

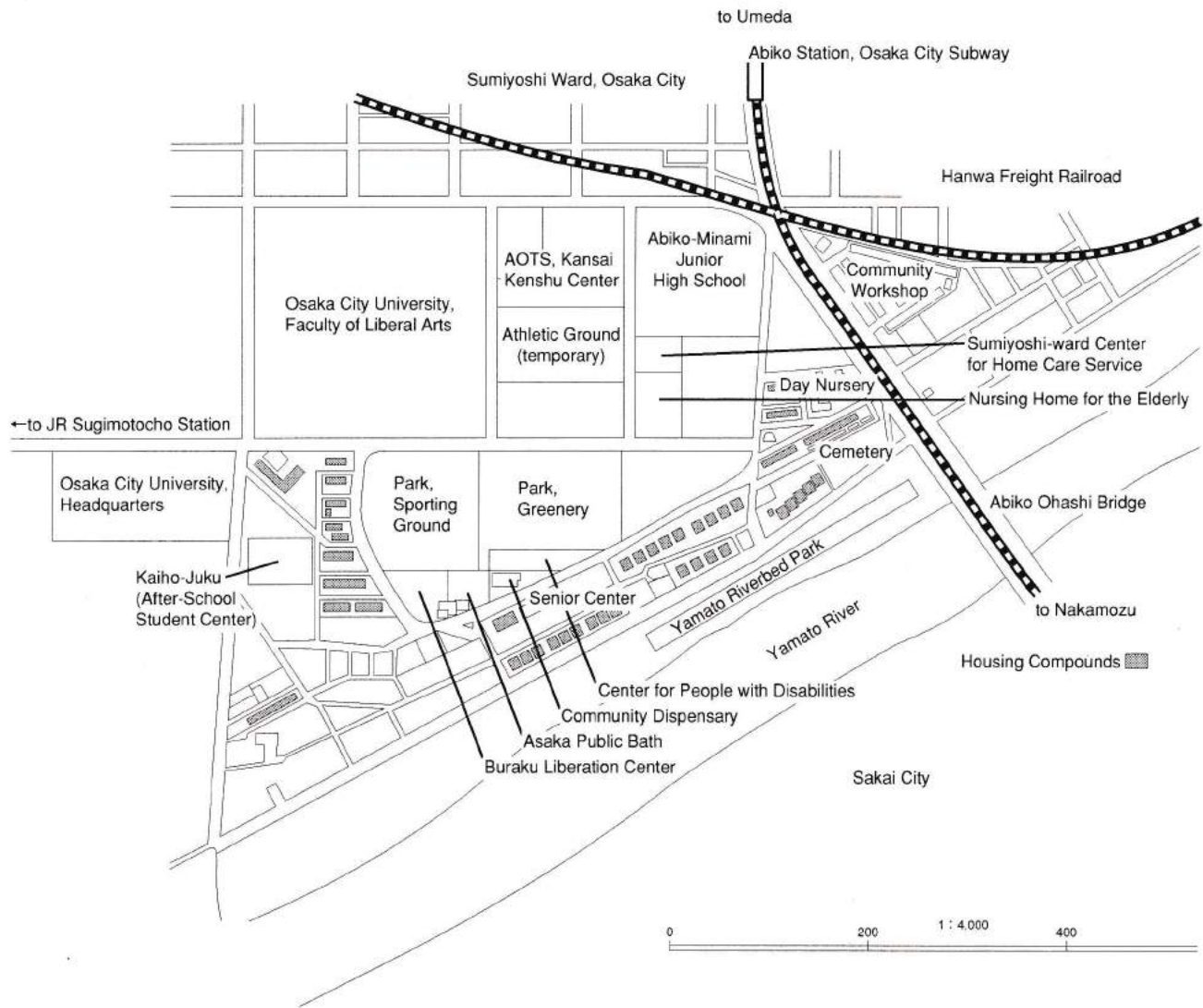


# A Guide to the Asaka Buraku

Executive Committee for Comprehensive Planning  
of Buraku Liberation in the Asaka Area

February 1995

# Map of Asaka (as of February 1995)





**A** saka Buraku Liberation Center  
(Asaka Dowa-chiku Kaiho Kaikan)

To promote independence and awareness among Asaka residents, the Center provides welfare and employment counseling, various lessons, lectures and literacy classes. Also, many cultural activities such as human rights lectures and newsletter publications are conducted here.



**A** saka After-School Student Center  
(Asaka Kaiho-Juku)

To raise Asaka children to be leaders of tomorrow for final Buraku liberation, vigorous efforts are made in these after-school classes to enhance their education so they may overcome differences in school performance.



**A** saka Senior Center  
(Asaka Rojin Fukushi Center)

Helping seniors lead more meaningful lives, this center provides opportunities for recreation activities and assistance in joining community activities.

**A** saka Center for People with Disabilities  
(Asaka Shogaisha Kaikan)

To improve the quality of life of Asaka residents with disabilities, various activities such as rehabilitation therapy, special bath services, classes, club meetings and exchange meetings are held here.



**A** saka Community Dispensary  
(Asaka Shinryosho)

Internal medicine and pediatrics specialists are available to preserve the health and hygiene of the community.



**A** saka Higashi Day Nursery  
(Asaka Higashi Hoikusho)

The day nursery enables Asaka children to grow up with a strong body and mind, imparting a keen awareness against discrimination and a firm community spirit.



**A** saka Public Bath  
(Asaka Onsen)

A relaxing pastime enjoyed by Asaka residents after a hard day's work, a visit to this public bathhouse provides refreshing comfort and time for socializing.



**A** saka Community Workshop  
(Asaka Kyodo Sagyosho)

In this workshop, used materials acquired by Asaka residents are processed for recycling. In addition to reducing pollution, the workshop supports used material buyers of Asaka, most of whom are self-employed.

# INTRODUCTION

This booklet is intended to tell you about the Asaka Buraku area; how this Buraku came about and how it is today. The Buraku of Asaka is located along the northern bank of, or in part on the riverbed of, the Yamato river which borders the southern most part of Osaka City between Sakai City. Before telling you about our Asaka Buraku, we have to tell you a little about Buraku discrimination in Japan, because the Asaka area or community is an area explicitly instituted as a result of Buraku discrimination and still remain as a Buraku.

As Japan's characteristic social status discrimination, Buraku discrimination has its origin in a social class system established, artificially and politically ca. the 16th to 17th centuries, to divide and control people in feudal Japan. A particular characteristic of this social system is the division of a major part of population into four classes; Samurai (Warriors), Farmers, Craftsmen and Merchants. And below these four classes, outcasts, "Eta (extreme filth)" and "Hinin (non-human)", were placed; these are the source of present day Burakumin status. These Burakumin were severely restricted in their habitation, in their occupation and were never allowed to marry out of their own class. Needless to say, many hardships were forced on them as they tried to maintain their daily lives.

In 1871, after the Meiji Restoration, the government promulgated the "Emancipation Edict", and declared a discontinuation of status discrimination as a system. The Edict, however, did not bring any concrete measures to eliminate the discrimination; it continued thereafter until the present day. On the other hand, the Burakumin's own liberation movements began developing with the formation of the Leveler's Association in 1922, which lead to the Buraku liberation movements of this day. Although Japan went through a tremendous change in its framework as a nation after the defeat of the Second World War, with the promulgation of the New Constitution, with its pillar of respecting fundamental human rights, Buraku discrimination did not cease to exist. It was in 1965 that the Cabinet Dowa Policy Council submitted a recommendation entitled "Fundamental Measures for the Solution of Social and Economic Problems on Dowa (Buraku) Areas" to the Prime Minister, and after this recommendation various government measures based on national legislation began taking place on environmental improvement, social welfare, industries, education and human rights of the Buraku.

As a result of Burakumin's own efforts for liberation and the advancement of the national government measures, many Buraku in Japan improved their features especially with regard to community environment. Discrimination, nonetheless, still continues. We shall tell you how it is in Asaka today, later in this booklet. There are many Buraku problems left unsolved all over the nation. Above all, a social discriminatory mentality is still deeply rooted in people's minds, and keeps coming out in the form of derogatory graffiti or refusal to marry Burakumin.

In the lines above, we have given you a very brief picture of Buraku discrimination in Japan. Compared with many other type of discrimination in the world today, such as racism or sexism, the unique difference in Buraku discrimination is in its zero-visibility. The mere fact that one happens to be born or to live in a particular community is the sole reason. There are no other differentiating features for being subjected to severe social discrimination; this is a distinction which separates Buraku discrimination from other discrimination the world over and, at the same time, makes it very difficult to explain the nature of Buraku discrimination to people in the world.

Buraku discrimination, along with other types of discrimination existing in Japan: (discrimination against women, disabled persons, Korean residents, the Ainu -an indigenous people of Hokkaido and adjacent islands- and foreign workers) will be watched by the world as a significant human rights problems in Japan. We of Asaka, being directly involved with the problem, are determined to work to eliminate all forms of social discrimination.

We would like to tell you about our Asaka community in the following chapters.

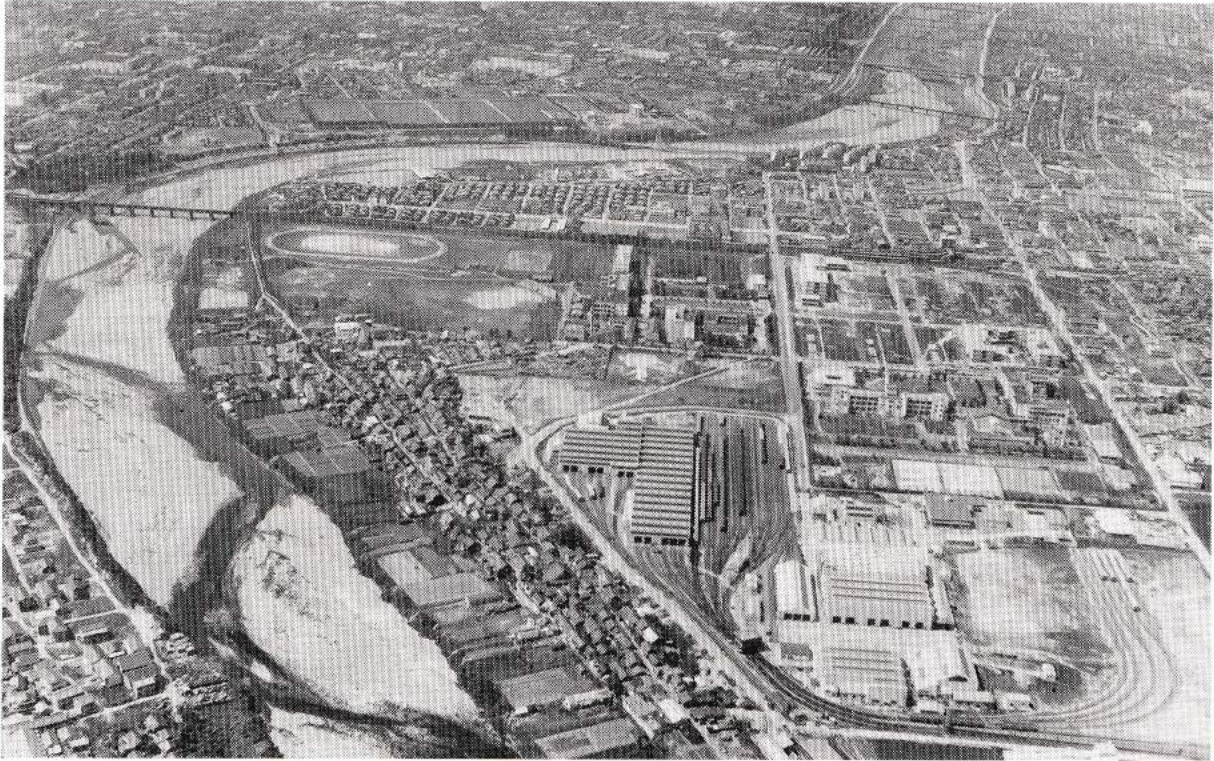
# CONTENTS

I	Asaka Buraku-Reality and Town Planning- .....	2
1.	Our Town Planning: Its Past, Present and Future .....	2
	(1) Yamato River Improvements .....	2
	(2) In the Asaka Buraku Community, All Conventional Housing .....	4
	(3) Removal of the City Subway Yard .....	5
2.	Asaka: Its Location and Surroundings .....	6
	(1) Isolated Location .....	6
	(2) Miserable Surroundings .....	6
	(3) Stood for Liberation .....	6
3.	People of Asaka .....	7
	(1) Single Parent Families and Older Persons Living Alone .....	7
	(2) Lean Work Force Population .....	7
4.	Education and Day-Nursery .....	8
	(1) Early Drop-Out Rate as High as 27 Times the Average .....	8
	(2) Day-Care for Every Child .....	8
	(3) Great Efforts Dedicated for Education by Whole Community .....	8
	(4) Intensifying Liberation Education .....	9
	(5) Education First, Education Last .....	9
5.	Industries and Employment .....	10
	(1) High Sick Rate Invite Unemployment .....	10
	(2) Unstable Employment and High Rate of Government Employment .....	10
	(3) Being Self Employed Means a One Person Operation .....	10
6.	Health and Sickness .....	11
	(1) Hard Labor Ruin Health .....	11
	(2) Many Are Not Covered by Any Medical Insurance .....	11
	(3) Three Times as Many Disabled People .....	11
7.	Welfare Problems .....	12
	(1) Eight Times as High in Relief Roll .....	12
	(2) Aging Problems Confront Asaka .....	12
8.	Livelihood and Human Rights .....	13
	(1) Low Income Families .....	13
	(2) Not Enough Space Even in Improved Housing .....	13
	(3) Discrimination Incidents Keep Recurring .....	13
II	History of Asaka .....	14
1.	History of Asaka from Its Origin .....	14
	(1) Origin of Asaka .....	14
	(2) Asaka under Shogunate Rule (1603-1867) .....	14
	(3) Asaka in the Meiji Era (1868-1912) .....	14
	(4) Asaka in the Taisho Era (1912-1925) .....	15
	(5) Asaka in the Early Showa Era (1925-1945) .....	15
	(6) Asaka after World War II .....	15
2.	History of Liberation Movements .....	16
	(1) Foundation of Buraku Liberation League Local .....	16
	(2) The Executive Committee for Comprehensive Planning .....	16
	(3) Council for the Promotion of Town Renovation .....	17
III	Four Ideals of Asaka Town Renovation .....	18
1.	Human Town-A Town Vivid with Human Energy- .....	18
2.	Town with Autonomy -People Felt Close, People Share- .....	18
3.	A Town with Water and Greens -To be a Home Town for 80,000- .....	18
4.	A Town of Education and Culture -Every One Is Precious- .....	18

## 1. Our Town Planning: Its Past, Present and Future

We will tell you how our Town Planning (the official title is the Comprehensive Planning for the Asaka Area) came about in a later chapter describing our movement and its history. In this chapter, we shall see the past, present and future of our Planning.

Our Town Planning is carried forward with a view to improve very poor Buraku surroundings which result from discrimination. The improvement plan has a three point goal in Asaka.



• An Aerial photo taken in 1962. Many houses can be seen within the riverbed.

### (1) Yamato River Improvements

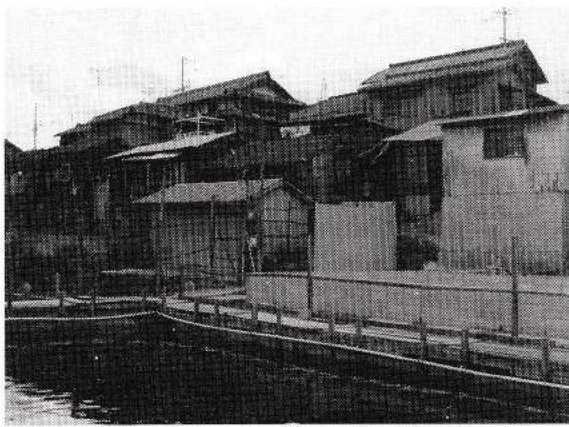
As an aerial Photo of Asaka in 1962 shows, the housing of Asaka town was built on top and on both slopes of the right bank of the Yamato River. Over 200 households actually lived on the riverbed, on the inner side of the bank, where it is in fact a part of reserve river flow. You could rarely find such a sight in all of Japan. It was clear at a glance that this is an appalling outcome of Buraku discrimination.

Life in that riverbed housing was, as you can notice in the photos above, in extremely miserable surroundings. Neither tap water supply nor sewage were provided for every house, and the main facilities in daily life were wells or neighborhood water taps and public lavatories. Roads in the town were so narrow that many of the motor vehicles, not to mention fire engines in an emergency, could not go through them. Most of the housing was so poor; tin-roofed row houses stood side by side. They were infested with insects such as mosquitos and flies and had an unpleasant humidity. They were also very vulnerable to damages from storms and floods in the rainy or typhoon seasons. Many houses were built on the steep slopes of the riverbank with an unstable foundation. You entered the ground floor from the riverbank road and the same floor became a second story if you came from the riverbed, something far

from a "wholesome and cultured living" standard as Article 25 of our Constitution reads.

The Yamato River Improvement Project was carried out after we had negotiated our demands with the government Yamato River Construction Work Office, the Kinki Regional Construction Bureau of the Construction Ministry. Improvement works were done on all private riverbed lands and housing on these lands was totally removed by 1983. As the riverbed was cleared of housing, government riparian works such as excavation and embankment were started and all completed by 1989. At the same time, construction of community roads in the town and a bank top-road for emergency vehicle use have also been completed by the Osaka City authority, with a 800 meter long line of cherry trees along the bank top road.

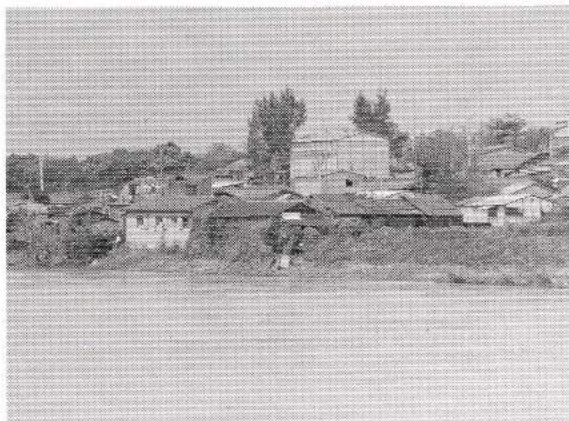
The riverbed, after the completion of riparian works, was turned into a park. On a one kilometer long riverbed between the Abiko Ohashi Bridge and a railway bridge of the Japan Railways Hanwa Line, tennis courts, an athletic ground, a Four Season's Plaza, a children's play corner and a trimmers' corner were built. The whole area was called Yamato Riverbed Park after its completion, and made into a place to enjoy the riverside waterfront surroundings. With all these works completed, the aim of the Yamato River Improvements Project was almost achieved. What's left to be done is the good maintenance of the park, along with linking it to a Central Park being constructed in a nearby former Subway Yard site.



• Row of houses viewed from the goldfish-breeding ponds.



• Houses in the riverbed.



• The Yamato River, swollen by typhoons, encroaching on the riverbed houses.



• Houses standing right at the river's edge.

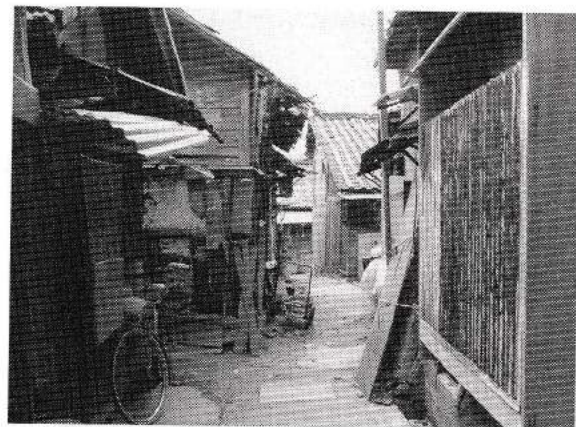
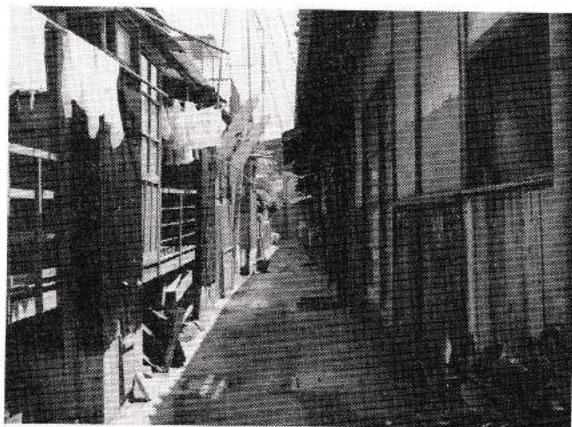
1968 - house stay  
1989 - River flush



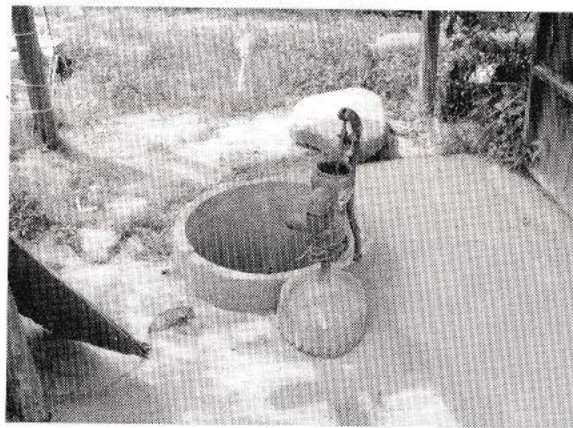
(2) In the Asaka Buraku Community, All Conventional Housing

Areas, except the apartment complex area, are called Muranaka (inner town). The Muranaka part of the town, as you can notice in the photo on page 4, was expanded on the riverbank and was in very poor surroundings. Most of the houses were built side by side facing narrow community roads which fire engines could not go through in case of fire. They were quite old and not up to the usual standards. Many alleyways crossed through Muranaka, and houses built along the alleyways didn't get enough sunshine and they lacked any sewage system.

We worked hard to push our demand for housing improvement and won a designation for area improvement for the north-western part of Muranaka in 1968, and housing complex No.3 was constructed there. In 1977, we succeeded in obtaining another designation for the eastern half of the town, and construction went on with 138 apartments being built; 27 more are planned to be built hereafter. The third area improvement designation for the remaining western part of Muranaka was acquired in 1986, and the city government is purchasing land in this area. After the purchase, the plan



• A tortuous maze of back alleyways, too narrow for access by ambulances or fire engines.



• Communal well: a well used in common by several households for their daily water needs.



• Communal toilet: an outdoor toilet shared by several households.

is mainly for housing construction. The western-most part of Asaka community was designated as a small size community in 1985 and land purchase by the city is also underway. Although total renewal improvements of Muranaka are achieved successively, the work is very much delayed from the initial time schedule. Further efforts are needed for the solution, as the expiring date for the validity of the special budgetary law is nearing.

### **(3) Removal of the City Subway Yard.**

When the City Transportation Bureau began building its subway yard right next to the Asaka community, the people of Asaka struggled against it as a matter of life and death, because once the yard was constructed Asaka would be cut off from all neighboring communities and become geographically isolated from anywhere else. Roads for children to go to school would be shut off and noise pollution was sure to hit the community. The city authority, however, threatened people struggling against the construction of the yard with forced eviction. The people of Asaka and the city clashed against each other with force, even with police interventions. Eventually a group of city council members intervened in the struggle, and switched to a conditional struggle ending in reconciliation at that time. The total removal of the yard, however, remained as a final desire for the people of Asaka. The Subway Yard brings nothing good but instead, many hazards to the community where it will be constructed. Considering the fact that, after sounding out several other possibilities, the city decided to build the yard half forcibly in Asaka, one cannot totally deny that there was a certain sense of Buraku discrimination at work.

After the foundation of the Asaka Local of the Buraku Liberation League in 1965, the people of the Asaka Buraku kept on demanding a total removal of the Subway Yard to the city authority. In 1976, at the start of the existing Asaka Executive Committee for Comprehensive Remodelling, in solidarity with local PTAs, workers' groups and even with the labor union of the Yard workers itself, we have finally succeeded in having the city authority promise the total removal of the Yard. The final and complete removal ended in 1988; almost 28 acres of land was obtained new and flat. How to make the best of this new land was discussed with the people concerned with the Working Committee for the Remodelling of the Former Subway Yard Area in its center. The final decision on how to use the land will be based upon the "Four Ideals for Town Renovation", to be described in a later chapter. (See page 18) These efforts are surely a first step toward the goal of eliminating Buraku and all other forms of discrimination.

## **2. Asaka: Its Location and Surroundings**

### **(1) Isolated Location**

Asaka is located in the southern most part of Sumiyoshi-ku. Sumiyoshi-ku is one of the administrative division in the south of Osaka City. The area is about 33 acres of narrow land, about half a mile long, shaped east to west, running along the northern bank of the Yamato River. The whole area, however, is separated from other neighboring communities because it is closely surrounded by the Yamato River to the south, a large campus of Osaka City University (65 acres) to the west, the Abiko Ohashi Bridge Elevated Road to the east and finally, the vast Abiko Yard of Osaka City Subway to the north. The very geographical condition themselves are proven evidence of Buraku discrimination.

The Osaka City Government never took any measures to improve the poor conditions of Asaka and left it neglected until people living in Asaka stood up in 1965 and began speaking for real emancipation from the misery of Buraku discrimination. Asaka, before the town improvements, was only a narrow strip of town on top of and on the slopes of the right bank of the Yamato River. The sphere of everyday life started extending after the Buraku liberation movement began in 1965. A new housing project was constructed extending to the north from eastern tip of the old town area. The center part of the old town will also be joined together with the former yard site and it is planned to have access to the neighboring communities to the north in the future.

### **(2) Miserable Surroundings**

Asaka had miserable living conditions before the large-scale town improvements began taking place. Asaka, in 1974, had 1.6 times higher the population density of the city average. Families living there were crammed into small rooms to sleep and eat. Many of the inner town roads were so narrow and winding that fire engines or ambulances could not pass. Houses built on the riverbed were always exposed to the danger of storms and floods and were left in poor sanitary conditions without a clean water supply and sewage. Schools for the children, both primary and junior high schools, were located very far away, much further than the city standard walking distance. No doctor was found in the town with 3,000 people living in quite an urban area. We also had to go out of Asaka for daily shopping as there was no shop selling daily necessities in the town.

### **(3) Stood for Liberation**

Although these poor living conditions directly oppressed the life of the people in Asaka, people were more tightly bound together and helped each other in a miserable and needy life. And everyone who had stood up to fight in the liberation movement, was tightly united by their great anger at discrimination. They kept fighting, the whole town together, to overcome many difficulties with the spirit of "our own liberation with our own power", until this day.

### 3. People of Asaka

The population of Asaka is 1,619 persons with 634 households, as of 1990. This is a decrease of about 300 households compared with the figure in 1970. The decrease is due to a number of people moving out Asaka after the land purchase for the improvement projects. Some moved out for good but others are temporarily away. Almost 60% of the households are originally from Asaka, i.e. a household having any family member (adult couple, their parents or grand parents) who was born in Asaka. A half are "moved-in" households which came to live in Asaka in the sixties.

#### (1) Single Parent Families and Older Persons Living Alone

Table 1 shows a breakdown in the family type. The average family numbers 2.6 persons. Households comprised of an elderly person living alone account for as much as 17%, which is over 5 times higher than the average for entire Osaka Prefecture population. Although the cause may be found in the very small housing in Asaka, still some measures are needed to protect their living. Single parent families comprise 11%, which is 1.6 times higher than the Osaka average.

#### (2) Lean Work Force Population

Table 2 shows a demographic breakdown by age of Asaka. A comparison with the entire Osaka population tells us that Asaka is 3% lower in ages under 14, 6.5% higher in ages over 65, and 3.4% lower in work force age groups.

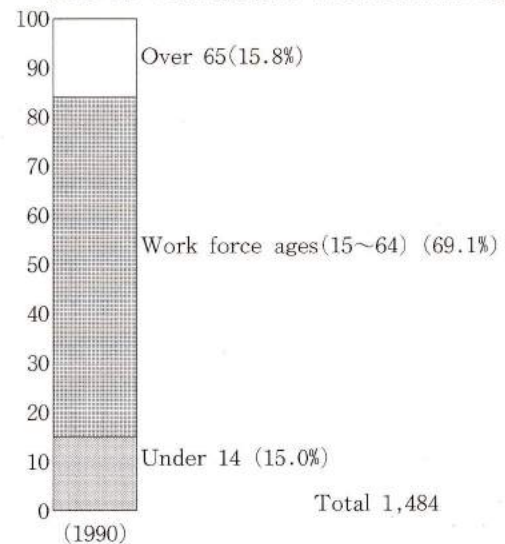
Another comparison with two other surveys of Asaka done in 1974 and 1982 figures from 1990, shows that the under 14 group kept decreasing from 30% to 20% and 15% respectively, while the over-60 age group kept increasing from 8% to 15% and 22%.

The aging of the population is common all over the country. Still, in Asaka it is climbing more steeply. Causes for a steeper aging may be sought in the moving out of workforce-age couples at the time of the land purchase for improvement projects and moving out after marriage. They moved out mainly because they couldn't find housing in Asaka with the quality they wanted. But other big reason for the aging may be found in the fact that a decrease in number of the people dying much earlier than the non-Buraku average. Buraku people used to live much shorter lives because of very hard working conditions and other miseries in their daily life. These changes in demographic curves actually show the effects of measures taken for Asaka's surroundings, industries, labor, nursery provisions, education and welfare and their importance.

Table 1. Family types



Table 2. Demographic breakdown in age



## 4. Education and Day-Nursery

### (1) Early Drop-Out Rate as High as 27 Times the Average

Table 3 shown here shows that nearly one tenth of people over 15 years of age quit school before they finished the 6th grade. A comparison with the city average surveyed in 1980 shows this to be appalling 27 times higher than the average. Contrastingly, the ratio of those who went on to higher education (junior college or beyond) is less than 70% of the city average. The education situation of people of Asaka is almost 20 years behind the national average. As a result of such poor education, 16.1% of people in Asaka face inconvenience in reading, 23.5% say they have the same problem in writing. This works to their disadvantage not only in job situations but in almost all stages of their social life; a vicious circle continuing one generation to the next.

To overcome this vicious circle, literacy classes have been held for almost 20 years, for adults to win back the "letters" unfairly deprived from them. The parents' hope to educate their children so strong that they have organized themselves to push for liberation education and day-care, and with these efforts they struggle hard to attain the improvement of the education environment and a betterment of the contents in teaching.

### (2) Day-Care for Every Child

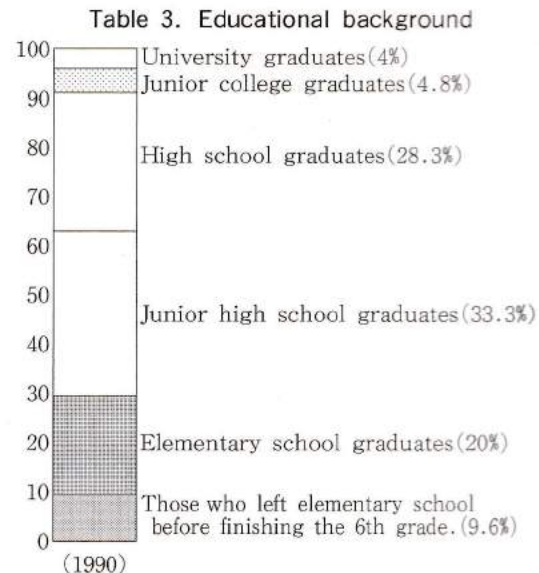
Parents could not afford kindergarden or day nursery until they succeeded in the construction of public day nurseries in Asaka. As both fathers and mothers had to work hard for survival, mothers had to keep their children beside them on the job sites. They had to bring their children out with them on waste material collecting, or were forced to tie their children with sashes so as not to be bothered when they were too busy in housework. After a great amount of serious efforts, mothers had nurseries constructed in the community, and over 90% of the children in Asaka attend day nurseries nowadays.

All the while the people of Asaka struggled hard for their comprehensive improvement planning, child day-care was considered important because it worked to guarantee both parents opportunities for employment. They are now able to engage in jobs without worrying about child care.

The other thing considered vital was the effect of pre- school education. As experiences in the very early stages of life can mean so much, it was regarded that acquiring adaptability in group life at this time of life was imperative. Thus the role the day nursery plays here is essential. Moreover, the children of Asaka, compared with the children in neighboring communities, were poorer in life experiences and were observed to have a smaller and narrower vocabulary in daily conversation. Pre-school education is needed in this perspective as well.

### (3) Great Efforts Dedicated for Education by Whole Community

Drop-out problems common among Asaka children in the '60s were gradually overcome with provisions prepared by projects for education attained in the liberation movements of Asaka. In the '70s greater attention, instead, was focused on the problems of juvenile delinquency and inadequate academic performance of Asaka students.



Many Asaka students indulged in cigarette smoking and glue-sniffing and playing hooky from class so that the average performance scored by Asaka students in Abiko Junior High School, where they attended, showed a 20% lower than average performance. This poorer performance was considered a direct reflection of Buraku discrimination toward the young people. The high school admittance ratio, also, was lower than the city average by 6%, and junior high graduates were guided to apply for high schools semi-automatically according to their score performance. This created a lack in awareness and determination on why they should have higher education, and resulted in an increase of students remaining in the same class and eventually dropping out.

Asaka parents organized a group entitled "Education Safeguard" and put every effort of the whole community, including women and youth groups, into overcoming juvenile delinquency and the poor school performance of Asaka students. A facility was built in 1974 for Kaiho-Juku, community after-school classrooms, aimed at both leadership training for liberation movements and supplementary teaching for better academic performance. Taking this opportunity of the Kaiho-Juku opening, the people of Asaka started to intensify the activities of the Kodomo-Kai (Children Association) and to hold a pre-entrance examination cramming camp for ninth graders. A closer exchange of information with high schools was also established. Extra School Study Programs particularly suited for students of Asaka were provided, and High School Subjects Study Programs for better aptitude guidance were also edited.

This thorough course that the parents of Asaka established for the better performance of their children had the aim of raising children to be able to see through any discrimination and fight against it. The final goal being to provide a human resource to shoulder the task of Buraku liberation.

#### **(4) Intensifying Liberation Education**

Cooperation with the staff of primary and junior high schools was intensified further for the betterment of liberation education. All these conditions were won after long and bitter struggles: good school facilities, pupils were limited to 30 in a class and extra supplementary teachers. Conditions being fulfilled, the answer to the big question of how to make the best out of the Buraku children was pursued. Efforts were given to solve the problems still left unattended, lesser score performance and juvenile delinquency, and how to make the children masters of their own destiny as well as to form group cooperation among the school children.

With all these efforts, gradual improvements of the education environment in Asaka have been achieved. The high school advancement ratio in the past five years went as high as 92.4%, almost equal to the average ratio of the Abiko Junior High, where Asaka children and non-Burakumin kids study together. Also, cases of drop-out and repeating the same grade in high school are almost disappearing and employment after high school graduation is steadily increasing with the cooperation of public employment agencies and school guidance.

#### **(5) Education First, Education Last**

Despite the advancement in pre-high school education, the university entrance ratio of Asaka students, which was the highest in 1977, is coming down to an average of 29.6% for the last five years, and the score performance of Asaka kids, which continued to rise during the seventies and eighties, is dropping down again in recent years.

Education is most important for "education is the first, as well as the last, step to eliminate discrimination." Greater efforts for education will continue among Asaka parents.

## 5. Industries and Employment

### (1) High Sick Rate Invite Unemployment

Among the 15 year old and over population of Asaka, 55.8% are either employed or self-employed. People looking for a job comprise 8.4%, and 31.2% want a job but are not making any effort to get one. Sickness is the biggest reason for unemployment - 32.1%. Age and taking care of family and children follow as reasons given. A high sick rate shows that engagements in unstable jobs or hard labor are undermining the health of these people resulting in unemployment.

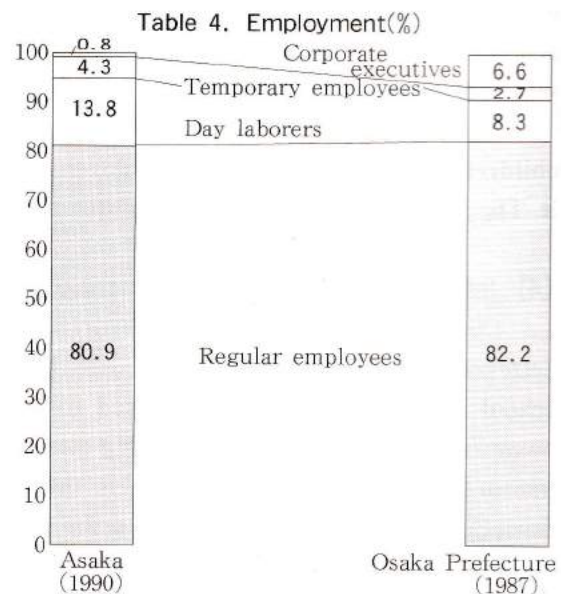
### (2) Unstable Employment and High Rate of Government Employment

The ratio of people employed in Asaka is 46.1%, which is 1.7% lower than the Osaka Prefecture average. 37.3% are permanently employed, 2% lower than the prefecture average. The fact that the Osaka Prefecture statistics available for comparison are about four years older clearly shows the disadvantage of being in Asaka. Also, 8.4% are temporary employed or day laborers, one and a half times the prefecture average.

About one third of those employed work as government employees, and another third work in smaller companies with less than 30 workers, where the employment situation is unstable.

In their pay style, 70.1% are paid monthly, an increase of 5% since the last survey of 1982,

Although the job situation in Asaka is, as Table 4 shows, improving thanks to the efforts paid for demanding secure employment, full equality for job opportunity is far from being achieved in Asaka. Three times as many of the people employed in government work is a fruit of people's efforts in movements, but this in a way shows the exclusion of Buraku people from job opportunities in larger enterprises.



### (3) Being Self Employed Means a One Person Operation

The self employed in Asaka are engaged mostly in buying used material for re-cycling or in small-scale construction businesses, followed by the dining, retail and service industries. Almost 90% of these are operated by an individual. Half of them with only one worker, and again, half of the workers are family members. They say that the future prospect of their business is at best to keep the operation barely going and that they have no one to inherit the operation.

Almost all of the industries in Asaka are so called one person operations with a very unstable management and with little prospects for the future.

## 6. Health and Sickness

### (1) Hard Labor Ruin Health

Long years of hard labor and poverty would often bring people sickness or handicaps. A survey shows that as many as 32.9% of the people in Asaka are under treatment or are hospitalized. Patients with troubles in the circulatory system are most numerous, followed by those with problems in the digestive system and the musculoskeletal system. Those suffering from hypertension come first in number, and pain in the lumbar, shoulders or knees come next. This shows the consequence of hard labor and an improper nutrition over a long period.

### (2) Many Are Not Covered by Any Medical Insurance

Table 6 shows a comparison of the breakdown in medical insurance between the national average and the people of Asaka. The ratio of people covered by mutual health insurance, which covers governmental workers, is over three times as high in Asaka than the national average, reflecting the fact that more are employed in public sector in Asaka. This also reflected in the ratio of people under coverage by National Health Insurance, about two-thirds of the average, the insurance covering the non-employed and those working in very small businesses.

What is appalling is the fact that almost 16% are not covered at all by any medical or health insurance, a big difference from the national average, which is almost non-existent. Although the biggest reason given for no insurance is that many are on the medical relief roll, a significant number among the no-insurance group was unable to take advantage of medical service in the time of need.

### (3) Three Times as Many Disabled People

A poor hygienic environment and the hard labor in Asaka before the area improvement programs started, pushes up the ratio of people with disabilities in Asaka. As high as 8.4% of the population hold ID cards for disabilities. This is over three times as many compared with the Osaka Prefecture population. High in number of disabilities are the visual disabilities, the lower extremities impediments, the internal disabilities, the auditory disturbance and balance function disorders.

Given as the cause of disabilities are, industrial accidents, 1.4 times as high in the occurrence ratio compared with the national average, and damages in parantatal accidents, 1.5 times as high in the same, showing clear and apparent evidence of Buraku discrimination.

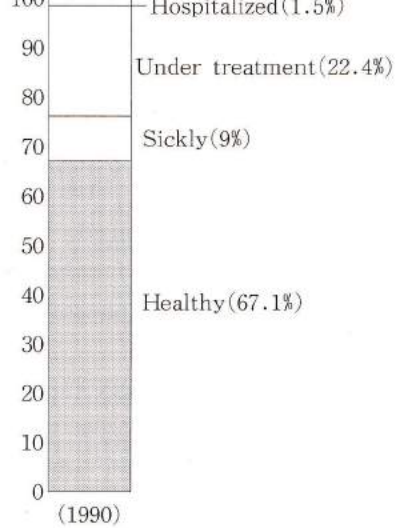


Table 6. Medical insurance coverage(%)

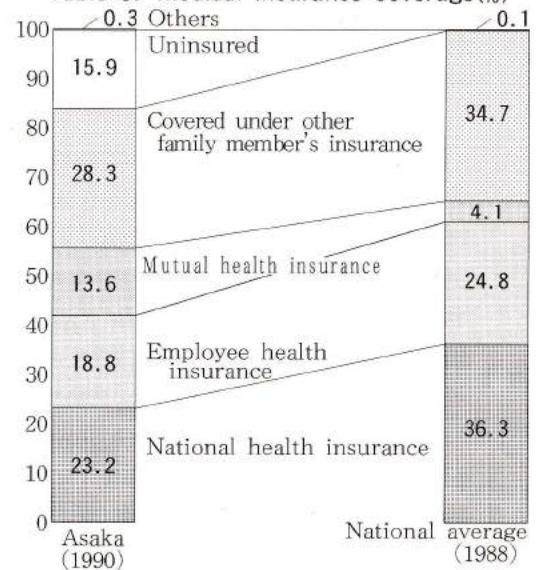
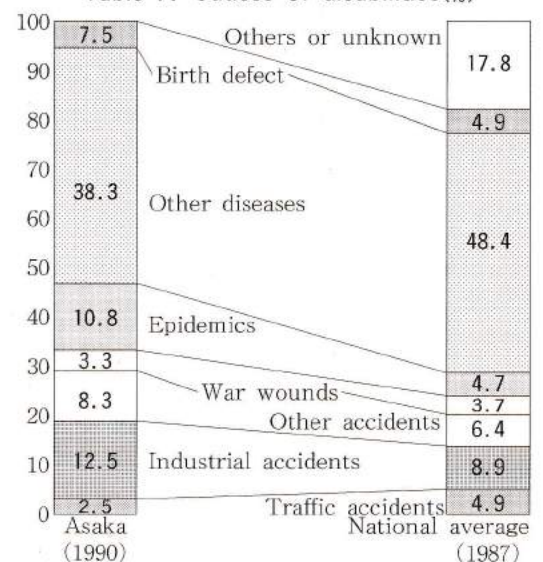


Table 7. Causes of disabilities(%)





## **7. Welfare Problems**

### **(1) Eight Times as High in Relief Roll**

Families in Asaka on relief roll are so many that a quarter of the total number of families are given some kind of relief. This is 8 times as high the ratio in Osaka city and shows directly the hardships being experienced by people under discrimination, i.e., not obtaining economical independence. The head of family's illness is the biggest cause of people being on relief, followed by old age, disabilities and single-parent family, reflecting the actualities of the Asaka Buraku as we have seen in the lines above.

There were not so many families on relief, actually a very few, before any liberation movements started in Asaka. Not because they were better off at the time, but because Buraku discrimination excluded them from ordinary administrative services and because of the hesitation of Asaka people to "being cared for by Okami (literally meaning Upper Being, usually means government or authority)", along with a low awareness of their own rights. The consequence was a vicious circle of dire poverty leading to illness or disability and an early death.

Although we are trying to help these families rehabilitate, difficulties confront us as many have been on relief for quite a long period of time. And at this time of welfare cuts, the disparity between the relief ratio of Asaka and other communities becomes wider still, to the point that some sort of action would be needed to fill the gap.

### **(2) Aging Problems Confront Asaka**

Problems concerning the aging population also confront the Asaka community. The live-alone elderly consist of as high as 17% of the entire families in Asaka, which is five times the prefecture average. The high rate comes primarily from the small public apartment housing plan, consisting of 70% of the total housing in Asaka, too small to accommodate any three-generation family. Still, you cannot ignore the fact that the number of elderly neglected in Asaka is greater. Although the Asaka elderly say in the survey that their major supporting income is pensions, the rate of pension beneficiaries would be much lower than the average, pushing up the relief ratio of these elderly. We presume the past joining rate for any pension system could not have been better than the present day ratio of 13.7% of the total Asaka work force population.

Many among the elderly have one or another illness and 0.6% of the population are bed-confined. Services for them are provided by the community dispensary and Senior center, the major burden of their care mostly being shouldered by their family members. Stronger supports of care services by the government to share the burden are called for.

To enjoy a better quality of life in our later days, we need a certain degree of basic culture. In the Buraku, many elderly were deprived of even a primary education and are still left illiterate. Better service programs to address the problem, besides on-going literacy classes and culture programs in Senior Center are also called for.

## 8. Livelihood and Human Rights

### (1) Low Income Families

The average yearly income per family in Asaka is about ¥3,430,000 (equivalent to about US\$34,300), an increase of ¥420,000 (equivalent to about US\$4,200) since the survey of 1983. The inflation adjusted increase would be calculated to about ¥120,000 (US\$1,200), and when the tax increase in the same period is considered, the real income stays about the same. A comparison with the prefecture average shows that the Asaka people are getting only about 80% of what other people are getting, showing an apparent difference.

### (2) Not Enough Space Even in Improved Housing

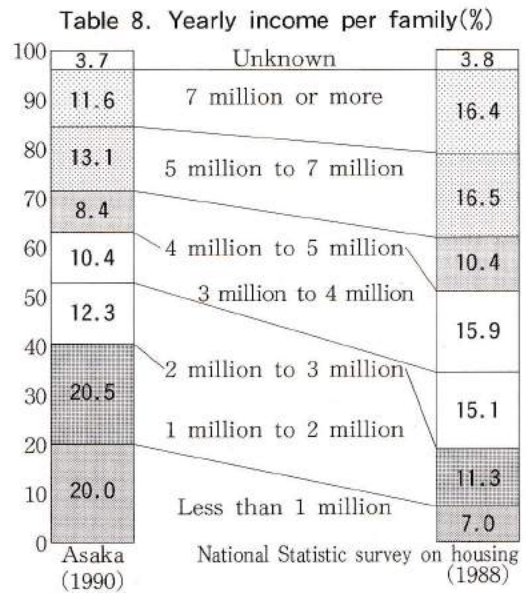
Housing is an environment the improvement of which is most obvious in Asaka. With the construction of housing especially meant for Dowa area improvement and re-modeled housing, 70% of the Asaka population now dwells in public housing without the fear of roof water leaks or storm hazards. Nevertheless, the average space for housing is about 40 square yards, 8 square yards less and 20 square yards less than the prefecture and national housings average. Such big changes in the housing environment have certainly brought changes in daily mores and people's mentality in the community. A community awareness of neighborhood support and help evident when most people lived in skid row terrace houses has faded out as people move into higher- storied apartment housings.

### (3) Discrimination Incidents Keep Recurring

It used to be that marriages in the Buraku were almost all between Burakumin because of the strict bondage of discrimination. Nowadays, a recent survey shows that 65% of couples in Asaka replied that either or both of them are non- Burakumin. Thirty percent of these couples, however, experienced opposition to their marriage by their close relatives, and 10% of them have at least one of their relatives rejecting any contact with them just because he or she married a Burakumin or because they live in Buraku.

To the question have any of their family member actually been confronted by discrimination, nearly 30% answered affirmatively. Sixty percent of the discrimination occurred at school scenes, on work sites or at the occasion of marriage. Almost half of the discriminatory acts were verbal, while 30% were attitudes, actions or gestures. A few had their identification surveyed by a detective agency or had derogatory graffiti scrawled around their homes. Plain and shameful kinds of discrimination are still here and have not gone away.

The total indifference to the actualities of persisting Buraku discrimination and "jealousy" aroused by special measures being taken to fill the gap created by long years of discrimination are, in a way, increasing among many non- Burakumin. We think it quite essential to keep trying to let the non-Burakumin public know how much effort is being made in demonstrations, meetings and studies by the people of Asaka, using the little time left after their work and house chores, to overcome all the difficulties confronting them.



# 1. History of Asaka from Its Origin

## (1) Origin of Asaka

The origin of the Asaka Buraku is directly connected with the redirection of the Yamato River. The Yamato River, or Yamatogawa, before redirecting work, bent northward at Kashiwara, ran through the Central Kawachi Plain and joined the Yodo River, or Yodogawa, at Kyobashi. The old Yamato River snaked through lowlands and was a big hazard to the inhabitants with its frequent floods.

It was around 1650 when a Imagome village headman filed a river redirecting proposal to the shogunate government, to avoid repeating damages from the flooding. This was not a small construction work even for the shogunate government, and lots of twists and turns were made before the final decision was given. Strong opposition also was voiced by villagers of the Yosami area, where rice paddies and fields would be destroyed and irrigation water damaged.

The redirection works, however, started on February 13, 1704, and were finished in an incredibly short period of 8 months. The redirected Yamato River flow ran westward from Kashiwara, went through the Asakayama Bend, where the construction met the biggest difficulties, to flow into Osaka Bay north of the old Sakai Port. With this redirection, the villages of the Yosami area were isolated from the water of the old Yosami Pond, later giving a disadvantage to the agriculture of the Yosami villagers.

Before the redirection of the River, the area where the present Asaka Buraku is located used to be a piece of land between the Asakayama Elevation and the Yosami Pond and is believed to be either farm land or a marsh of the Pond. The area was neglected after the river reconstruction and left barren for sometime. A taxation notice issued by a local governor in November, 1708, four years after the redirection works, shows that the area was made arable again.

It was not until 1721 that the area was redeveloped for housing. This was the time under the rule of Yoshimune, and the famous Ooka Echizen was a magistrate of the Minamimachi Court in Edo, the present-day Tokyo. Historical documents tell us that people of "Kawata (hide tanners)" status from Settsu, Kawachi and Izumi provinces, all in the vicinity of the present-day Osaka, came to live in the area. This was a start of the Asaka Buraku, then called Sugimoto Shinden (newly explored paddies in Sugimoto Village).

Closely located are the Buraku of Yata, Sumiyoshi, Matsubara and Sakai, about 2 to 5 kilometers in distance.

## (2) Asaka under Shogunate Rule (1603-1867)

The Buraku people, who were forced into extremely difficult living because of discrimination, came to live in Asaka to find a place for a new and better life and established themselves after opening new fields for crops. What they found there again, nevertheless, was another life in dire poverty.

The people of Asaka, without their own lands or visible means of support, depended for their living upon the meager and miserable jobs of carrying water from the Yamato River, the treatment of dead cattle and horses or subcontracting from sharecroppers (i.e. sharecropping from sharecroppers).

They had no other choice but to engage in petty jobs because the systematic status discrimination at the time forbade Burakumin to be engaged in more meaningful work with better rewards.

## (3) Asaka in the Meiji Era (1868-1912)

Little is left today for us to know about the life in Asaka during the Meiji Period (the later half of 19 century). We rely on a report of a survey conducted in 1898, on the lives of the indigent to find out how Burakumin led their daily lives in those times. The income earned by people engaged in used material collecting, manual labor, agricultural labor or miscellaneous jobs, was so petty that they could never make their ends meet. They could hardly survive every day life. We suppose that life in Asaka

was not any better.

#### **(4) Asaka in the Taisho Era (1912-1925)**

Again, little is left to tell us about Asaka in the Taisho Period. A report entitled "Buraku Daicho (Buraku Register)", a report of a survey on Buraku in Osaka conducted in 1918, tells us some facts about Asaka in the Taisho Era. According to the report, the population of Asaka was about 1,000 and 200 families were counted, giving the average number of family members as a little less than five. Used material collectors were most in number, followed by petty farmers and simple laborers. Although about a half of the families in Asaka were "independent", their earnings kept them barely surviving, while the other half had to depend on someone to keep themselves alive.

Sugimoto Shinden, however, parted from Sugimoto Village in 1883 and became a single village. It also changed its name to Asaka-cho when Asaka and Yosami Village were later merged into Osaka City in 1925.

#### **(5) Asaka in the Early Showa Era (1925-1945)**

In this period, the actual space of the town of Asaka was reduced and access restricted by various projects around the town. First, with the Osaka College of Commerce, later Osaka City University, moving in to the site directly west to Asaka, the way west was blocked. The College site was expanded during the Second World War when it was converted to the Marine Scout Camps and completely shut off any access westward in 1945, as the US Occupation Forces requisitioned the site for use as a garrison camp. The approach from the north of Asaka would also be closed as the acquisition of land for a new subway yard during the period 1939 and 1941, and later was totally closed at the time of completion of the yard in 1961. And recently, a Tennoji-Abiko road extension to the south with a new bridge construction across the Yamato River shut off the east side of Asaka.

A day nursery for children was opened in May 1936 in Asaka, and together with a Youth Meeting Hall and a public bath house, made up the community meeting place. The Meeting Hall and the bath house were first opened in 1906 and were renovated in 1952 on a new site. Farming was going on in Asaka in this period along with waste collecting, and a cooperative of agricultural practice was organized, later to become branches of Sumiyoshi Agriculture Cooperative.

#### **(6) Asaka after World War II**

In September 1957, a movement started in Asaka to oppose the construction of a city subway yard. The plan for the yard construction included the use of town property, and if the yard was built as planned, it would have been too close to housing in Asaka. School children of Asaka would have had to walk much farther to school. Sharecroppers who were using the land where the yard was to be constructed, also started a big opposition. Although these movements were quite powerful, a lack of tactical leadership to unite various elements of the opposition made it somewhat sporadic and never led to a realize of the total environmental improvement of the Asaka area. Sharecroppers compromised with a monetary compensation, while community land was acquired by the city in exchange for new land and construction of a community center and new roads. A social welfare juridical person, Asaka-kai (Asaka Association) was organized and licensed on January 24, 1964, for the management of the common community property then acquired, and continues to work even today. The Asaka-kai also manages the community center, a playground, a community swimming pool and street lamps as well as distribution of the fund interest to various community activity groups. The Red Cross Volunteers of Asaka also had been organized as far back as 1949 and continue their work of community activities. This was re-organized as a grass roots community organization: the Asaka Neighborhood Association, working under the Sumiyoshi Ward Community Activity Promotion Association, and providing volunteer activities in crime prevention, hygiene education, welfare and aid support as well as fire and hazard relief.

## **2. History of Liberation Movements**

### **(1) Foundation of Buraku Liberation League Local**

In July 1965, people fed up with the poor housing in Asaka organized the Asaka Area Housing Improvement Union. The Union, following the trends of the more advanced movement experience of the fore-going Yata and Sumiyoshi Burakus, pushed forward their efforts in the spirit of Buraku Liberation Movements and under the guidance of the Osaka Prefecture Federation of the Buraku Liberation League, re-organized themselves as the Asaka Local of the Buraku Liberation League (BLL). The 7th movement organization in Osaka to continue in the steps of the historical Levellers Association was born in Asaka.

The foundation of the BLL local in Asaka was an epoch making event because this was the first breakthrough to spontaneous community efforts to fight for the elimination of discrimination, against the resignation ("Don't wake a sleeping child") prevalent among the Asaka population.

The history of the liberation movement in Asaka is divided into four stages. The first stage was from its foundation in 1965 to 1970, the early developing stage when activities centering around housing improvement and the Kodomo-kai (Children's Group) were very active. The second stage was from 1971 to 1975, the empowering stage, when the youth section and women's organization were reconstructed and made strongholds in the movement as well as the active engagement of every neighborhood joining the Sayama Mistrial Struggle and the Discrimination Denouncement Struggles. The third, from 1975 to 1980, was the stage when the whole community of Asaka joined their efforts for the Comprehensive Planning Movement and formed the Town Renovation Promotion Committee in 1988, leading into the fourth stage of joint movements, as the local made steady advancement.

All through these periods, the Asaka Local of the BLL played a central role to negotiate with local authorities to obtain many Dowa measures in environmental improvements and construction of housing, day nurseries, a community liberation hall, an after-school student center (Kaiho-Juku), Senior Center and Center for People with Disabilities, as well as improvement and extension in school and park facilities. The Local now also shares responsibility in the big project of renovation of the former subway yard site. As a core member of the Executive Committee for the Comprehensive Planning of the Buraku Liberation Asaka Area, and as a spearhead of the liberation movement, the Local shall continue to play an important role.

### **(2) The Executive Committee for Comprehensive Planning**

Based on the experience of the struggles mentioned earlier, the Executive Committee for Comprehensive Planning of the Buraku Liberation in the Asaka Area was organized on March 14, 1976. The Committee was formed after a 3 months period of provisional committee work, with the expectation of all the town's people, and surrounded by the local authorities, local school staff and those involved in the movements, waiting after long years of effort, to overcome the divisions among the Asaka people.

Unfortunately, there was division among the Asaka people at the time of the organization of the BLL local. The Executive Committee was represented by the three major community organizations existing in Asaka, namely, the Asaka Local of the Buraku Liberation League, the Asaka Neighborhood Association and the Asaka-kai (Asaka Association), a social welfare juridical person, to overcome the division. People from all fields of Asaka, not only the workers of many public facilities in Asaka, but teachers, workers and PTA members of both the Yosami Primary School and the Abiko Junior high School, and particularly workers from the City Subway Yard, all participated by representation in the Executive Committee, to work actively in building Asaka town in the light of buraku liberation.

What actually drove the organization of the Executive Committee was the success of an overall survey conducted to find the needs of people in Asaka. Preparation for the survey began in February

1974 and a survey plan was finalized in December of the same year. The survey was conducted among all the town people in Asaka. Both the BLL and the Neighborhood Association put forth great efforts, with full cooperation of the Dowa Problem Research Room of Osaka City University, to conduct the survey. Of the 928 households in Asaka, 89% were interviewed at home by visiting interviewers for a total of 619 man/days.

With the report of an analysis based on this survey, an overall negotiation for comprehensive improvement was carried out with the Osaka City Authorities. The negotiation was a first big effort under the initiative of the Executive Committee and went on all through the night for over 18 hours, with full concentration from all organizations of the Committee. At this negotiation, the local authorities gave the word for the total removal of the subway yard, the reconstruction of the river bank and the riverbed of the Yamato River and the total renovation of all poor housing in the town center, all of which will be a major framework of the future town building of Asaka.

The main objectives of the Executive Committee lie in building Asaka anew into a town of liberation, education and people's autonomy in every perspective of the environment, education, employment, daily life and culture. All of these objectives are included in the Buraku Liberation Comprehensive Plan.

### **(3) Council for the Promotion of Town Renovation**

In October 1988, just before the total removal of the City Subway Yard, the Council for the Promotion of Town Renovation Utilizing the Former Yard Site was organized. The Buraku Liberation League, the Executive Committee for the Comprehensive Planning and six Neighborhood Association Federations representing the non-Burakumin communities surrounding Asaka and the former Yard site joined the Council, where they discussed a renovation plan for the former yard site.

The Council was founded after three workshops held in Asaka, a number of talks with 45 surrounding Neighborhood Associations and five discussion meetings with six Neighborhood Association Federations, where the ideals of renovation and actual renovation plans were thoroughly discussed.

In November 1988 the Council held an event entitled "Yard Site Festival", where an awareness and participation was appealed to 35,000 people for the town renovation plan making. In April 1989, the Council had a first negotiation meeting with the city authority, and made suggestions and presented demands of the Asaka people to the city officials. In August of the same year, the vacant land of the former yard site was made a temporary athletic ground for citizens' use. The council also held the 4th Study Meeting for the Town Renovation in December 1990. In this meeting, a report was made on the reply to a questionnaire from over 2,000 inhabitants living nearby on the use of the site. This report was published in September 1991.

The Council is also working very hard for constant exchange programs between Burakumin and non-Burakumin communities to the effort of eliminating all forms of discrimination, including Buraku discrimination, whenever they have an opportunity for town renovation.

## **1. Human Town —A Town Vivid with Human Energy—**

Renovating the town should be people-oriented. You experience people, you experience life. You remember the town as you used to remember it. People come together, people build the town, people generate energy. Men are there, Women are there. So are the elderly, and people in the prime of their life, young ones and the very young. Not only Koreans, from both North and South, but people from many other countries would be living in the town. The disabled are also living deeply rooted in the town. People first. Always people first. No matter what your gender, birth or nationality. Every one of you is a master in this town. All the same, all equal. You feel air, heat, strength, willing to know, to understand each other. This is a town for people.

## **2. Town with Autonomy —People Felt Close, People Share—**

A town of people, by people, for people. No one forces you to do anything. Your wish comes first - feeling close to each other. Sharing with every one. This is most important. For these purposes you nurture human warmth, human aura. You put your power together to run the town, to solve problems. You reach here putting power together. You go ahead from here with power put together. Everyone has equal rights and shares equal duties. You acknowledge and respect others. And cherish independence. This is how a town with autonomy should be.

## **3. A Town with Water and Greens —To Be a Home Town for 80,000—**

Water and greenery on the banks of the Yamato River. Get us back to nature. Fish in the river, birds and insects in the trees. Not asphalt but the scent of the earth. The mellow scent of flowers, and the thick aroma of grass. No man-made town. A town full of nature.

Enough nature for people to live pleasantly and wholesomely. Where you feel every one of the four seasons. You breathe nature here and there. Where you mingle with flowers, birds, winds and the moon. You smell nature here and there. Not a town to pass by but one to live in. To live in and proudly call it your home town. This is a town with water and greenery.

## **4. A Town of Education and Culture —Every One Is Precious—**

Children, our next generation grow up here. Grown-ups are teachers for kids. Kids are the hope for grown-ups. Kids learn human warmth and consideration, growing up among people. Kids are masters in the streets, where they play to their heart's content. With these kids, history is taken over, and a new culture will be born. A culture of people who most respect to learn and to work, a culture of people who toil. An authentic and indigenous culture will be born, inherited and advanced in the town. Every one of the kids in town is precious. For they are the creators of culture. This is a town of education and culture.

## — Afterword —

The reality and history of the Asaka area and its ideals for town renovation are as mentioned in the preceding chapters.

It has been more than thirty years since the efforts toward liberation began in the Asaka area. Also, it has already been twenty years since the Executive Committee for Comprehensive Planning of Buraku Liberation in the Asaka Area was established by consensus of its residents to re-establish the area as a "town of liberation, education and people's autonomy."

We, the residents of the Asaka area, will continue to cooperate with the people in neighboring areas in eliminating social discrimination from Asaka, and establish a living environment where everyone can lead the life of his or her own choice, where everyone is treated with dignity, where everyone understands and helps each other, and where everyone takes pride in his or her town, in accordance with the "four ideals for town renovation," thereby solving the remaining problems.



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