This paper examines the feudal and autonomous regimes and their shifts in Sakai from the late Muromachi period (the late 15th century) to the period of the ascendancy of Oda Nobunaga (the late 16th century). This century was a transitional period from medieval to early modern, when the social regime changed drastically, as represented by the shift from the manorial system to the township system. Likewise, in Sakai, it has been observed that after Sakaikita-shō and Sakaaminami-shō (Northern and Southern Sakai Manors) were established, township communities emerged as the basis of the early modern city. Thus, it is important to inquire into the process of changes in the municipal regime to reveal how these basic units were integrated and developed into a new municipal regime.

The results of the analysis indicate a shift from a feudal regime based on the manorial system developed under the framework of Sakaikita-shō and Sakaaminami-shō to a society characterized by territorial autonomy based on township. The watershed in this shift was the spread of the autonomous territorial regime around the city in the mid-16th century. This shift in the social regime was accompanied by major changes, such as the change of authorities and the replacement of dominant merchants (egōshū). The development of the autonomous territorial units (town authorities) at that time also seems to have contributed to the construction of moats as a symbol of autonomy as well as the development of Sakai into a “place of peace,” as a missionary of the Society of Jesus described it. Moreover, this analysis suggests that the municipal regime which had been established and changed in different ways in the mid-16th century formed the basis of the early modern municipal regime in the late 16th century and thereafter.

Key words: Sakai, Transitional period from medieval to early modern, Municipal regime, Shift/change, Autonomy