Changes with Sakari-ba (amusement quarters)

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Sakari-ba is one of the festive spaces in a city. It is a well-known fact that Sakari-ba is an area where drinking, singing, dancing and other entertainments all of which were considered unusual elements of daily life are accepted to take place on a daily basis. Those elements are also activities based on natural instincts that human beings share universally.

In Japan, it is not too long a time ago that Sakari-ba became a public place, open everyday for everyone to visit. Development of most Japanese cities did not take place until late except Kyoto, which has had some form of Sakari-ba. It is, however, difficult to determine whether the ancient Sakari-ba in Kyoto has anything to do with the present Sakari-bas. The prototype of Sakari-ba as as gay and entertainment quarters must be sought for in Edo Period.

The prototype Sakari-ba originated in Takamachi. Takamachi was an open market, which is sometimes observed now at festivals and fairs, and was often set up around or in the precincts of temples and shrines. Since most of the temples and shrines were built either at the foot of mountains or near the water, they also served as grounds for emergency escape from fires. Takamachi was first held in these grounds on an occasional basis and later became permanently open.

The government often ordered Takamachi to be removed as they were held in the emergency grounds and were believed to be conducive to the corruption of public morals. Toward the middle years of Edo Period, however, as there were no more wars and relative peace was maintained in the metropolis, Sakari-bas became more and more active as people's desires to seek for entertaining events were difficult to oppress. As a result, Yukaku (licensed quarters) and Kagai (gay quarters) developed.

They further developed during Meiji Period and at the beginning of the Showa Period as they were supported by the armies and soldiers. When the second world war was over, and there was no more support expected from them, Sakari-bas were again put into confusion.