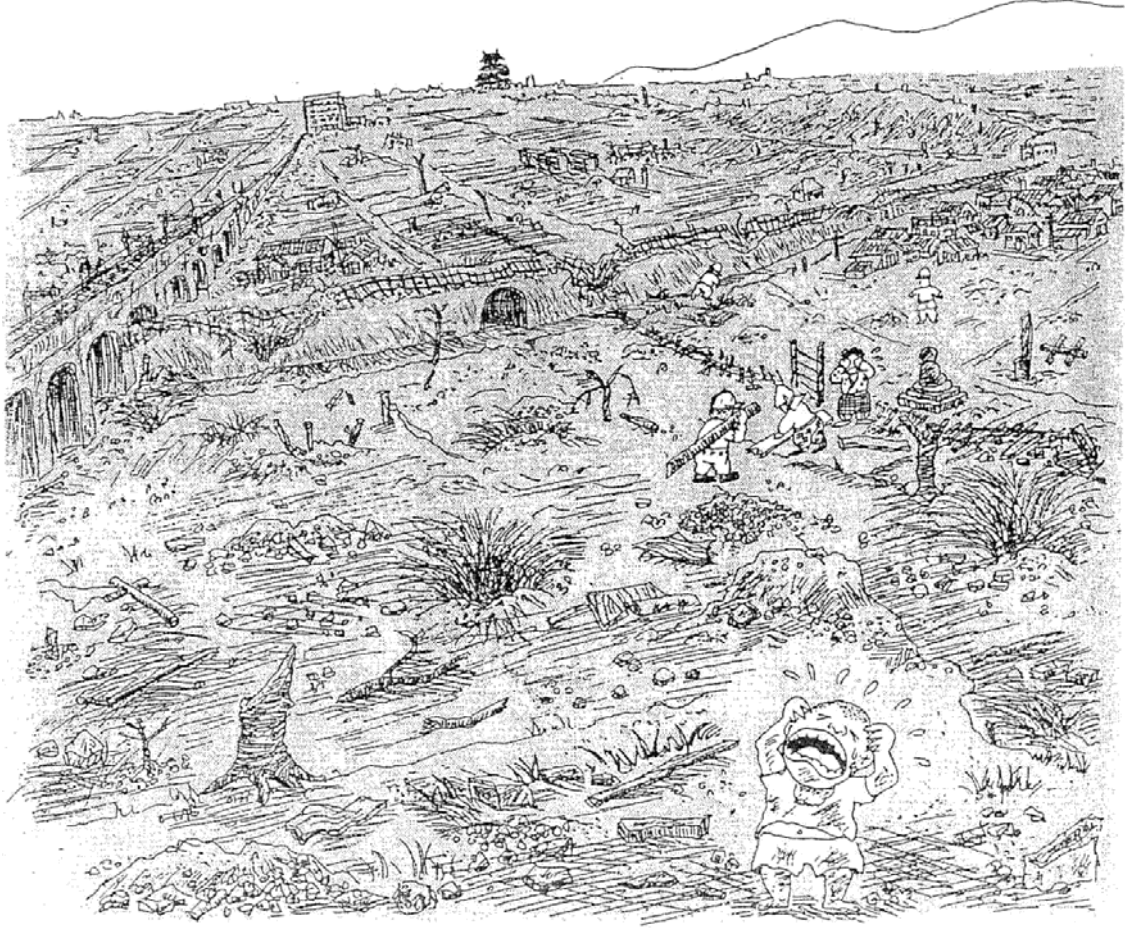


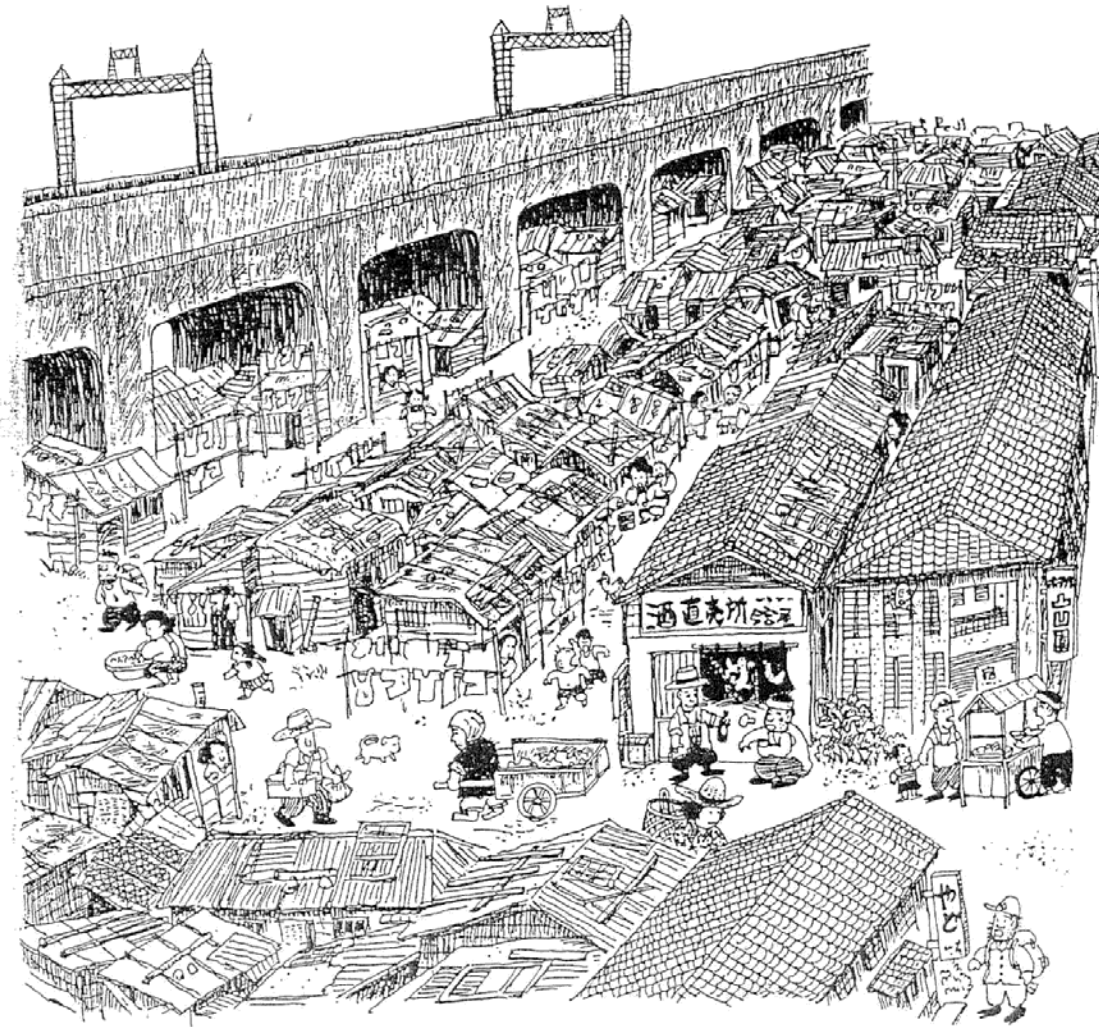
The History of Kamagasaki :After 1945

ARIMURA Sen



1945: Kamagasaki Just prior to the Japanese Surrender

This year saw Osaka suddenly in ruins as US B29 bombers carried out air attacks in March and August. They say you could see Osaka Castle and Takashimaya Department Store (in Namba), both of which escaped the bombings. Around Kamagasaki, everything was burnt down except for some structures including the Club Cosmetics building on the north side of Imamiya Station and the area around Imaiike and Tobita. A statue of Jizo, the guardian deity of the common people (in the illustration on the right side in the middle), complete with scars from an incendiary bomb, still remains to this day. This is an illustration of what it might have looked like.



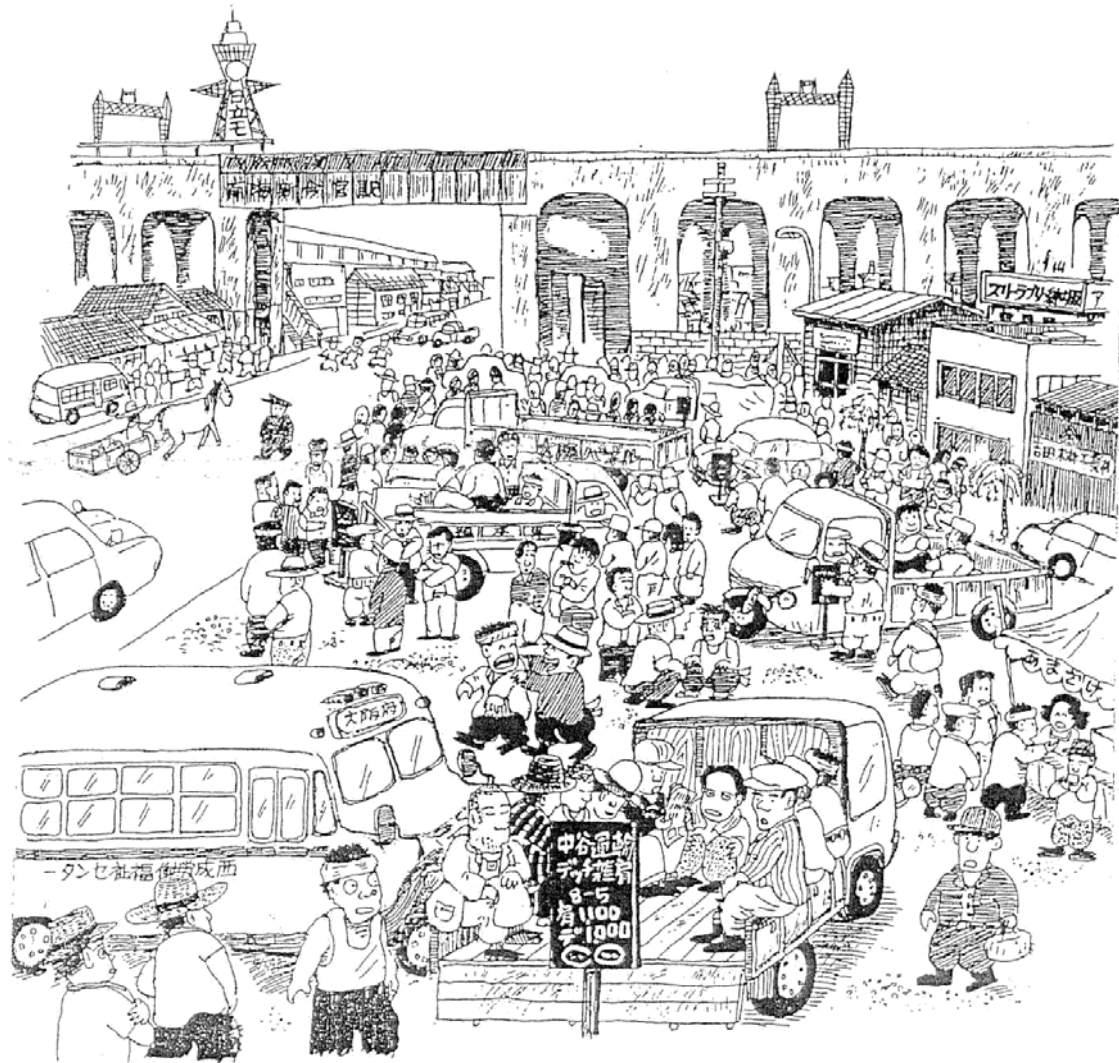
The 1950s: Kamagasaki's Shanty Town Era

In the 1950s, Kamagasaki was a typical slum, inhabited by many victims of World War II. It might have looked something like the illustration below. The main street was lined with doya (cheap lodgings), behind which people built poor, wooden shanties that often extended onto the street. It was like a maze. The rows of shanties below the Nankai train line overpass were dubbed the "Nankai Hotel." People frantically did anything they could to make a living: they delivered packages, bought scraps of clothing, picked up garbage, shined shoes, sold cigarettes, or ran open-air baths. The cheap drinking establishments were likely frequented by local laborers as well as workers from the docks.



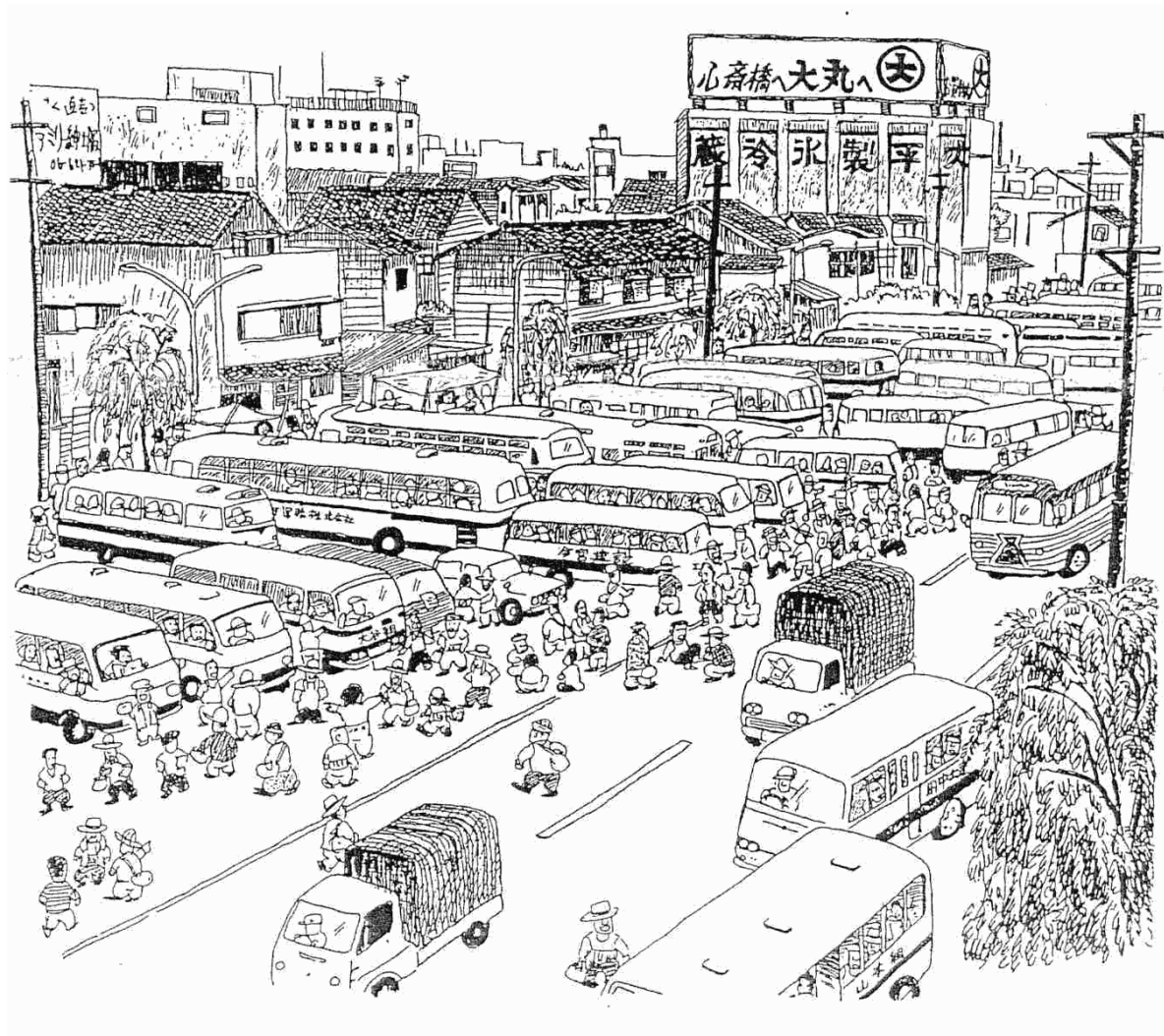
Ginza Street in Kamagasaki in the Early 1960s

Following World War II, the GHQ ordered the streets to be widened (to eliminate the maze-like structure of small streets) and the wooden lodging houses (basic lodgings) to be rebuilt. In 1961, there were 175 basic lodgings (with a capacity of 15,000 guests) (figures base on documents from the Osaka Prefectural Police). The population at this time had swollen to 35,000, 60 to 70% of whom were day laborers. About 40% of the population were people living alone, and the male-female ratio was about equal.



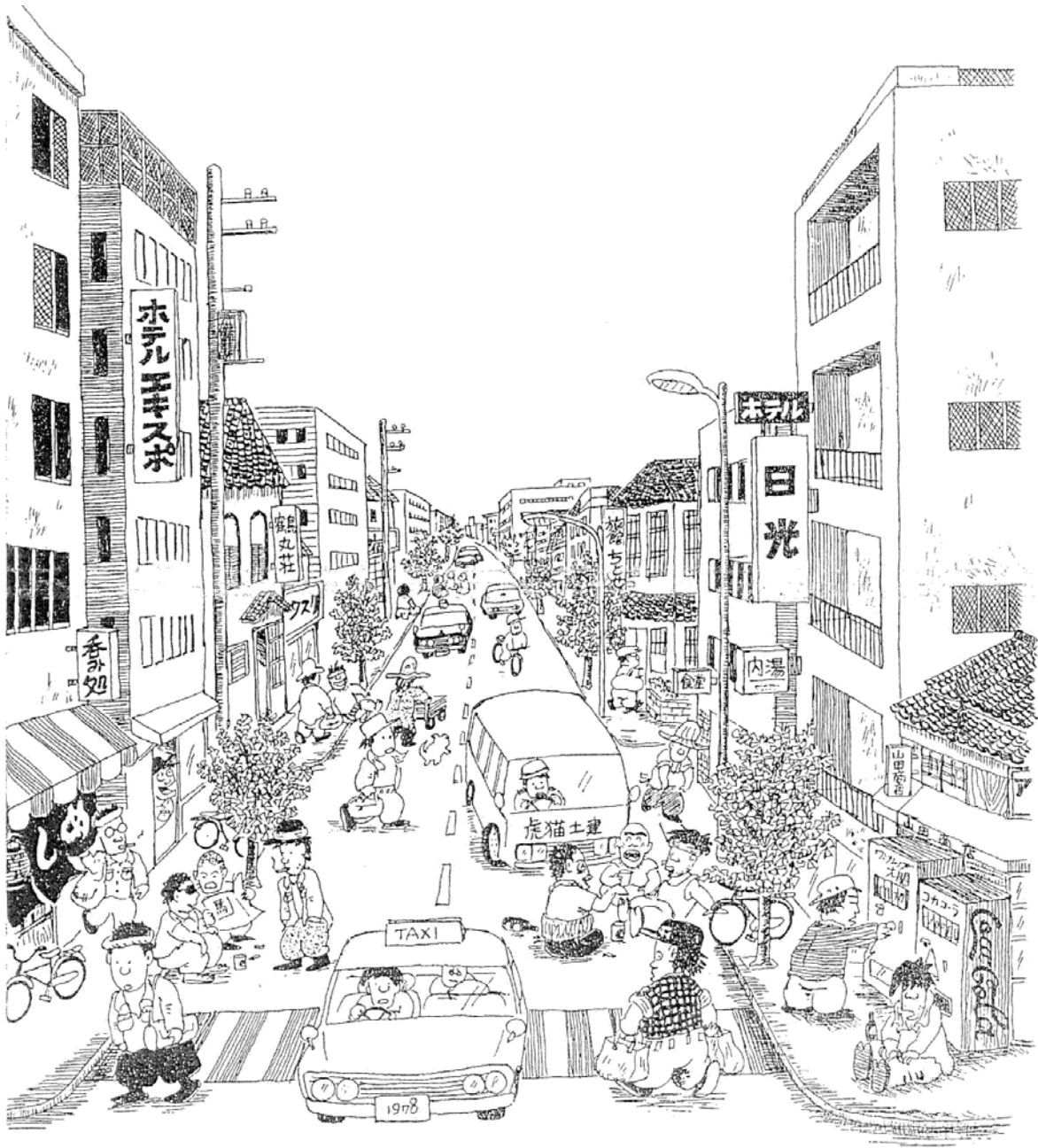
The Day Laborer Recruitment Site in the Early 1960s

During this period, the day laborer recruitment site was on the south side of the Nankai train line. The Osaka Prefecture Labor Division, Nishinari Office (predecessor to the current Nishinari Labor and Welfare Center) can be seen in the bottom left corner of the illustration (the white bus). This was a period of rapid economic growth for Japan, and many farm workers and workers from mines that closed down flocked to Kamagasaki. The population of single male day laborers suddenly swelled past 10,000, a great many of them in their 20s and 30s. In addition to construction work, there were also many jobs in transportation (related to dock work) and manufacturing. The Tsutenkaku tower (in the top left of the illustration), was dismantled in 1943 and rebuilt in 1956.



The Day Laborer Recruitment Site in the Late 1960s

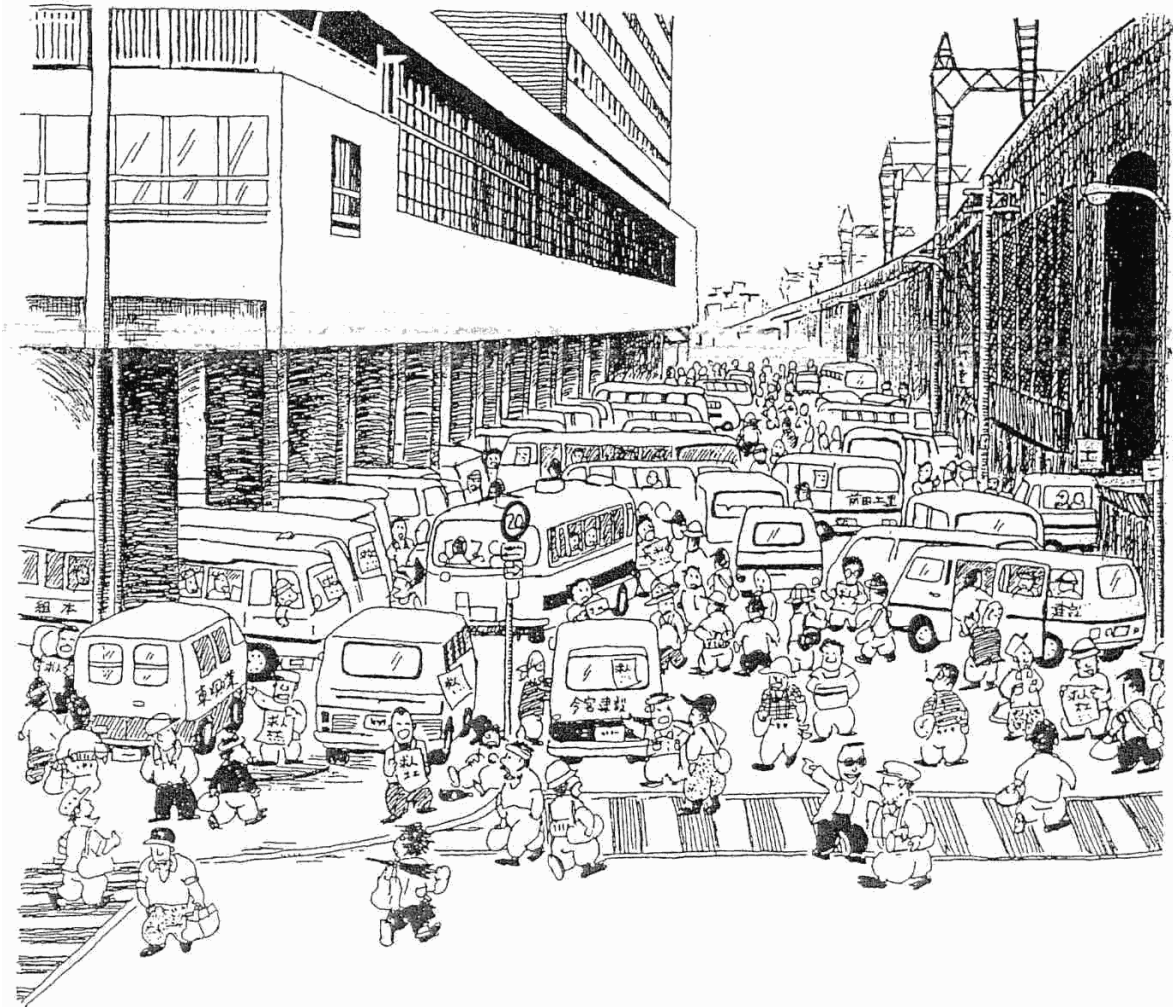
With the construction boom leading up to the 1970 World's Fair in Osaka, day laborers came to Kamagasaki from all over the country, and the Airin recruitment site was a constant buzz of activity.



Ginza Street in Kamagasaki in the 1970s

The flophouses were built as four and five storey buildings (among these were buildings that doubled their number of floors by adding several storeys and that used veneer panels to split up larger rooms into “private rooms”). Kamagasaki thus became almost completely a town of single dwellers.

The flophouses charged between 600 and 700 yen a night. The ginkgo trees along Ginza Street were still small at this time.



Kamagasaki in the 1970s, the Day Laborer Recruitment Site, and a Healthy Economy

The current Airin Center opened in October 1970. The day laborer recruitment site, along with the Nishinari labor and Welfare Center and The Osaka Socio-medical Center Hospital, moved into the first floor of the building. The system of the abure techou (unemployment card) also began at this time. In the mid 1970s, Japan was severely hit by the first oil crisis, and unlike the bustling economy hinted at by this illustration, many people experienced extended periods of unemployment.



Ginza Street in Kamagasaki During Japan's Bubble Economy From the Late 1980s to 1990

Kamagasaki during this time saw employment hit a historic high, as companies in industries like steel and shipbuilding rushed anew to the area in search of labor. Almost all of the approximately 200 flophouses were rebuilt in the style of high-rise business hotels. For the first time in 17 years, riots suddenly erupted (from October 2 to 7, 1990) to protest the role in the area of the gangsters and the police who colluded with them. At the same time, the riots were a statement of the objection by the common people (the workers) to the way the entire country seemed to be living it up in the bubble economy.

(Courtesy of "The Hotel New Kamagasaki," by Sen Arimura; originally appeared in Young Champion Comics, Akita Shoten Publishing.)



The Bursting of the Bubble Economy: Kamagasaki Enters a Severe Recession

Despite an increasingly aging population in Kamagasaki, with an average age of 52, there were no measure taken to deal with the agony experienced by the residents. Sometimes, when local day laborer unions or Christian groups held free meal sessions, 700 to 800 people would show up at once. As well, in the late 1980s workers began to come from other countries, and Kamagasaki developed stronger ties to the international labor market. This was to be a major turning point for the area.

