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Homelessness and housing in Japan

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1. Introduction

In Japan, it has emerged that "the homeless" issue has been a social problem since the 1990s. The number of rough sleepers in Japan has been rapidly increasing after the burst of the bubble economy. The number of rough sleepers has gradually increased since 1990s and has been increasing much more rapidly since 1997 when the instability of Asian currencies brought about an economic crisis, with 20,000 rough sleepers estimated by the Ministry of Health and Welfare in 2000, 24,000 in 2001 and 25,296 in 2003. The number of rough sleepers in Japan was estimated at over 30,000 in 2003. The place where rough sleepers live has been spreading to parks, train stations, streets and riverbeds. The rough sleepers issue has become a social problem precisely because of rough sleeping in public spaces.

On the other hand, the number of completed houses and vacant houses remains high. The number of completed houses was 1,630,378 in 1996, 1,213,157 in 2000 and 1,173,649 in 2003. The investment in housing in Japan has been at a high level, with the average age of housing being less than 30 years. Many houses which have been constructed year by year have not delivered to people who need housing.

There are larger social problems that existing measures cannot solve. Although there has been some reduction of low-income people (1,929,408 people received income support in 1955, vs.1,349,230 in 1975, vs. only 882,229 in 1995; Ministry of Welfare,2000), the number of rough sleepers has been increasing mentioned above. There are rapidly increasing numbers of self-declared bankruptcies rising from 14,625 cases in 1985 to 43,414 cases in 1995 The number of job-hopping part-time workers increased from 0.5 million people in 1975 to 1.51 million people in 1995 and the number of domestic violence cases became quite visible with 2,418 cases in 1999 (task group for the social services for the supporting people the situation of social services on December 2000). These indicators suggest that social policies are needed to tackle the problems of people who are not able to have a home.

Recently, some local governments have made strategic plans to address rough sleeping followed by the 2002 homeless law. However we should examine the reasons of rough sleepers and

homelessness which means not only rough sleeping but also unstable living situation. Rough sleeping is the most serious situation for people and it has been brought various reasons. So we should investigate them which lead the rough sleeping. Otherwise, we are not able to address the rough sleeping and homelessness.

The definition of the 2002 homeless law is the quiet narrow, but the discussion in below is wider meaning of homelessness. The reasons of homelessness in Japan are discussing below in wider meaning from the view point of housing and well-being.

2. Outline of homelessness in Japan

According to Ministry of Health, Welfare and Labour (2003) outline of rough sleepers in Japan were single men and over 55 years old in the survey of rough sleepers in 2003. The last employment is dominated by day labour construction. However the number of full employment has been increasing recently in it.

Rough sleepers used to be dominated by day labour construction workers who depend on *Yoseba*. *Yoseba* is the open air day labour market in large cities in Japan. People who want to get jobs and agencies who want to hire workers gather in the early morning at *Yoseba*. Unfortunately someone who does not get jobs can not get money and stay at accommodations. They sleep rough in and around *Yoseba*. After the burst bubble economy, construction companies have switched from employing labourers from the *Yoseba* to others such as illegal workers or students, who are employed directly or through magazine advertisements. Therefore the decline of the employment function of the *Yoseba* has resulted in rough sleepers massing in and around the *Yoseba*.

Spreading the restriction of expenditure, the number of rough sleepers who had been full employment has been increasing. Social mechanisms, such economic, social and political issues, and individual issues were discussed as the reasons for homelessness in European countries. They have suggested that changes in economic structures such as world economics, the freedom of capital transformation and the freedom of labour transformation, changes in social and demographic structures such as increasing longevity, the growing number of individual households and increasing divorce rate, and the change of policy such as deregulation, the backslide of the welfare state and the extension of the inequality between the rich and the poor people, have all been enhancing the prevalence of homelessness (Hutson, S. 1999, 1-25). These changes of situation have the influence homelessness in Japan as well.

However the central government in Japan defines the homeless in the narrow meaning in the 2002 homeless law. It might lead the superficial measures to reduce the number of rough sleepers. It is difficult to tackle the real reasons of homelessness in Japan from the view point of this.

3. Discourse of homelessness in Japan

(1) The definition of the homeless

There used to be no word for "homeless" in the Japanese language. After World War II, the Japanese central government made provisions for the people who had no home and were called *Furou* or *Runpen* which mean a vagrant or a loafer. More recently it designated them as persons of "no fixed abode." The word "homeless" was introduced from western countries such as the US and

UK. As such there was no official definition for "homeless" until 2002. The mass media use it to refer to people who live in public places such as in parks or along roads. Actually, people who live in the public spaces such as parks or along roads are referred to as "rough sleepers," whereas "the homeless" are those who live in unstable accommodations including rough sleepers and also people who are not able to forge a healthy and cultural life because of other reasons, which is written in the Constitution of Japan . In 2002 the homeless law defines the homeless as the same meaning which the mass media use. In 1987 and 2004 homelessness in Japan had been discussed with wider meaning than the mass media by the Japan Housing Council.

   It is necessary to define the homelessness in the wider meaning. Otherwise the solution means the wiping rough sleepers off the public spaces, not means the solution of wider meaning of homelessness. It is not able to prevent the rough sleeping and homelessness.

(2) The responsibility for housing

   The most important issue for homelessness is who constructs houses and has responsibility for such construction. The central government in Japan does not take responsibility for housing. In Japan most houses built after the Second World War were built by private companies (Yamada, 1999). The government has been responsible for providing infrastructure, such as roads or bridges, but not houses. Roads or rivers are the centres of city planning, but houses have played a subordinate role since the 1860s. The white paper on construction mentions that over the years since the Meiji Period, since 1868, public investment focused on flood control, railroads and roads. In recent years the emphasis has shifted to investment in new infrastructure for economic growth, including information technology, physical distribution and urban restructuring (White Paper on Construction in Japan 2000). So public housing is thought of as an exception. Company houses are also regarded as an exception. However, company housing is thought of as a springboard to home ownership, and in many cases there is a restriction on the length of stay. In other words company houses are seen as temporary accommodations.

   Since 1958 the ratio of homeowners had been declining; however it has been stable at around 60% since 1968. There is not a big change in the tenure structure, especially in owned houses and rented houses owned privately. The ratio of rented houses owned privately has been increasing very slowly since the 1980s. On the other hand the ratio of social rented houses has been declining slightly since the 1990s. The ratio of company houses has been also declining, although it rose briefly in 1993. This was affected by the "bubble economy" in 1998 which made the price of land and housing extremely high in large urban areas. No one who newly employed in a large urban area, especially Tokyo, could afford to live close enough to commute, so large companies constructed or borrowed houses as company houses.

   However we cannot ignore the role of company houses and the housing assistance from companies. According to the survey, which reported the company welfare adopted for the change of social economic structure in 1996 (Ministry of Labour), shows 73.7% of companies have workers' nest-egg saving scheme, especially 99.8% of large companies who employ over 1,000 persons have it. Between 21.5% and 33.0% of all companies in Japan have company-run housing or dormitories for employees were (70.1-88.5% for companies employing over 1,000 persons). Less than a quarter, 23.5% of all companies, has a homeowner financing or an interest subsidy system (77.5% of large companies who employ over 1,000 persons). It is clear that larger companies have a more supportive system for employees' accommodation.

   The reason for company-run housing is to support employees until they are able to purchase property in 51.6% of cases which have company-run housing. The reasons for small- and

medium-scale enterprises which have between 30 and 299 employees are to secure employees or to employ employees for long time in 73.9% of cases. This means that it is part of the strategy of worker recruitment. In large companies 68.4% of responses were to make-work related transfers smoother.

  Almost all companies, 92.0%, who have personnel changes with inter-company transfers have a support system for new employees, such as provisions for housing or dormitories (69.9%), for benefits for living single (58.9%), and/or for temporary leaves to return to the home of origin (58.5%; Ministry of Labour, 1999). However, many companies (14.1%) report that they intend to abolish or reduce such benefits in the next 3 years (The Ministry of Labour, 1999). This coincides with the tendency of the company housing ratio in the housing survey in Japan. In times of severe recession companies try to reduce the cost by giving up company housing.

  There are some reasons why companies provide housing support measures. Some, in Japan as well as the West, have suggested that Japan's miraculous economic achievements in the second half of the 20th century were made possible partly by neglecting people's housing (Donnison & Hoshino, 1988). Local governments provide little support for the residents themselves. Support and subsidies are available primarily for construction and suppliers. The measures by local authorities are insufficient for residents and haphazard (Van Vliet & Hirayama, 1994). Low-quality and low-rent private housing, rather than public housing, has provided accommodation for low-income people. This heaving "private sector" emphasis in housing policy in Japan became clear when the Great Hanshin-awaji Earthquake occurred in 1995. The attitude of the government has not been to support the development individual property. The government expects most people to get houses in the housing market by themselves and does little to provide public welfare housing for people who are not able to get housing on the housing market. However a lot of people cannot get housing on the private housing market. The government has not given any type of housing guarantee to the elderly, the disabled, or other low-income people. Hirayama (2000) therefore describes Japanese housing policy as the dualist model followed by Kemeny (1995). There are two types of household in Japan, one is the ordinary household who can get their accommodations on the private housing market and other is the poor household who are given their accommodations by the government. And the latest type means the special which they are given the supports by the government. The government mentioned that Japanese housing policy targeted the whole housing market to be active.

   In Japan public housing is provided for people who are clearly incapable of obtaining accommodation in the private housing market. The amount of public housing is low, and there are strict criteria for the eligibility for public housing. So only a few people who can get accommodation in public housing. Most of the rest live in low rent private housing. Some companies and agencies provide dormitories, company-run houses, home ownership support programs, and some welfare provisions for their employees. The newly unemployed often find it difficult to obtain low-cost housing in the general housing market. They can only find accommodation out-of-market (from the very limited public housing). However, day labourers (especially construction day labourers) mostly cannot find accommodation without local connections and they become rough sleepers.

  The government has no responsibility for housing as a result of this. In Japan, the provisions for people who are not able to have accommodation are based on encouraging self-help to work and supporting those who are not able to work. Consequently few social supports assist those rough sleepers who are unemployed simply due to socio-economic reasons. They do not think the central government provides accommodations for the poor in Japan.

(3) Company society

In Japan government-led economic growth policy is central. It is a company- centres social policy. The cabinet looks to the major companies to take action and does not directly institute policy for the nation. This approach has led to the poor social security system in Japan. It is typically in many Asian cultures that one's welfare is dependent on family or relatives. Families and companies have been supporting the social security system and it is believed that home ownership and savings are the basis of family welfare (Hirayama & Hayakawa, 1995).

1995). Many own assets in the form of the property they live in and there is a high ratio of savings. Musashino, a public corporation, which provides support services for the elderly based on their properties is a well known example. Also, welfare provisions by companies play an important role (Izuhara, 2000).

According to the Ministry of Labour (1999), nursing support was the highest response to the question of what will be introduced or expanded in companies' 3-year plans (17.5%). More than 80% of large companies (1,000 employees and more) expect to provide nursing support in the near future. The larger companies provide better pay levels as well as more extensive welfare programs. In such large enterprises, those who enjoy a high employee status generally come from well-educated backgrounds. Recent economic changes (e.g., globalization) and the revolution of technology have increased the need for well-educated people and those skilled in technology. People want high income and a stable life, so the percentage of students who go on to a higher stage of education has been increasing. While the economy has been developing and the size of companies has been increasing, companies have often recruited employees not on the basis of their ability but on what university they graduated from. Companies did not expect education to provide the abilities necessary for work to students but instead saw graduation from a prestigious university as a measure of their potential ability. Companies provided training for their employees on the job. It has been suggested that standards of education in universities have been in decline (Castells, 2000). The aim of education through high school level has been to educate in the techniques for passing examinations and to select students. The children who are educated in this system could regard the rough sleepers as dropouts or failures in life. Youngsters have attacked and abused rough sleepers, for example, by throwing the rough sleeper into rivers, setting fire to their property, and even killing the rough sleepers (Fujii & Tamaki, 2003, p.15-16). However a few schools have brought pupils to talk with rough sleepers. This attempt aims to overcome the discrimination against rough sleepers. Unfortunately there are few movements to develop the vocational ability of rough sleepers.

There is the poor social equity system in Japan. So company welfare and family support have underpinned the peoples' life in Japan. However the change of economy brought the end of life long employee system and the change of society in Japan brought the weakness of family support. And the decrease of the household size brought the crisis of family care. These changes brought the high possibility of rough sleeping.

Furthermore the increase of unstable employment increases the risk that young and elder workers will become rough sleepers. The new economic structure has involved an increase in the numbers of female and young employees, as well as a growing instability of employment status (Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare 2003). Changes in management practices are viewed as producing the death of lifetime employment in Japan. Female employees have been getting formal but unstable situations. Young people cannot get stable positions and then invariably become job hoppers. Young and female workers have been cast in the role of an economic buffer. Furthermore many enterprises cut off middle-aged and elder workers in the name of corporate streamlining.

Japan has also seen a steady change in its social structure. Society has been aging rapidly and the over-50 year old day labour construction workers who have been left on the street have suffered the alienation of the labour market. And the average Japanese rough sleeper is in his late 50s. The instability of family structures has been rising due to a decreasing family size and an increasing rate of divorce. The average household size has declined in Japan. The increasing number of single-person households underpins this trend. Change in the family structure has also been drastic in Japan. "IE" which means the family system in Japan, has unpinned the Japanese welfare system in the modern age (Izuhara, 2000). The weakening of social and family cohesion, mentioned above, has destroyed the base of Japanese social security and will lead to an increase in the new type of rough sleepers outside of the Yoseba. The rate of divorce has been increasing in Japan. The rate of divorce in Japan was 0.74 par thousand person in 1961, 1.34 in 1991 (Trends in Vital Statistics by prefecture in Japan, 1899-1998).

Other policy changes have also occurred in Japan. Social security measures have been cut despite their already being a comparatively small amount of the national budget. De-institutional policy for elder persons, handicapped or mental illness has been introduced from the Scandinavian countries into Japan and probation facilities have been decreasing. The number of facilities fell from 351 in 1990 to 296 in 2000. Capacity decreased from 2,287 in 1990 to 1,981 in 2000 (survey of social welfare facilities in 2000). However, at the same time the number of rough sleepers has been increasing. There is therefore a widening gap between capacity and needs of facilities.

The issues of homeless individuals in Japan have been barely discussed. The decrease of social and human cohesion and the increase of drug and alcohol abuse and runaways have been examined (task group for the social services for the supporting people the situation of social services, 2000). Discrimination and prejudice related to homeless people, often connected with drug and alcohol problems, has been described in the UK (Hutson & Jones, 2002) and the homeless have been condemned as the lazy in Japan. Actually many of rough sleepers in Japan work to collect empty cans and other recyclable items (as discussed below).

(4) Unbalanced vulnerable people

Concentration of vulnerable people such as the elder, handicapped and low-income people leads homelessness. Migrations have happened in several times in Japan. At first it from provinces to the metro area happened during the high economic growth. This brought the depopulation in provinces. Second migration from the inner city to suburban area happened in between 1970s and 1980s. Housing estates have been constructed in suburban areas for people who have migrated from provinces in 1960s. This brought the depopulation in the inner city area. And then furthermore housing estates have been constructed outside of previous housing estates. Again depopulation has been brought in previous development areas. As a result of these migrations depopulation, the reduction of household and aging has been brought in provinces and inner areas.

Something happening with small elder household, it might be serious problem for them. If they were young or they have more family members, it was easy to solve it. For instance the number of death by drowning in house has been increasing recently in Japan. Aged people are likely to be affected the change of the temperature of a room. When they take off their clothes to go in the bath, they touch with the cold air. It triggers cerebrovascular disease, high blood pressure and so on. And then they have a dip in the bathtub, their veins are dilated and blood pressure fall. They are easy to drown.

In under populated area it is difficult for elder people to live in comfort because many of them need medical treatments and means of transportation to living facilities. But it is very difficult for

them to drive a car. It is difficult for them to contact their cohesion of community. This is not well-being and homelessness.

4. Conclusion
(1) The homeless issue
Rough sleepers are brought by the change of economy and population structure. The change of economy means the cost. The change of the population structure means the aging of the workers.

(2) The factors which make the rough sleepers visible
The central government does not take responsibility at the housing for the people in Japan. There are two reasons, one is too many people sleeping rough in and around the *Yoseba,* and some of them have overflowed into public spaces. Other is new type of rough sleepers who do not know the *Yoseba* have been emerging. They also sleep rough at public spaces. So people are able to see a lot of rough sleepers at parks, streets, river banks and stations.

The reason why so many rough sleepers emerge is the poor social security in Japan. No job leads no money and no accommodation. Social security in Japan can not prevent rough sleeping. There is the question of howl social equity system in Japan.

(3) The factors which lead the homelessness
From the view point of the wider meaning of homelessness the reduction of household size and the under population lead the instability of daily living. As the something trouble with the household has happened, they cannot support it by their family and their community in living area. It leads the real homelessness.

(4) Recommendation
The first is for the central government to take the responsibility of the housing for the people in Japan. For instance latter half in 1990s in China income difference expanded and the housing shortage for low-income person became serious. Many redevelopments are advanced in the private base, and the removal compensation changes from the offer of the substitution housing to the supply of the compensation, evictions have developed into social problem. Therefore all the residence security polices for the low income earner are being done during the regulations about the land accommodation, the construction of the residence for the work person and the house rent assistance to the low income earner and so on.

The second is the cooperative activities in the community based organizations such as the NPOs. In times when the number of rough sleepers increases rapidly, public measures which local authorities or central government provide are insufficient. Various non-profit organizations (NPOs) have recently begun to provide various services for the homeless. For example, the Kamagasaki Support System was established in 1996 in Osaka and its aim is to provide support to improve the situation of rough sleepers and threatened rough sleepers, and support self-help. The Support System is composed of an anti-unemployment society, welfare organizations, neighborhood associations and academics. Some NPOs involve volunteer activities assisting rough sleepers, including soup runs and the provision of accommodation and health consultation. Other NPOs follow the recommendation of "the contact committee for rough sleepers" and have joined up and supported existing social welfare and volunteer organizations that attempt to promote self-help among rough sleepers (Matsushige, 1999).

In Japan attempts to address homelessness have often been discussed from the view point of

economics, especially employment issues. But the discourse has been changing slightly to emphasize welfare and housing measures, in part due to the age of the homeless and in part due to the seemingly ever increasing number of rough sleepers. Furthermore, homeless families and women have appeared recently.

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