



Poverty, disease, and urban governance in late nineteenth-century Osaka

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ABSTRACT

On August 3, 1886, at the height of the deadliest cholera epidemic in Japanese history, Osaka Police Chief Inspector Ōura Kanetake issued an urgent memo to the heads of Osaka's four city wards and the commissioner of neighboring Nishinari County. Citing the immediate threat to public health and security posed by the city's rapidly expanding "slums" (*hinminkutsu*), the memo outlined a plan for Osaka's first large-scale slum clearance. Characterizing the city's slums as "dens of poverty, crime and disease," the plan called for their demolition and the mass relocation of thousands of poor urban dwellers to a walled residential compound southwest of the city. Focusing on Ōura's proposal and the series of debates that followed its presentation, this article explores the manner in which disease influenced the relationship between urban poverty and local governance in Osaka during the late nineteenth century. It argues that frequent outbreaks of cholera during the 1870s and 1880s gave rise, in both the popular press and official circles, to a discourse identifying the city's slums as the root cause of urban epidemics. Bolstered by a growing body of scientific data suggesting intimate links between poverty and disease, that discourse supported efforts by the authorities in Osaka to permanently segregate the poor and raze the slums. This article traces those efforts from the summer of 1886, when Inspector Ōura's plan was announced, to April 1891, when Osaka's first slum clearance was executed.

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Introduction

On August 3, 1886, at the height of the deadliest cholera epidemic in Japanese history, Chief Inspector of the Osaka Prefectural Police Ōura Kanetake issued an urgent memo to the heads of Osaka's four city wards and the commissioner of neighboring Nishinari County (Yamamoto, 1982, 69–70).¹ Citing the immediate threat to public health and security posed by the city's rapidly expanding "slums" (*hinminkutsu*), the memo outlined a plan for Osaka's first large-scale "slum clearance."² Characterizing the city's slums as "criminal sanctuaries" and "breeding grounds of infectious disease," the plan called for their immediate demolition and the mass relocation of thousands of poor urban dwellers to a walled residential compound southwest of the city (Ōura Kanetake, 1886).

Ōura's proposal represents a significant shift in objectives and strategy on the part of the Osaka prefectural

authorities vis-à-vis the urban poor. While the ultimate aim of official policies towards the poor since the Meiji Restoration had been the controlled integration of poor workers into the local socio-economic order, Ōura's proposal sought just the opposite. In seeking to eradicate the root causes of epidemic outbreaks, he advocated the permanent segregation of thousands of slum dwellers outside the city. Ōura maintained that a massive slum clearance would help to significantly bolster public health and security, while improving the city's appearance.³

This shift was precipitated by two key factors. The first was the devastating wave of cholera epidemics that struck the city between 1877 and 1886 (Yamamoto, 1982). During that ten-year period, cholera outbreaks occurred nearly every year, resulting in the death of more than 30,000 local residents (Hayami & Machida, 2002, 178). In addition to the

³ Contemporary news coverage of Ōura's proposal indicates that by the mid-1880s, local officials in Osaka and members of the media were becoming concerned about the how the city would appear to foreign visitors. Although foreign residents of Japan were prohibited from living outside areas specifically designated for their residence (*kyoryūchi*), many believed that the era of "naichi zakkyo" (mixed residence) was on the immediate horizon. Once foreigners were permitted to live among the general populace and freely move around the city, officials worried that they would catch a glimpse of slum districts, such as Nagamachi, and negatively influence their view of the city, or more broadly, the Japanese state.

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¹ Although the total number of reported infections in 1886 (155,923) was slightly lower than in 1879, the death toll and national mortality rate were the highest in Japanese history (108,405). On August 5, 1886, the *Asahi* newspaper reported that the cholera epidemic of 1886 was one of "unprecedented intensity."

² Katō (2002) uses the term slum clearance to describe Ōura's plan.

tremendous human cost, cholera epidemics severely hampered local commercial activity and industrial production. For example, according to figures compiled by the Osaka Chamber of Commerce and Osaka Department of Agriculture and Commerce, cholera outbreaks were responsible for nearly two million yen in losses to the local economy between May and October 1886.⁴ As a consequence, eliminating such epidemics emerged during the 1880s as one of the Osaka prefectural government's primary concerns.

The second factor behind this shift toward the social exclusion of the urban poor was the appearance of a body of "scientific" data linking disease outbreaks with the city's poorest neighborhoods and the linked emergence of a discourse identifying Osaka's slums as the primary source of citywide epidemics.⁵ While urban slum districts had long been identified as a source of crime and social instability, the 1880s saw the rise of a discourse, in both the popular press and official circles, that negatively characterized the city's slums as breeding grounds of disease and slum dwellers as "carriers" (*baikaisha*) who spread infection as they wandered the city begging for handouts and gathering scraps of paper, fabric and metal.⁶ Employing similar images of the city's slums and their impoverished residents, Chief Inspector Ōura asserted the necessity of a comprehensive slum clearance in the summer of 1886.

Focusing on Ōura's proposal and the complex administrative process that unfolded following its official presentation in September 1886, this article examines the manner in which infectious disease influenced the relationship between poverty and urban governance in Osaka during the late nineteenth century. It argues that frequent outbreaks of cholera during the 1870s and 1880s gave rise to new forms of discrimination against the urban poor and prompted the establishment of an increasingly exclusionary regime of local poverty management. By segregating the city's poor and reconstructing the slum districts in which they lived, the prefectural authorities aimed to establish an orderly, hygienic and secure urban core in Osaka exclusively populated by "middle and upper class persons."⁷

Although Ōura's proposal was eventually rejected, it triggered a five-year debate about how to effectively address the perceived threat to public health and security posed by the city's slum districts. This debate culminated in the execution of a large-scale housing reform project in Osaka's largest slum, Nagamachi, in the spring of 1891. As a result of that project, hundreds of back-alley tenements were razed and thousands of slum dwellers were driven from their homes to villages in neighboring Nishinari and Higashinari Counties.⁸ While the authorities "succeeded"

in dismantling Osaka's largest slum, these efforts led to the dispersion of thousands of slum dwellers across the city's periphery, setting the stage for the emergence of a number of a twentieth-century Osaka's largest slums, including the massive Kamagasaki day laborer district (Katō, 2002, 99–101).

Poverty, disease and social exclusion

Nagamachi: a brief sketch

The primary target of Ōura's proposal was Osaka's infamous Nagamachi slum.⁹ Jutting out from the city's southern edge, the area had served as a gathering place for "unregistered persons" (*mushuku karaninbetsu*), vagrants, and other members of the urban underclass since the seventeenth century. This was largely the result of a deliberate policy pursued by the Osaka city magistrate (*machi bugyō*) vis-à-vis unregistered persons beginning in the 1660s.¹⁰ In addition to permitting the establishment of dozens of specially licensed flophouses (*kichin'yado*) in the Nagamachi area, the city magistrate granted the flophouse proprietors there the exclusive right to provide lodging to unregistered persons and arrange employment for them in three local industries: sake brewing, oil pressing and rice processing.¹¹

As historian Uchida Kusuo has noted, the decision to grant those rights was strategic. According to Uchida, the city magistrate's office worked to concentrate unregistered migrants, who were considered a key threat to urban stability but also represented a vital source of labor for three of Osaka's most important early modern industries, in a single area by permitting them to seek temporary lodging in Nagamachi. At the same time, city authorities called upon local flophouse proprietors to engage in the day-to-day regulation of unregistered persons (Uchida, 1992, 847–851).¹² In other words, the authorities worked to guarantee a steady supply of labor to three vital local industries, while ensuring that unregistered persons remained constantly supervised.

After the Meiji Restoration, Nagamachi expanded rapidly, absorbing destitute migrants and persons displaced following the dismantling of Osaka's four designated *hinin* enclaves, or *kaito*, in 1871. According to urban historian

⁹ Nagamachi, or Nagomachi, was the popular name for the five long, narrow quarters running along both sides of Nipponbashi Boulevard just south of the Dōtonbori Canal during the Meiji period. The neighborhood is currently the site of Osaka's Den-Den Town electronics district. In 1893, journalist Sakurada Bungo described the neighborhood as "the city's largest slum" (*shichū saidai no kikankutsu*) (Sakurada, 1893 [1970]).

¹⁰ The establishment and operation of flophouses inside the Nagamachi area was initially permitted in the 1660s and 1670s during Ishimaru Sadatsugu's term as city magistrate. During that time, 106 establishments were authorized to operate in four licensed quarters in the southern part of the city.

¹¹ According to a late eighteenth-century record of *kichinyado* occupants, in 1791 there were 1,374 lodgers staying in flophouses and cheap inns located in Nagamachi. 1,034 of the lodgers worked as unskilled and semi-skilled day laborers in the city's oil mills, sake breweries and rice mills. The record also indicates that flophouse occupants included more than 220 beggars (*kotsujiki*) and 110 riverside prostitutes (*hamadachime*). *Kichinyado hatagoya namae oyobi shukuhakunin kakiage*. 1791. Osaka University of Commerce Archive.

¹² While that right was threatened at various points in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by the appearance of competitors providing similar services, Nagamachi's flophouse proprietors maintained control over it by incorporating competitors as subordinates in a hierarchy over which they presided.

⁴ Osaka shōhō kaigisho, 1886 (1933). "Korerabyō ni yoru dageki." *Meiji taishō ōsaka-shi shi, shiryō-hen*. Osaka: Seibundō shuppankai, 613–620. *Asahi shinbun*, 1886. "Rabyō yori kitaseru shoshō no songai." *Asahi shinbun*. 12 September 1886. *Asahi shinbun*, 1886. "Songai chōsa." *Asahi shinbun*. 10 November 1886.

⁵ Osaka-fu keisatsubu eiseika, ed. 1919. *Osaka-fu densenbyo ryuko shiyo*. Osaka: Osaka-fu, 10. According to official figures compiled by the Osaka prefectural government during the 1885 epidemic, nearly half of the 1,071 cases of cholera reported in Osaka occurred in the city's slum district, Nagamachi.

⁶ *Asahi shinbun*, 1886. "Nagomachi no ura nagaya iten no kekkō." *Asahi shinbun* 17 August 1886.

⁷ *Osaka nippō*, 1886. "Shiku ichigun rengō chōsonkai." *Osaka nippō*. 19 August 1886.

⁸ *Osaka mainichi shinbun*, 1891. "Nagomachi no kaoku kaizō." 24 April 1891.

Harada Keiichi, following the dissolution of the *kaito*, the prefectural authorities required that beggars and vagrants found in the city be relocated to Nagamachi and added to the local population register there (Harada 1997, 145). While the authorities' primary intent was to contain the destitute in a single regulated area, pursuit of such a policy contributed directly to the establishment of a large-scale slum district in Nagamachi.

The 1886 slum clearance plan

I turn now to the content and logic of Inspector Ōura's 1886 slum clearance proposal. In its original form, Ōura's proposal targeted 1867 households from 28 neighborhoods in Osaka proper and three villages in neighboring Nishinari County (Ōura, 1886). Notably, nearly 60% of the households targeted under this original proposal were located in Nagamachi (Katō, 2002, 61).

Ōura's plan was announced at the peak of the devastating 1886 cholera epidemic, at a time when the city's slums were being widely vilified in both the mass media and official pronouncements as “dens of infectious disease and crime” (*densenbyō to hanzai no sōkutsu*).¹³ Relying on similar claims about the squalid and unsanitary condition of the city's slums, the plan described the Nagamachi neighborhood as a place “almost entirely devoid of empty space [where] cramped hovels (*waioku*) [stand] one on top of the other like the teeth of a comb (*shippi*).”

Moreover, the plan characterized Nagamachi's residents as “unregistered vagrants” (*museki musan*) and “persons of unparalleled hardship” (*muhi no naru nanmin*). It noted that many lived in squalid tenement-style flophouses known as *kichin'yado* and subsisted by begging for food in the city and collecting paper scraps (*shihen o hiroi*). While Ōura conceded that Nagamachi's appearance had improved somewhat since the Meiji Restoration, he pointed out that the “customs” (*kanshū*) of local residents had changed little and were in need of immediate reform. He claimed, for example, that residents spent their days gambling and squandered whatever money they had on food and drink. During times of financial hardship, he noted that residents would wander the streets naked, accompanied by their wives who were clad in “rags like seaweed” (*kaisō no gotoki boro*). According to Ōura, conditions were so dire that it was “rare for a person not to emerge from Nagamachi's gates as a criminal.”

As in much of the contemporary discourse about the urban poor, Ōura stressed the cultural gap between the residents of Nagamachi and the “good people” (*ryōmin*) of the city. He contrasted the “immorality” and “depravity” of Nagamachi's slum dwellers with the more “appropriate” moral sensibility of residents of more affluent city neighborhoods. In addition, his proposal maintained that unlike people from other parts of the city, Nagamachi's residents viewed the “harboring [of criminals]” (*intotsu*) as an act of “chivalry” (*ninkyō*). According to Ōura, permissive local attitudes encouraged criminals from across the country to seek seclusion in Nagamachi. This, he asserted, led the

“good people” of Osaka to fear the area “like the serpent and the scorpion” (*dakatsu no gotoku*) and to “detest [it] like a plague.”

In order to eradicate the twin evils of crime and infectious disease, Ōura claimed that a comprehensive slum clearance was necessary. Previous attempts to rid the city of crime and disease had been ineffective because the authorities had failed to eradicate the root causes of both problems, which lie in the built environment of the city's slums and the attitudes and behavior of slum dwellers.¹⁴ Urging immediate action, Ōura noted that despite expenditures of more than 100,000 yen on epidemic prevention during the first seven months of 1886, more than 10,000 residents of Osaka prefecture had contracted cholera and 8515 had died. With the cholera epidemic showing no signs of abating, Ōura maintained that it was no longer sufficient to “carry out a few cleansing projects and close some tainted wells.” He asserted that the government needed to take more drastic measures and root out the disease at its source.

Ōura advised that the authorities should first purchase a “tract of farmland outside the city” and construct a housing compound there for persons who would be evicted from their homes as a result of the slum clearance. Then, a large-scale tenement demolition project should be carried out on the basis of the Tenement Construction Law, a recently enacted regulation that established strict structural standards for tenements in the prefecture.¹⁵ The funding for this project, Ōura advised, should come from the local budgets of the wards and counties directly impacted by the plan. Stressing the immediate need for a slum clearance, he noted that while the cost would be burdensome, “the benefit of preventing future epidemics in Osaka city and Nishinari County would be even greater.” In the proposal's final passage, Ōura called for the establishment of a joint town and village council (*rengōchōsonkai*) comprised of representatives from the city's four wards and Nishinari County to debate and vote on a slum clearance resolution.

The Four Ward-One County Joint Town and Village Council and the September slum clearance resolution

Acting on Ōura's memo, the heads of Osaka's four wards and the commissioner of Nishinari County held a meeting to discuss the proposal on August 4, 1886.¹⁶

The following day, they sent a request to Governor Tateno asking for permission to establish a deliberative assembly to vote on a slum clearance resolution.¹⁷ On August 9, 1886, the governor issued an official response formally granting their request. With the governor's approval, ward and county officials then moved to establish a deliberative

¹⁴ Drawing on statistics from the cholera epidemics of 1882 (Meiji 15) and 1885 (Meiji 18) as well as data on other infectious disease outbreaks from the mid-1880s, Ōura also advanced the claim that rates of infection for cholera and other infectious diseases, such as typhus, were much higher in Nagamachi and other similarly impoverished places. Considering the extreme squalor found in the city's slums, this, Ōura asserted, was not coincidental (*guzen ni arazaru nari*).

¹⁵ *Asahi shinbun*, 1886. “Nagaya kenchiku kisoku.” *Asahi shinbun*, 1 April 1886.

¹⁶ Minami kuyakusho, 1886. “Shiku ichigun rengō chōsonkai soshiki ni tsuki ukagaigaki kaisō oyobi chōsonmei kaisei negai.” 4 August 1886. *Minami kuyakusho gyōsei monjo* (Sho-No. 5373).

¹⁷ Minami kuyakusho, 1886. “Rengō chōsonkai soshiki no gi ni tsuki ukagai.” 5 August 1886. *Minami kuyakusho gyōsei monjo* (Sho-No. 411).

¹³ *Asahi shinbun*, 1886. “Kyū nagomachi jinka no iten.” *Asahi shinbun*, 4 September 1886. *Osaka nippō*, 1886. “Nagamachi-mono no meiwaku.” *Osaka nippō*, 3 July 1886. *Asahi shinbun*, 1886. “Nagamachi heishū issen no kyōgi.” *Asahi shinbun*, 8 August 1886.

body, which became known as the Four Ward-One County Joint Town and Village Council (Harada 1997, 203–205).¹⁸

On August 18, elections were held to select council representatives. In total, 25 representatives, five from each ward and Nishinari County, were elected to the council.¹⁹ As representatives, they were then charged with the task of debating and voting on a slum clearance resolution that would be drafted jointly by the secretaries of Osaka's four city wards and Nishinari County under the direction of Inspector Ōura. The resolution would then be put to a vote at a meeting of the joint town and village council in early September.

The resolution was completed on August 23, 1886.²⁰ In terms of content, it was very similar to Ōura's original proposal. Unlike Ōura, however, the resolution's authors chose to frame the slum clearance issue only as matter of public health rather than one of both public health and security. In addition, they increased the total number of households that would be targeted for clearance from 1867 to 2700 (Harada 1997, 210–211). Approximately 85% of those households were located in Nagamachi. According to newspaper reports at the time, once a slum clearance had been carried out, the prefectural authorities intended to permanently exclude former residents and redevelop Nagamachi as a "middle class residential district."²¹

The site selected for the relocation of the city's poor was a 24.5-acre tract of land in the southwestern corner of Namba Village in Nishinari County. The site was chosen not only because of its location outside the city, but also because it was considered clean and hygienic.²² The resolution called for the construction of a walled residential compound on this site. Encircled by a ditch, the compound was to include 2700 communal housing units, a workhouse, a medical clinic, three hardware stores, two barbershops, four public baths, two pawnshops, two produce shops, four restaurants, two futon rental shops, five rice shops and a community office.²³ The total estimated cost for the project, including housing, bridges, wells, toilets, drainage ditches, garbage dumps, street lamps, and roads, was 48,247 yen 87 sen. The project was, as Ōura advised, to be jointly funded by Nishinari County and Osaka's four wards.²⁴

¹⁸ The council's official title was actually "The 605 Town and Village Joint Town and Village Council including Nishi Ward Tosabori-dōri 1-chō-me" (Nishi-ku tosabori-dōri 1-chō-me gai roppyaku ka chōson rengō chōsonkai." It was referred to, however, in newspapers by the much shorter title, Four Ward-One County Joint Town and Village Council.

¹⁹ *Osaka nippō*, 1886 "Shiku ichigun rengō chōsonkai." *Osaka nippō*. 19 August 1886. Izumi Yujirō, Yukawa Fukutarō Higuchi Jube'e, Nagao Tozō, and Oi Tōsai were selected to represent Higashi Ward. Ogiya Gohe'e, Sano Yohe'e, Omiwa Chōbe'e, Ishigami Gisuke, and Aoki Matsuemon were chosen from Nishi Ward. Yasui Kenji, Kida Magojirō, Mita Masaemon, Takeda Genbe'e, and Matsumura Kyube'e were chosen from Minami Ward. Oshima Ryosuke, Kitada Otokichia, Saito Kashichi, Fujiura Shojirō, and Yamaguchi Shoshichi were chosen from Kita Ward. Nakano Jihe'e, Oishi Naotaka, Hiramatsu Denbe'e, Kakimoto Soemon, and Ikushima Genbe'e were chosen from Nishinari County.

²⁰ *Asahi shinbun*, 1886. "Nagamachi no jinka hikiutsushi." 21 August 1886. *Asahi shinbun*.

²¹ *Osaka nippō*, 1886. "Shiku ichigun rengō chōsonkai." *Osaka nippō*. 19 August 1886.

²² *Asahi shinbun*, 1886. "Shiku ichigun rengōkai gian." *Asahi shinbun*. 5 September 1886.

²³ *Osaka nippō*, 1886. "Shiku ichigun rengō chōsonkai." *Osaka nippō*. 3 September 1886.

²⁴ *Osaka nippō*, 1886. 44.7% of the funding was to come from household taxes, 35.1% from business taxes and 20.2% from land taxes.

The compound proposed by the authorities was intended as more than just a quarantine facility. By forcing the poor to live outside the city in a segregated, but hygienic and orderly housing compound, the prefectural authorities aimed not only to protect the general population from the threat of infectious disease, but also to encourage the reform of the poor themselves. Once inside the facility, former slum dwellers could be kept under the constant supervision of government-appointed officials, monitored by an on-site physician, provided with vocational training and put to work in a range of trades, including match and textile production.

Contemporary newspapers applauded efforts to execute a citywide slum clearance. The August 17, 1886 edition of the *Asahi shinbun*, for example, commented that efforts to rid the city of poverty and disease "should be lauded by the people of the prefecture" (Harada, 1997, 217). Similarly, the August 18, 1886 *Osaka nippō* reported that the authorities were "at last" taking steps to demolish the slums and "rid the city of filth."²⁵

Despite such mass media support for the proposal, even as the council convened at the beginning of September, differences of opinion were already apparent among local leaders in Osaka. A number of officials, for instance, felt that the proposed relocation site, which was located 2.2 kilometers from Osaka proper, was far "too close the city."²⁶ They suggested that the authorities should instead relocate the poor to the Yahataya Shinden, which was located 5.5 kilometers west of the Nagamachi area.

By mid-August, petty merchants from Nagamachi had also begun to voice their opposition to the relocation plan. On August 18, the *Osaka nippō* reported that local merchants in Nagamachi had formed an opposition organization and were working to halt the slum clearance.²⁷ These merchants operated shops along Nagamachi's central thoroughfare, Nipponbashi Boulevard, and earned a living by selling food, clothes and other daily necessities to the residents of the neighborhood's back-alley tenements. If a slum clearance was in fact carried out, they stood to lose their primary source of income.

Strong opposition also came from landowners in Nishinari County, the community to which the authorities planned to relocate the city's poor. They opposed the slum clearance largely for financial reasons: under the September proposal, Nishinari County residents were expected to contribute 12,000 yen—more than any city ward—to help fund the project. In late August 1886, the *Asahi shinbun* reported that landlords in Nishinari County felt that this was unfair because the vast majority of the households being targeted for relocation were located inside the city limits.²⁸ Therefore, they felt that city residents should shoulder a

²⁵ *Osaka nippō*, 1886. "Shiku ichigun rengō chōsonkai." *Osaka nippō*. 18 August 1886.

²⁶ *Asano shinbun*, 1886. "Shiku ichigun rengōkai." 21 October 1886. Additional documents from the same time period indicate that the council included members, such as Toyoda Bunsaburō, who was served as a member of the Osaka Prefectural Assembly and was elected to the lower house of the Japanese National Diet in 1890. Toyoda was an influential local leader who was also involved in the establishment of the Osaka Electric Company, and was a co-founder of the non-governmental Osaka Educational Association and Osaka Hygiene Association.

²⁷ *Osaka nippō*, 1886. "Shiku ichigun rengō chōsonkai." *Osaka nippō*. 18 August 1886.

²⁸ *Osaka nippō*, 1886. "Rengōkai bunri no kyōgi." *Osaka nippō*. 28 August 1886.

larger percentage of the total cost. The article also noted that many were unhappy about the fact that thousands of impoverished and potentially dangerous urban dwellers were going to be relocated to Nishinari County.

Contemporary newspaper coverage indicates that local landlords in Nagamachi also fiercely opposed the proposal. As historian Saga Ashita has noted, these landlords provided the poor with housing, sold them daily necessities, lent them money, acted as their pawnbrokers and employed them to produce umbrellas, matches and other goods (Saga, 2007, 153–158). Such landlords stood to lose not only their primary source of income, but also a vital source of unskilled labor power if a slum clearance was indeed carried out.

Therefore, when the Four Ward, One County Joint Town and Village Council finally convened on September 3, 1886, the slum clearance proposal was already facing significant opposition. Following a day of debate about the plan's content and objectives, an initial vote was held on September 4. Only four members of the council supported the proposal and it was easily defeated.²⁹ Immediately after the vote, Governor Tateno ordered that the proposal be resubmitted for a second round of deliberations. Facing even heavier opposition the second time around, the proposal once again failed to win approval.

In total, 21 members of the council opposed the slum clearance proposal. The majority did so because they felt it was insufficient in scope and would place an excessive financial burden on the already cash-strapped people of the prefecture. Ogiya Gohē of Nishi Ward, for example, characterized the proposal as “a stopgap [measure] addressing only a small part of the problem.”³⁰ He urged the authorities to “wait for another day” until the necessary economic resources could be harnessed to carry out a more comprehensive program of urban reform, which also included projects targeting the city's water system and sanitary infrastructure.

Striking a similar tone, Nishinari County representative Nakano Jihē asserted that the problem of infectious disease was not unique to poor city areas and, in fact, affected a much larger segment of the urban population.³⁰ Any plan to eradicate cholera and other water-borne infectious diseases, he maintained, had to be based on more than just the reform of a few impoverished urban districts. However, as financial constraints made such a project impossible, he called for the proposal's immediate withdrawal.

In addition, Izumi Yujirō of Higashi Ward also made a strong statement against the plan.³⁰ Speaking on behalf of the city landlords whose interests were threatened by the proposal, he noted that the resolution failed to provide any compensation to the owners of dwellings that were targeted for demolition. This, he claimed, was unfair to the owners of tenements in neighborhoods, such as Nagamachi, who stood to lose future income as a result of the slum clearance project.

Facing defeat, the prefectural authorities changed strategies.³¹ Abandoning Ōura's plan, they worked instead to dismantle the city's slums through the enforcement of a series of stringent new regulations targeting the city's flophouses and back-alley tenements. These regulations, in turn, provided the basis for Osaka's first large-scale slum clearance in the spring of 1891.

Conclusion: Nagamachi's dismantling

While official policies in Osaka towards the urban poor during the 1860s and 1870s were designed to achieve the controlled integration of vagrants and impoverished migrants into the local socio-economic order, a proposal designed to achieve just the opposite was presented in the 1880s. In an effort to counter the mass destruction caused by outbreaks of cholera, the chief inspector of the prefectural police presented a plan for Osaka's first systematic slum clearance. Prepared under the direction of reform-minded governor Tateno Gōzō, the plan was, at least initially, also intended as a public security measure. Therefore, by executing a slum clearance, the prefectural authorities in Osaka hoped to eradicate what they perceived to be the root cause of epidemics, while at the same time helping to foster a crime-free city.

The plan's primary target was Nagamachi. Long a gathering place for Osaka's poor, the area had come to be vilified in both official and popular discourse in the 1880s as a den of poverty, disease and crime. At the same time, however, area residents represented a vital source of labor for a number of Osaka's key industries, and transactions with these residents constituted an important source of income for an array of landlords, inn proprietors, pawnbrokers and merchants. The financial stability of these businessmen depended on their economic dealings with the poor. In the end, it was the opposition of these businessmen along with the residents of Nishinari County, who opposed to the mass relocation of the poor to their region as well as what they felt was the plan's excessive cost, that defeated the proposal.

In spite of this defeat, the authorities were able to begin the process of dismantling the city's slums through the enactment of two important regulations, the Inn Control Law (*yadoya torishimari kisoku*) and the Tenement Construction Law (*nagaya kenchiku kisoku*).³² Enacted in 1886, these measures targeted flophouses and back-alley tenements, both of which were dwelling types that were prevalent in Nagamachi and other slum districts.

Enacted in December 1886, the Inn Control Law banned the operation of flophouses inside the city's four wards and established five licensed quarters outside of the city in which they could legally operate (Article 48). Considering that the vast majority of Osaka's flophouses were located in Nagamachi and catered primarily to the city's poor, the

²⁹ The bill was supported by prefectural assemblyman and Minami Ward alderman Yasui Kenji, prefectural assemblymen and Higashi Ward alderman Nagao Fujimi, Higashi ward pharmacist Oi Bokushin and one additional individual whose identity is unknown.

³⁰ *Asahi shinbun*, 1886. “Shiku ichigun rengō chōsonkai giji bōchō ryakki.” *Asahi shinbun*. 7 September 1886.

³¹ Despite the bill's overwhelming defeat in September, the prefectural government did not abandon its plans to execute a large-scale slum clearance. Instead, efforts began almost immediately redraft the proposal. A revised version was completed in September and submitted to the newly expanded Four Ward, Two County Joint Town and Village Council, which now also included Higashinari County. The council convened on October 16, 1886. Following a brief debate, the council members held a vote and the revised proposal was resoundingly defeated.

³² *Asahi shinbun*, 1886. “Osaka-fu rokuji otsu dai-nanajūgo-gō.” *Asahi shinbun*. 14 May 1886. Osaka-fu. 1886. “Yadoya torishimari kisoku (Osaka-fu furei dai-rokujūnana).” Osaka-fu kōhō, 9 December 1886.

authorities clearly intended to drive the poor out of the city by requiring the establishments where they lived to operate outside city limits (Harada, 1997, 227–228).

Similarly, the Tenement Construction Law enacted in July 1886 targeted “unsanitary and poorly built tenements” in the city.³³ It established strict new structural regulations for tenements and mandated that dwellings that failed to meet the newly established regulations must be demolished or reconstructed at the expense of the landlord. Landlords would then be required to raise rental rates in order to defray the costs they incurred in reconstructing the buildings. In fact, very few of the dwellings in Nagamachi and other slum districts met the newly established standards and once the law took effect, a large portion of the dwellings in such areas would have to be razed and completely reconstructed. In the case of Nagamachi, this is precisely what happened.

Between March and May in 1891, authorities executed a massive tenement reconstruction project in Nagamachi. In total, nearly 4000 dwellings were targeted for demolition. By the end of April 1891, newspapers reported that 380 dwellings had been demolished and totally reconstructed, and that construction of more than 2522 additional dwellings was already underway.³⁴

As a result of the project, thousands of urban dwellers were forced out to villages on the periphery of the city, including Namba Village (1905 households), Tennōji and

Kitano Villages (1226 households), and Kizu and Imamiya Villages (874 households).³⁵ Although the authorities had finally achieved what amounted to Osaka’s first slum clearance, they had also unintentionally set the stage for the development of a number of Osaka’s largest twentieth century slum districts, including the well-known Kamagasaki slum, which emerged during the first decade of the twentieth century just south of Nagamachi in Imamiya Village (Katō, 2002, 95–99).

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³³ Asahi shinbun, 1886. “Osaka-fu rokuji otsu dai-nanajūgo-gō.” *Asahi shinbun*. 14 May 1886.

³⁴ Osaka mainichi shinbun, 1891. “Fuketsu nagaya kaichiku.” *Osaka mainichi shinbun* 24 April 1891.

³⁵ Osaka mainichi shinbun, 1891. “Nagamachi kaoku kaizō.” *Osaka mainichi shinbun* 24 April 1891.