This dissertation is a study of Beer Riot (Bierkrawall), which happened from 1 to 3 May 1844 in Munich, the capital of the Kingdom of Bavaria. In this case, more than 30 breweries, government buildings and Royal Theatre were attacked by thousands of lower-class men mainly consisting of journeymen and soldiers (also former journeymen or agricultural laborers) throughout the three days. The direct trigger was the price increase of beer which was regarded as food in Bavaria. However, it seemed that there was a unique social and cultural character of brewing and drinking beer in the pre-industrialized Bavarian cities in the background. Therefore, in this study, I tried to place the beer riot in the historical transformation of the city Munich in the first half of the 19th century. Hence, it could be ascertained what was exactly expressed in the riot by its participants.

The significance of this dissertation could be claimed that, firstly, although the researches on the food riots during German Vormärz (1815-1847) had tended to be focused on Prussia’s cases, it dealt with a case in the Bavarian region for which little attention had been paid. Secondly, this study tried to integrate the two main, but divided approaches applied to most previous researches: investigating the correlation between riots and social structures through the statistical processing of a large number of incidents, or examining the crowd’s own logic through detailed observation of a particular case (or of several cases). For this purpose, finally, I focused on the multiple
social and cultural representation of beer in Munich in order to explain the linkage between an incident and city’s political and socio-economic structures changing at that time.

In Chapter 1, it was attempted to reconstruct the details of the beer riot based on the administrative and judicial documents. As a result, certain selectivity and discipline were figured out in the crowd’s acts which targeted only the bar-section normally attached to every single brewery but not more than 200 pubs within the city, even though the both professions sold beer. Besides, Munich citizens expressed their sympathy for the rioters and some officials also suggested some understanding of their motivation. Therefore it turned out that this riot had characteristics similar to food riots sustained by moral economy, which most frequently occurred in Germany during the early industrialization era.

However, following three points were to be reconsidered: a) Even though the beer price had highly jumped several times before 1844, why hadn’t any riot occur? b) Didn’t the profession diversity of journeymen who were the chief part of the rioters suggest wider problems in the city’s trade-system? c) Was the solidarity of the crowd really based on so-called Kruggerechtigkeit, a right to receive drinks (especially beer), about which it is asserted by the previous studies that there used to be a belief every Bavarian had it.

For solving these issues, in Chapter 2, I inquired into the historical transformation of Munich’s municipal organization and trade-system. In Bavaria in the first half of the 19th century, the territorial state tried to demolish feudal autonomy of the cities and liberalize their trade-system founded on guilds. In conclusion, these efforts, the latter in particular, were made only to see their setback mainly because of Realgewerbsgerechtigkeit, a kind of craft license.

Granted originally by authorities or guilds, this craft license had been getting multiple characteristics customarily. In socio-economic dimension such as private property, social security for retirement and a means of acquiring workforces, and in political dimension as a suffrage of city government with the feudal citizenship connected. However, as Munich’s trade- and autonomy system were shaken, those craft licenses would come to concentrate on certain people of high repute and their price rose rapidly. As a result, opportunities for journeymen to run independent business, who had already been suffering from social stagnation, became even smaller.

In the last Chapter 3, I examined meanings of brewing and drinking beer in Munich referencing those results of legal history about rights and duties and cultural history about drinking practices of lower-class men. Concerning the brewing, one had to focus on the craft license mentioned above, especially that of brewing, because it had been
called Recht der Sache, right of things (not right to things), and totally different from the others in the way that this right was said to be attached to a brewery itself to form an inseparable aggregate and lay duty on its owner to supply beer for the city. In other words, the owners of Munich breweries were obliged to brew beer for the city and its dwellers. The fluctuation of the trade- and municipal structures, however, forced the right of things to change into an object of speculation and monopolization. Those who most actively took part in this process were some of Munich’s prominent brewers and so-called brewing-nobles, several male and female aristocrats. This trend inevitably caused wider distrust of Munich’s residents and would make an important factor of the beer riot.

As for the meaning of drinking beer to journeymen and soldiers, one should say it was a gift. When an apprentice successfully finished his service and was promoted to a journeymen, a feast was held and he was given a glass of beer by veterans. The young man had to drink it off and give them a return feast after a while. All of these needed to be carried out in order to become their fellow. Similar rituals were repeated almost every time he arrived in a new town because his workplace and food and sleep were usually offered with the help of the same trade fellows. He might have not rejected drinking beer as a gift. In short, journeymen were also obliged but to drink beer.

Based on the considerations above, this dissertation concluded that the Munich’s beer riot in May 1844 was an objection from those who had a duty to drink beer against those who had a duty to brew beer. And the crowd, journeymen and soldiers, staked their living in a broader sense onto the riot, which consisted of beer not only because it was food, but also because it offered their comprehensive social relationships: bed, work, and fellows.