

HOUSING ABANDONMENT IN JAPAN: PATTERNS, DYNAMICS AND POLICIES

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ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades, housing abandonment has been spreading nationwide in Japan. However, a solid understanding of the underlying causes of this phenomenon is still lacking. This paper provides an overview of the national scope of this situation in Japan, with an emphasis on regional difference of abandonment.

With a particular focus on the detached housing segment, city-level data from national censuses conducted in 2010 and housing surveys conducted in 2008 have been used. A significant spatial correlation of level of abandonment at the city-level has been found. It suggests that the determinants of housing abandonment are not confined to within a city. A geographically weighted regression analysis is conducted to explore the indicators of abandonment among Japanese cities. The proportion of single-aged household has been identified as the main indicator of level of abandonment. An average correlation coefficient of 0.7 suggests that nationwide, the proportion of single-aged household can indicate 70% of abandonment rate in detached housing segment. Furthermore, the variations of correlation coefficients on the local level are obvious. In contrast to the peripheral areas that have an average positive correlation coefficient of more than 0.7, the Tokyo and Osaka metropolitan areas have a relatively low average correlation coefficient of less than 0.3. It suggests that in Tokyo and Osaka metropolitan areas, only demographic factors are far from enough in indicating the level of abandonment in detached housing segment, probably non-demographic such as building characteristics, land price is more significant. Finally,

the analysis indicates suburban areas of Tokyo metropolitan area is a special region in terms of the negative correlation between household ageing and abandonment rate. Probably household ageing accelerate household regeneration there - younger household move to this areas and occupy older household's housing. Younger households choose to live in the suburban areas of Tokyo metropolitan areas for its relatively cheap housing price than the center area and convenience for commute to central area.

The research has two policy implications. Firstly, since housing abandonment is found to be a phenomenon beyond the city, local governments' responses should adopt a regional perspective to dealing with it. Current local governments' measures dealing with housing abandonment focusing within the city is problematic. Secondly, the dynamics of abandoned housing in the peripheral areas, the suburb area of metropolitan area and the center of metropolitan areas are quite different. Hence, national housing policy responses should consider these regional differences in making policies to address housing abandonment. Current policies ignoring the regional differences of dynamics of abandonment are problematic.

Key words: Housing abandonment, abandoned housing, vacant housing, Japan