by long-term residents. In other words, familiarity for one could be aversion for another. A newcomer admitted his lack of participation by saying: “... When she [his baby daughter] goes to kindergarten and enters the elementary school ... I might have exchange with other parents. I don’t have it yet” (K5 2014). Interestingly, even people who lived in the area for ten to twenty years did not fully participate. An interviewee who came from Okayama said, “There is ... an association, if I come to the English conversation group, but not with people from inside the same mansion” (J 2013).

The possibility of exclusion of outsiders was acknowledged by an interviewee who was born and raised in Horie: “Only, if we are too close, it becomes hard to enter [the in-group]. ... When there are newcomers from here and there, it gets difficult, if we are not careful” (K3 2013). Therefore, long-term residents who actively assumed local duties were aware of the in-group versus out-group problem. Another recommended an integrative approach to all people living in the area, regardless of their length of residence:

Among people living in condominiums, there are some who don’t want their lives to be interfered. ... There are such people among those who have been here since the past too. Yet, living long helps form relationships. Being the head of all, I want to make events by integrating. (I 2013)

C) Empathy

Local people who also conducted business in the area did not fully associate themselves with the long-term residents or the newcomers. Although they belonged to the former group, their businesses depended on the new young families as target customers. An interviewee described the clash between these groups as “the conflict of native races” (M2 2013). He argued that the long-term residents created and maintained a “safe and peaceful city”, and thus, had some “vested rights”, whereas people who came in by buying a condominium with their money considered living there as “natural” (M2 2013) without being aware of the former group’s sensitivities. His recommendations were empathy and effort by all of the parties to get along with each other.

VI. Reactions to Horie’s Revitalization

The redevelopment of Tachibana Street was not without conflict. “The area’s community is divided into two” (M2 2013) as proponents and opponents of revitalization more or less corresponded with Minami Horie and Kita Horie, respectively. An interviewee suggested that their “businesses got a little better” (M2 2013) thanks to the revitalization. Another, living in Kita Horie, supported her superior (*senpai*) from junior high school by claiming that “[furniture shops] would have quitted probably, even if fashion shops hadn’t come” (K3 2013).

However, the entry of Tokyo capital into Tachibana Street through apparel shops like A.P.C. was considered a negative outcome of the redevelopment. It simply led to “people gather[ing] out of purpose there” (M2 2013) that did not help the struggling furniture shops.

A) Regretful Feelings

Criticism of Orange Street (former Tachibana Street) was more widespread among residents without any

business interests in the area. This group was more conservative in the sense of maintaining historical place identity, community ties, and public facilities, in comparison to the city administration's neoliberal policies of privatization and unification. For example, the interviewees preferred the old name Tachibana to the "more fashionable" (R 2013) Orange Street of foreign origin. They unconsciously distorted the new name by saying "Orange Road" (K1 2013) or the "so-called Orange Street" (N 2013) as a signal of their dislike. These people cared for older, representative place names to the point of feeling frustrated with administrative changes in street names that were "without taste, emotion, or that place's image" (O 2013).

The resentment over Tachibana Street's revitalization into Orange Street arose from a sense of unfairness toward furniture shops, discrimination against the elderly residents, and Orange Street's role in rendering Horie a brand.

1. Disappearance of Furniture Shops

A critique of the transition was that it was not managed well enough to achieve the intended results by initiators. An interviewee who used to buy furniture at Tachibana Street argued that he "can't see the old Tachibana Street" in Orange Street. He did not "feel like going" there anymore, now that the atmosphere had become "closer to the downtown's" (K4 2013). It echoes the feeling of another who just "passed [from Orange Street] on the way to shopping" in department stores like "*Takashimaya* or *Daimaru*" (K2 2013).

An interviewee interpreted Orange Street as a mistake because it did not turn out to be the "reactivation wished for by the furniture dealers". He likened the situation of the furniture dealers who closed down or rented their shops to "squeezing one's own neck" (M1 2013). The initiators of change are now trying to correct the mistake, through measures such as Horie Union's efforts to prevent unrelated businesses from coming in further.



Figure 4. A Fanlight Shop as a Remaining, Old Business

2. Exclusionary Horie Brand

Another criticism was related to the efforts to render Horie a brand to attract people and sell commodities or condominiums, often having Horie in their names. Defining Horie as a brand, and thus, rendering the place a product to be sold and profited from, excluded long-term residents. It abstracted Horie's social element, and emphasized only its exchange value. An interviewee remarked: "It is written as popular Horie in flyers of condominiums. ... As residents, we don't think so [that Horie became popular], but it is considered in that way" (K3 2013). Another argued strongly against such a place branding approach for Horie:

We feel that the consciousness of "Let's live all together" is fading away. I think that it is a great mistake, if young people come with the idea of Horie brand. ... It might not match with the goodness of Horie until now. We might not agree. (N 2013)

The area had always been a bit expensive, compared to Osaka's other areas. However, the "[area's cost of living] rose more recently" (S 2013). Rent was quite expensive, especially in the newly built condominiums. An interviewee argued that "it is a difficult place to live for the elderly" (T 2013) because there were not many shopping alternatives in reach, except for department stores. The branded Horie area was stated to be more expensive than the area west of Nishi Ward as in this comment: "Kujō is cheaper. [In Kujō] Life standard is lower, too." (N 2013) The closer one got to Yotsubashi Street, the higher the prices became. However, one remarked: "I feel like [recognition] is now moving more to the north of Horie, from Yotsubashi to around Naniwa line; various shops are being opened [there]." (I2 2013)

B) Future Concerns

Long-term residents were not completely opposed to change. They were aware of the inevitability of change. For example, an interviewee stated: "New things can't begin, unless old things disappear" (K1 2013). Moreover, the interviewees were hopeful about Horie's future based on their confidence in the efforts of the community because "everything is related to people" (K1 2013).

On the other hand, they were also concerned about a possible deterioration of the area, related to the loss of place identity and function. They feared the possibility of higher rates of crime and an intensification of the schools' capacity problem, if the area became more popular and crowded. Furthermore, they worried about young residents of the newly built mansions, considering that they were prone to think, "Why should I pay neighbourhood expenses, when I don't participate?" (I2 2013). Unless older members were replaced by newer members for neighbourhood duties, it would be difficult to keep the "safe and peaceful city, created and maintained by the efforts of the old people" (M2 2013).



Figure 5. Apparel Shops on Orange Street

VII. Discussion

Urban redevelopment is likely to bring about commoditized and homogenized spaces in the current context of neoliberal urbanism. The historical place identity is lost because exchange value of space dominates over its use value. Alienating and exclusionary spaces are produced. Questions of survival against large capital are triggered. Even if an urban redevelopment process arises from the place concerned, the intended, grass-roots type of town-making is not guaranteed.

Tachibana Street's redevelopment was initially a bottom-up redevelopment because of the local actors involved. Nevertheless, when outside capital was incorporated into the process, the direction of town-making changed. Large business interests began to put local residents and businesses in the shade, just as the condominiums left single

family houses without sunshine. Eventually, the area resembled any gentrified area. The homogeneous community of furniture shop-owners was replaced by social diversity, but at the cost of spatial homogenization.

Horie's post-bubble change meant both an opportunity and a problem - with unintended consequences - for people with a long-term relationship to the area. Worries regarding the loss of historical and cultural place identities following Horie's promotion as a brand were intensified by the city administration's neoliberal policy approaches. Horie's incomplete story of change is evolving towards "a renewed identity and economic function" (M1 2013).

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