

Early Settlement Houses of Japan and Neighborhood Houses of the City of Osaka

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Early Settlement Houses of Japan

The settlement movement, which had begun with the founding of Toynbee Hall (Fig.1) in London in 1884, soon spread to the United States, and finally reached to Japan in the 1890's. At that time, Japan's economy was rapidly growing. By the end of the nineteenth century, agriculture provided less than half the national product as the share of manufacturing increased steadily. Industrialization concentrated labor in the cities. Sen Katayama (1859-1933), a pioneering social worker of Japan, founded Kingsley Hall (Fig.2) in Tokyo in 1897. This is considered one of the first settlement or neighborhood houses established in Japan. However, he stopped his activities in Japan in 1914 when he sailed to the United States. After his departure, another settlement house continued similar activities in the same area of Tokyo, but it finally stopped them before 1926.

After the Great Earthquake of 1923 (Fig.3), some professors and students of Tokyo Teikoku Daigaku (Imperial University) founded Tokyo Teikoku Daigaku Settlement in Tokyo. It was the first university settlement of Japan, and followed by Kanto Gakuin Settlement established in Yokohama in 1928.

Even before the Great Earthquake, however, social problems of new industrialized nation was apparent. It was in Osaka, one of Japan's largest commercial and industrial centers, where the first full-scale neighborhood house was founded and an extensive system of municipal neighborhood houses was created.

Neighborhood Houses of Osaka City

As an after-effect of the First World War, prices of commodities rose, and social unrest due to the difficulty of living became more intense, culminating in the "rice riot" which broke out throughout Japan. Osaka was no exception. Under these circumstances, the social welfare work of the country and particularly that of Osaka made rapid development.

The City of Osaka accelerated its prosperity since the war. In the outer area of the city limits, medium and small-scale factories sprang up in large number (Fig.4), and day-laborers and poor citizens were crowded in several gloomy quarters where rents were comparatively low but lacking in public utilities. Slums similar to the East End of London sprang up. "Tenroku" located in the north end of the city was a slum area full of dirty and unsanitary environments. Many families lived on boats floating on a nearby river. This area was considered a hotbed of social evils in the northern part of the city. Children's welfare was disregarded. Gambling, prostitution, and other vices were rampant in back streets. "Kamagasaki" located in the south end of the city was another notorious one.

As a relief means for this miserable social life around “Tenroku,” a neighborhood house named “Shimin-kan” which literally means “citizen’s house” was established in 1921 to impart cultural education to those poor people to enrich their life. The “rice riot” of 1918 was a moment of this movement. The municipal government of Osaka changed their welfare policy from passive to active one. At that time, this municipal project was the first attempt of this kind under public management, and attracted the attention of the general public.

In establishing the house, the municipality made exhaustive investigations of the precedents of the most famous settlement houses of the world including Toynbee Hall in London and Hull House in Chicago. One of the reasons why it was called “neighborhood house” rather than “settlement house” was, unlike Toynbee Hall or Hull House, it was municipal and there was no settler who actually “settled” in the area to improve its conditions¹. Social workers and civil servants commuted to the neighborhood house from their own houses. But, Shinando Shiga(1892-1938), the first chief of the neighborhood house tried to partly settle in the area, for example, by commuting also to public bathes in the area to increase opportunities of direct communication with the local people. Majored in sociology at Tokyo Imperial University, Shiga was a recognized expert in this field of social work with extensive knowledge and rich experiences as an Osaka Y.M.C.A. manager.

Shiga understood that the municipal settlement was rather irregular by Western standard. Looking back Japanese social work later in his life, he admitted that social workers were becoming rather bureaucratic and losing human contact with people, but maintained his own view of the settlement movement. He thought that it was unnecessary to conform its Western tradition².

Completed in May 1921, the neighborhood house’s imposing four-storied reinforced concrete building was devoted to welfare services (Fig.5). Many social workers volunteered in backing the operation of the neighborhood house, and it was not long before the house became one of the best institutions enjoying a world reputation. In 1922, the first international Conference of Settlement Workers was held at Toynbee Hall, and Shiga was elected as a committee member of the conference. In 1923, Jane Addams of Hull House visited the settlement house during her tour in Japan. After the Second World War in 1948, Hull House presented an Addams memorial medal to the Kita Neighborhood house (Fig.6).

Based on the experience of their first neighborhood house, the municipality constructed a series of similar neighborhood houses in various parts of Osaka, and changed the name of the first house to the North Neighborhood House, from Shimin-kan to Kita-Shimin-kan in Japanese. The Tennoji house was opened in 1926, the Taisho, Naniwa, and Higashi houses in 1928, the Tamade house in 1929, and the Konohana house in 1930.

¹ Naomasa Kawabata (ed.), *Kita Shimin-kan sanjunen no ayumi*, Osaka Shiritsu Kita Shimin-kan, 1951, 1.

² Nobuyuki Hozumi, *Shakai Jigyo Zuiso*, Osakashiritsushiminkan-koenkai, 1968, pp.150-151.

In the 1930's, the establishment of their new neighborhood houses was suspended. It was 1940 when they resumed their work, and opened the Imamiya house in March of the year, the Asahi, Minato, Higashinari houses in 1941, and finally the Nishiyodogawa house in 1942 when the numbers of their neighborhood houses counted 14 in total.

However, the Second World War stopped this project. 10 among 14 neighborhood houses were turned into home manufacturing service offices according to the government's war policy, and only the Kita, Minato, Higashi, and Imamiya houses remained as neighborhood houses. During the war, the Minato, Higashi, and Imamiya houses were either completely destroyed or severely damaged. And, at the end of the war, only the first house, Kita-Shimin-kan survived. This means the settlement workers of Osaka were put back where they started nearly a quarter of a century before.

Kita Neighborhood House

Stopped their activities in 1983, the Kita-Shimin-kan or Kita Neighborhood House was demolished before long. However, it was a monument of the history of social welfare in Japan. Its four-stories building was unparalleled among similar institutions in pre-war Japan, and many of its activities were very original at that time.

As educational activities, there were lectures, educational courses, recreations, and library activity. For child welfare, there were a day-care center and a nursery association. For public health, there were a medical office and a dental office. As advisory activities, there were personal affairs consultation, legal advice, and vocational clinic. For financial support, there were a credit association and a credit union as well as vocational training program.

Kita Neighborhood House was very active from the beginning, as is shown by the following statistics. The number of lecture increased from 28 to 211 during years 1921-22. The number of audience increased from some 9,000 to 31,000 during the same period of time. The number of educational courses increased from 521 to 1,162, while the number of students from some 9,000 to 23,000.

One of their unique activities was the production of books in Braille type. This pioneering activity was later taken over by the Osaka Mainichi newspaper. Kita Neighborhood House was very much used by workers, because it is conveniently located and with the lecture hall of an appropriate size. Kita Neighborhood House was also used for music and sports.

The Kita Shimin-kan was an outstanding house among many municipal neighborhood houses of Osaka city. The Tennoji house, the second house after it, was of two-stories building (Fig.7), and some of them were of smaller wooden houses.

Real activities at the Kita Neighborhood House have not been sufficiently surveyed yet. But, we can glimpse at them in some pictures in its photo albums kept at a social welfare office of Osaka city. A couple of pictures shows us children of "Tenroku" area going out from the Kita Neighborhood House

for their outdoor activities (Fig.8). Another couple of pictures shows us younger citizen getting vocational training at the Kita Neighborhood House. A set of pictures show us practice or rehearsal of music club at the neighborhood house (Fig.9). Another couple of pictures show us needlework and dressmaking. They taught both Japanese needlework (fig.10) and Western dressmaking (Fig.11). Some of these women learned them for income, but some others for the so-called feminine modesty. The Kita Neighborhood House was used as a place for children's homework. It had a modest library.

During the Second World War, they had various wartime activities such as first aid course (Fig.12). On the same stage, however, local residents sometimes had a fun even during the war (Fig.13). A photo shows us Shiga and his colleagues, perhaps volunteer social workers, and children of the area (Fig.14). This photo was perhaps taken on the housetop of the Kita Neighborhood House.

The success of the Kita Neighborhood House was partly due to the economical development of Osaka but also due to the effort of these social workers and active neighborhood people. This is a very interesting photo, because people came out very lively and their clothing and surrounding show us the time. In the back, there appeared a much larger office building of a railway company, which also contained a department store as well. Time changed. These women in this photo wear Japanese traditional clothes "Kimono," but they are certainly "modern" in gestures and facial expressions. Clean-shaven boys were not skin-head hooligans by the way. It was customary in those days. Bobbed hair of girls also. They are mostly lively. What we miss in today's Japan is this atmosphere. Some specialists think that we still need settlement or neighborhood houses, which take root in urban communities.