



HOMELESSNESS & RELATED POLICY IN JAPAN AND MALAYSIA

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Homelessness in a Global Landscape

Simultaneous Workshop: Japan, Malaysia, China and Korea

9:45-11:15am. June 2, 2015

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JAPAN

POLICY BACKGROUND: JAPAN

Gøsta Epsing-Anderson: Hybrid welfare state

Liberal-residual welfare + Conservative/Corporatist welfare

- ❖ Universal social insurance systems
 - ❖ National Pension Act (1959)
 - ❖ National Health Insurance Act (1959)
- ❖ Livelihood Protection Act (1950)
 - ❖ Public assistance guaranteed to all by the Constitution (Article 25)
- ❖ Public Housing Act (1951)
- ❖ Post-war labor policy focused on employment security
 - ❖ Labor Standards Act (1947)
 - ❖ Also, subsidies to employers to prevent economic dismissal, etc

A.K. Abe (2003):
“Universal in principle,
Selective in practice”



HOMELESSNESS: JAPAN

1980s

- ❖ Emergence of street homelessness in *yoseba*
 - Rooted in post-industrial shift,
 - e.g. Shrinking construction industry
 - Largely daily laborers: Ageing, Male, Single
 - Previous housing: Employer-provided, SROs

1990s-2000s

- ❖ Rising visibility of tents / tarp structures by rivers, parks
 - Poverty exacerbated by stagnant post-bubble economy, as well as industrial/political responses (e.g. corporate restructuring, retrenchment)
 - Deepening poverty in *yoseba*
 - Greater vulnerability among self-employed, formal sector workers

Popularization of the term “Homeless”

Mid-2000s to present

- ❖ Escalating youth poverty, homelessness broadly defined
 - Rooted in deregulation of labor market from 1999
 - Rapid diffusion of non-regular/contract employment
 - Accompanied by proliferation of illegal/predatory/insecure housing (or accommodation) targeting poor

Popularization of: “Precariat”, “Working poor”, “Internet café refugee”



RELATED POLICY & ISSUES: JAPAN

❖ Pension system

- Low-income mechanisms exclude poor
i.e. Exemptions from contributions result in benefit reduction

❖ Livelihood Protection

- Despite constitutional guarantee to all, disbursed under strict scrutiny
-In practice, those deemed non-deserving denied, dropped
- Social stigma associated with assistance reduces utilization

❖ Harassment and eviction by private guards, police

- Authorities may use legal procedures to evict from public property

Timeline: Policy & research responses to homelessness

- 2002 Law on Temporary Measures [for] Self-Reliance of Homeless People
- 2003 Central government's first national homelessness survey
- 2004 Support for Transitioning from Homelessness to Community Life
- 2007 Annual homelessness street counts begin
- 2009 Housing Benefit Special Emergency Measures
- 2014 Law to Assist Persons Experiencing Hardship



RELATED POLICY & ISSUES: JAPAN

❖ 2002 Law on Temporary Measures [for] the Self-Reliance of Homeless People ホームレスの自立の支援等に関する特別措置法

- **Homelessness narrowly defined as:**

“Persons conducting day-to-day lives in urban parks, by rivers, on the streets, and in or around stations and other facilities.”

Aims: Temporary shelters, geared to connect clients to employment
Ensure “proper use” of public space

Civil society critique:

- 1) Gaps in present policies (i.e. livelihood assistance) not yet remedied;
- 2) Facile work-centered approach to addressing/solving homelessness;
- 3) Facilitates systematic clearing of homeless persons from public spaces

❖ 2004 Support for Transitioning from Homelessness to Community Life

ホームレス地域生活移行支援事業

Pilot program in Tokyo

Designed to: 1) move persons in tents out of public parks, with offer of low-cost subsidized apts (\$30/mo), and 2) ensure “proper use” of parks

- Eligibility limited to: persons in tents, in 5 specified park areas
- 2-year contract; Recipients originally barred from livelihood assistance
- Plans also explicitly geared towards ‘securing’ park (preventing re/entry)



RELATED POLICY & ISSUES: JAPAN

❖ 2004 Support for Transitioning from Homelessness to Community Life (Con't)

Civil society critique:

- 1) Resembled lure; people evacuate tents w/out assurance of continued aid
- 2) Top-down planning & implementation; Homeless persons not consulted
- 3) Policy to curb use of tents forces street homeless population into greater insecurity

❖ 2009 Housing Benefit Emergency Measures 住宅手当緊急特別措置事業

- 3-9 month rental assistance for unemployed

❖ 2014 Law to Assist Persons Experiencing Hardship 生活困窮者自立支援法

- Designed as buffer to forestall need for livelihood assistance
- Offers housing, job skills, and emergency support: conditional on work

Civil society critique:

- 1) May be used to steer people away from livelihood assistance
- 2) Sends people to programs and work with little/no economic support
- 3) Housing benefits limited to unemployed persons, 3 months



Survey Data on Street Homelessness (N=1300)

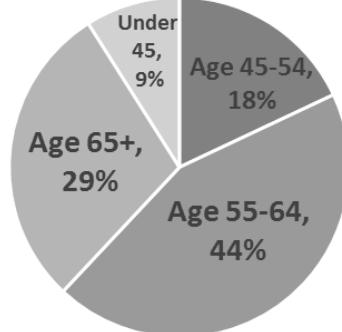
Source: 2012 National Survey on Homelessness
www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/houdou/2r98520000029ag9-att/2.pdf

- ❖ 95% male; 5% female

40% Tokyo / Yokohama

25% Osaka

AGE



- ❖ 28% in parks, 29% along rivers, 9% in stations, 16% on streets

- ❖ Over 80% maintain regular place
 40% have tents / structures

- ❖ 62% homeless over 3 yrs; 20% under 1 yr.

- ❖ 61% earn income.
 - ❖ 78% from collecting recyclable/saleable material, 13% from daily labor.

Reasons:

Underemployment	34%
Unemployment	28%
Illness/Injury/Ageing	20%
Could no longer pay rent	22%
Workplace conditions	22%
Addiction	8%
Problems at home	7%

Previous Employment/Housing:

E: 46% Construction; 13% Services, Sales

H: 30% employer-provided; 41% rental

Survey Data on Persons Using Internet Cafés as Accommodation (N=364)

Source: MHLW Report on the 2007 National Survey on Insecure Housing and Employment
www.mhlw.go.jp/houdou/2007/08/dl/h0828-1n.pdf

- ❖ 90% male; 10% female
- ❖ Most in 20s & 50s (chart below)

Reasons for housing loss (Tokyo | Osaka)

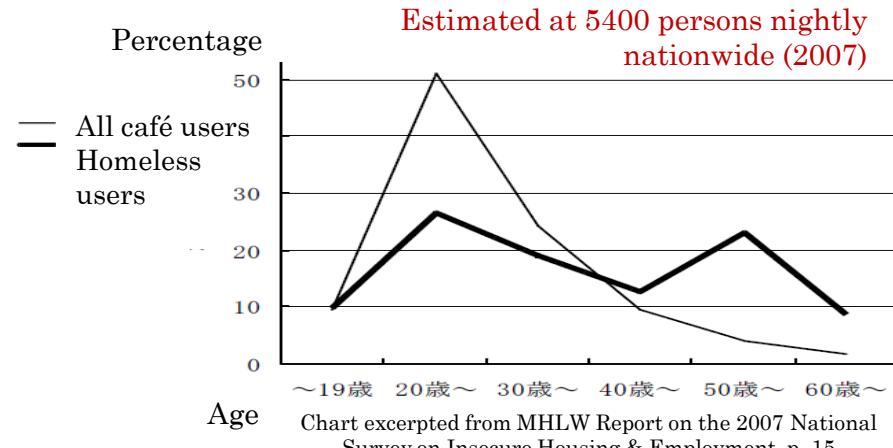
- Unable to pay rent after job loss (33% | 17%)
- Lost employer-provided housing (20% | 44%)
- Had to leave family home (14% | 12%)

Employment status (Tokyo | Osaka)

Unemployed/not working	(34% 39%)
Non-regular worker	(57% 40%)
Self-employed	(8% 10%)
Regular worker	(1% 5%)

Trouble entering secure housing, due to:

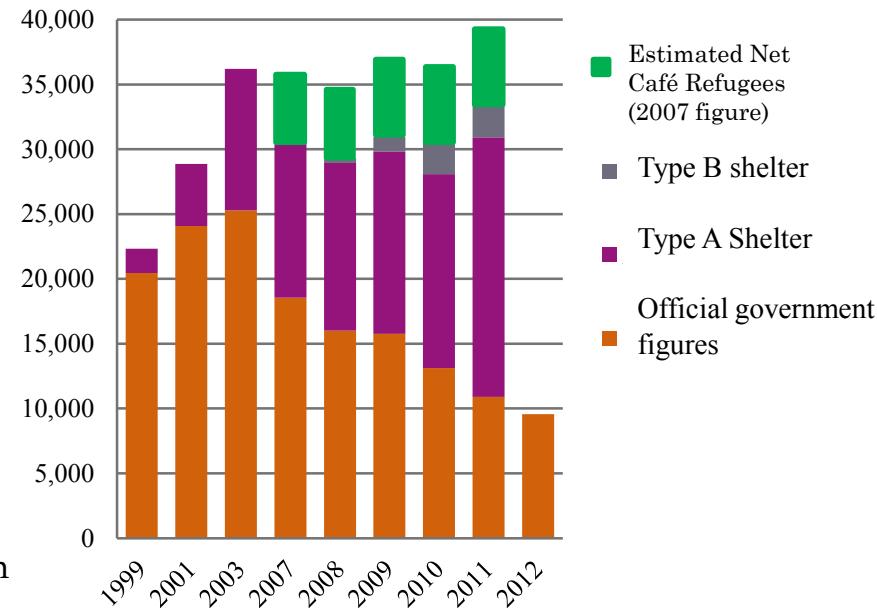
- Cannot save enough for deposit, etc (66%)
- Do not have steady income for rent (33%)



Homelessness in Japan: Do Definitions and Measures Matter?

- Government street counts (in orange) have been presented as evidence of a decline in homelessness (defined narrowly, as it is in Japan,) since implementation of the 2002 Self-Reliance Law.
- Shimokawa (2014) matches this data with government figures for persons in provisional shelter (in purple and grey; data on persons placed in *doya* lodging not included). Such a view reveals that homelessness, when more broadly defined, is not necessarily in decline.
- I add to Shimokawa's chart the government estimate for internet café refugees (in green) in 2007* to each year (*there are no estimates for subsequent years), to make a point: considering trends in multiple forms of homelessness broadly defined uncovers the possibility of an overall rise in homelessness and housing insecurity.

Government estimates on the number of homeless persons: National



The ways in which data may be used and presented underscore the critical role of definitions and measures in providing a foundation on which to advance public conversations, and a common understanding, of housing insecurity and homelessness.

Figure adapted from: **Shimokawa, M. 2014. Recent changes in forced evictions and homelessness in Japan.** Retrieved from Asian Coalition for Housing Rights: <http://www.achr.net/upload/files/Homless%20Eviction%20in%20Japan.pdf>

Additional data (in green) on internet café refugees; taken from the MHLW Report on the 2007 National Survey on Insecure Housing and Employment





MALAYSIA

POLICY BACKGROUND: MALAYSIA

Ian Gough: Minimal state role in social policy

Priority on expenditures for economic growth, nation-building

- ❖ Universal health care system, governed by Ministry of Health
- ❖ Employees Provident Fund Act 1951/1991
 - Non-compulsory for self-employed, informal sector workers
- ❖ Employment Act 1955
 - Provides labor regulations re: wages, work conditions, etc
- ❖ Housing determined under Malaysia Plans
 - Largely left to private sector since 1971
- ❖ Public Assistance
 - Piecemeal; provided by way of various disparate programs



HOMELESSNESS: MALAYSIA

Colonial era (British Malaya)

- ❖ Documented throughout settlements
 - Rooted in colonial era labor systems, lack of access to health services
 - Largely injured, ill, and unemployed laborers from Europe, India, China

1950s-1970s

- ❖ “Beggars and vagrants” viewed as enduring problem across peninsula
 - First surveys on homelessness, begging by Social Welfare Dept (1955, 1975)
 - Largely single foreign-born men, unable to work due to age/disability
 - Also, rural poor pushed to the city by NEP, rubber estate fragmentation
 - Anti-vagrancy sweeps, detention in federal ‘rehabilitation centres’ instituted

1980s-2000s

- ❖ Street homelessness remains visible nationally; most rough sleepers
 - System of anti-vagrancy sweeps, detention expanded
 - Non-citizens targeted for deportation, drug users for arrest
 - Persons with disability or mental illness disproportionately fill centres

2000s-2010s

- ❖ Soup kitchens, other civil society responses to street homelessness grow; Stoke renewed government attention / action
 - Street homeless population diverse in age, gender, ethnicity, geographic origin, disability and health status, employment status, family/household composition, sexual orientation, etc.



RELATED POLICY & ISSUES: MALAYSIA

❖ Pension: Employees Provident Fund

- System of individual accounts, rather than collective fund, with inequitable results
- Over half of working adults in the informal sector, uncovered

❖ Social safety nets

- Public assistance
 - Piecemeal: multiple programs, targets for each defined narrowly
 - For the eligible few, benefits only 15-40% of a poverty line income
- No unemployment insurance/assistance
- Policies and programs generally reflect government view of social welfare as responsibility of the family

❖ Housing policy

- Low-cost rental supply inadequate; wait lists for public units
- Federal policy presently focuses on ownership, not rental, market

❖ Employment policies

- Employment Act: not widely enforced,
 - Violations affecting low-income workers widespread, severe
- Minimum wage not paced with housing costs, cost of living



RELATED POLICY & ISSUES: MALAYSIA

Timeline: Policy & research responses to homelessness

- 1977 Destitute Persons Act (replaced Vagrants Act of 1965)
- 2010 Social Welfare Department conducts street homelessness census in Kuala Lumpur (KL) with civil society groups
- 2011 Government establishes temporary shelter, to be run by NGO
- 2012 Social Welfare Department launches anti-begging campaign in KL
- 2014 Federal, municipal governments attempt to expand anti-homeless sweeps, enact new criminalization; stalled by public criticism

❖ Destitute Persons Act 1977 (replaced Vagrants Act 1965)

- Primary government strategy for addressing homelessness
- Derived from colonial vagrancy law; comprised of mass roundups and compulsory detention in rehabilitation centres run by Social Welfare Dept
- Ministry in charge has announced plans to amend law to criminalize begging; Could also lead to criminalization of ‘vagrancy’

Civil society critique:

- 1) Facilitates policing, harassment, & forced removal of people who are homeless, begging, or otherwise deemed ‘unwelcome’ in public spaces
- 2) Violates constitutional and international human rights to freedom of movement, equal protection, due process, and personal liberty
- 3) Rehabilitation centres, policing ineffective; Fail to address root problems



RELATED POLICY & ISSUES: MALAYSIA

❖ Anjung Singgah Temporary Shelter/s (est. 2011)

- Est by federal ministry, handed over to gov't-organized NGO (GONGO)
Government not responsible for operations, funding
- Provides temporary shelter, food, job referrals
- **Defines homeless persons (not homelessness) as:**
persons who “choose to live or stay” in public spaces

Civil society critique:

- 1) Programmatic focus on employment means that a diverse range of other issues often overlooked, left unresolved
- 2) Clients generally channeled into low-wage work, often with employer-provided dormitory accommodation, undermining income/housing security

❖ Berhenti Memberi, Kami Prihatin (Stop Giving, We Care) (2012)

- Anti-begging campaign, a la UK's “Killing with kindness”:
Discourages public from giving money to people who beg

2014: Ministry attempts to expand campaign to discourage food provision; Kuala Lumpur government announces plans to criminalize giving food & money, and create a “Zero Zone” enforced through sweeps.

Proposed changes met with criticism from public, stalled.

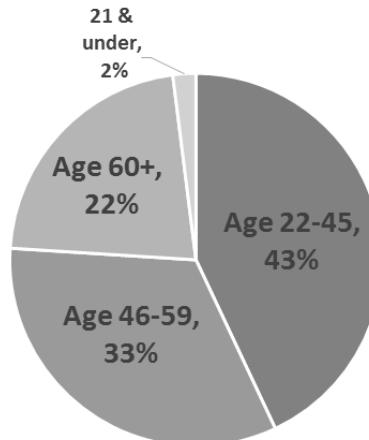


2010 Street Homelessness Kuala Lumpur Survey

(N=1387)

Source: Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development, Malaysia (2011)

- ❖ 85% male; 15% female
- ❖ Over 95% Malaysian, Identified ethnicity as:
 - Chinese, 45%
 - Malay, 32%
 - Indian, 18%
 - Bumiputera 4%
- ❖ 25% Employed
- ❖ 65% from states outside Selangor/KL



Reasons (only single responses allowed):

Unemployment	46%
Low income (adults)	18%
Low Income (seniors)	14%
Health/disability issues	6%
Addiction	5%
Loss of housing	2%

- ❖ 9% Have physical/mental disability

2012 Kuala Lumpur Street / Shelter Survey

(N=62)

Source: Rusenko (2014, unpublished)

Street survey respondents (N=48)

Time on the streets

- 2+ years, 41%
- 6 months or less, 44%

Some desired assistance

(multiple responses allowed)

- 59% Housing
- 45% Better employment
- 45% Unemployment
- 20% For chronic illness
- 17% For depression, mental health
- 10% Debt advice
- 5% Legal aid

Shelter respondents (N=14)

- 74% Had never slept on the streets
- 26% Had experience rough sleeping

At the time of the surveys, shelter clients largely came from sheltered situations and were seeking to avoid the streets;

The street survey found multiple past shelter clients among rough sleepers.



REVIEW: A FEW COMMONALITIES, KEY POINTS

- ✓ Gov't objectives in recent policy rooted in pressure to clear homeless persons from public spaces.
 - For major cities, this often intersects with urban (re)development plans affecting commercial, tourist, and transportation areas/sectors.
 - In Japan, policy targeting tents and other structures for removal pushes persons with limited alternatives into greater insecurity.
 - In Malaysia, government seeks more aggressive utilization of vagrancy law.
- ✓ Recent policies in both countries favor non-public means to addressing homelessness. They tend to insulate the public sector, and look to labor markets (generally) and civil society actors & service providers (specifically) as solution bearers.



REVIEW: COMMONALITIES, KEY POINTS

- ✓ Recent programs developed to reduce homelessness are structured to responsibilize homeless persons, sending a message to clients and the public that homelessness can be overcome through individual efforts. Since government focus is on individual behaviour, and not difficulties posed by social, economic, and structural circumstances, policy action is not adequately taken to improve income and housing security, etc.
- ✓ Also, by framing the labor market (“jobs”) as the operational solution to homelessness without review of the quality of available employment, policies neglect the interests of the vast population of working poor, who include homeless and non-homeless persons alike.

