

A Comparative Study of Homelessness in the United Kingdom and Japan

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This article describes the problem of homelessness in Japan, and contrasts the status of the problem between the United Kingdom and Japan. Demographic characteristics of the homeless, including age and gender, vary across the two countries (for example, there are very few homeless women in Japan). Factors contributing to the development of homelessness in each country are discussed and contrasted. Differences in social welfare systems may be the primary contributor to differences in the apparent rates of homelessness and the conditions that the homeless must endure across the two nations. Housing and homeless policy in Japan are discussed in depth.

Many countries, whether developed or developing, face severe problems with homelessness, but the problems take different form, depending on differences in history, culture, and legislation. The present article describes homelessness in Japan based on a survey of rough sleepers conducted in Nagoya, Japan, with some additional demographic data collected in Osaka, and compares it to the situation in the United Kingdom (U.K.), as documented in a survey of rough sleepers throughout England. The other papers in this issue suggest considerable similarities in causes of homelessness and characteristics of homeless people across Europe and North America. This article will suggest important contrasts with the situation in Japan.

Because homelessness in Europe and North America became prominent in the 1980s (Forrest, 1999), whereas homelessness in Japan emerged as a social

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problem a decade later, in the 1990s, one might hope that Japan could learn from the European experience. However, one cannot transplant policies and programs from one country to another without considering the foreign soil in which the plants must take root. Thus comparative research must take background issues such as the social system and culture into account, as Kemeny and Lowe (1998) did recently for housing research, and as I will attempt to do here. The comparative approach may also hold lessons for the West. Both Japan and the U.K. are highly developed countries economically but the U.K. has a far more developed welfare system. Current tendencies in global policy show a shift away from extensive welfare states towards more market-friendly policies. Japanese policy has long been based on economic growth and has remained market friendly. This article will highlight the risks of an overly market-friendly policy.

The article begins by discussing the historical background of homelessness in Japan, and contrasts the causes of homelessness in the U.K. and Japan. It then presents empirical data from the two countries and discusses reasons for the differences. Turning to policy, it describes housing policy in the two countries and homelessness policy in Japan. (Policies about homelessness in the U.K. are discussed in depth by Anderson (2007).) Finally, it suggests lessons that the two countries can learn from one another.

Historical Background of Homelessness in Japan

There used to be no word for “homeless” in the Japanese language. After World War II (WWII), the Japanese central government made provisions for people who had no home and were called *Furou* or *Runpen*, terms that translate roughly as vagrant or loafer. More recently, the central government has begun using the terms “persons of no fixed abode” to denote homeless people. The English word “homeless” was introduced from western countries, with varied definitions. The mass media use the term to refer to people who live in public places such as in parks or along roads. Officially, people who live in such public places are referred to as rough sleepers, whereas the broader term “homeless” also includes people who live in unstable conditions and are not able to forge a healthy and productive life.

Historically, Japan has had three types of blighted residential areas, which may fall under this broader definition of homelessness. The first is made up of substandard housing tied to employment. Examples include accommodation for seasonal work called *Dekasegi*, spinning mill dormitories after the Meiji Restoration, coal mine houses, houses for the people who fish for herring, and construction camps. Conditions in this housing were exacerbated due to their instability, as they were tied to seasonal or temporary work.

The *Yoseba*, or open-air labor markets found in large cities, and the flophouses that surround them are the urban version of these districts (these *Yoseba* are similar

to the “skid-rows” that were once common in the U.S.). Approved companies come to employ day laborers at the *Yoseba* in the early morning, and many day laborers come to look for jobs there. Those who succeed in finding jobs earn enough to stay at local doss houses (flophouses). Those who do not find jobs have to sleep rough around the *Yoseba* to seek jobs another day. The number of rough sleepers changes with the business cycle with larger numbers in times of economic depression and smaller numbers in times of prosperity. After the 1980s, flophouses were rebuilt, the *Yoseba* landscape changed, and accommodation fees rose. However, the basic character of *Yoseba* as poor and undesirable districts, in which day laborers move back and forth between flophouses and rough sleeping, remains unchanged.

The second sort of blighted area is defined by obvious discrimination. It is easy to think of Japanese society as homogeneous because of its single language, single culture, single race, and relative equality in income. Japan’s GINI coefficient, a measure of income inequality, was 24.9 in 2003, which is one the lowest among developed nations—the U.K. by contrast had a GINI coefficient of 36.0 (United Nations Development Program, 2003, p. 282). Nevertheless, minorities such as the Ainu, Okinawans, and Koreans do exist and have been treated coldly. Japanese society historically had people who were discriminated against such as Eta or Hinin, caste-like groups who were not part of the four recognized social classes in Japanese feudal society, warriors, farmers, craftsmen, and merchants. People who were discriminated against lived in poor residential districts called *Hisabetsu-buraku*, and were forced to work in particular jobs that were deemed low-status.

Widespread poverty in the whole of society created the third type of blighted area. Prior to reconstruction after WWII, there were many poor residential districts in Japan and a deficit of 4.2 million houses. This was recognized as a social problem and the government implemented plans to combat poverty. As the standard of living of the whole society has improved, these poor residential areas have become the exception rather than the norm.

Poor residential districts and discrimination have a synergetic effect in keeping ordinary people away. People whose relationship with ordinary society is disrupted for reasons such as unemployment, bankruptcy, debts, crime, and anti-establishmentarianism often live in these areas (Arimura, 1991). As a result, these districts become the targets of further discrimination, delaying the resolution of their problems. Poor people who have no choice but to live in the poor areas become viewed as criminals or lazy, rather than as typical members of society.

Until recently, rough sleepers in Japan were almost exclusively day laborers who lived around and depended on the *Yoseba*. After the oil crisis of the 1970s, the number of rough sleepers began to increase, and the collapse of the stock and real estate markets in 1988 made rough sleepers very visible in the 1990s. Rough sleeping has become more prolonged, and spread outside of the traditional *Yoseba* area to parks, train stations, streets, and riverbeds. It is also becoming more common

among people who have worked for small- and medium-scale industries, rather than mostly in construction. Kasai (1995), noting these trends and the formation of communities of long-term rough sleepers, argues that the homeless are becoming increasingly isolated and institutionalized in Japan.

The rough sleepers' issue has become a social problem both because of the increased numbers and because of the extensive rough sleeping in public spaces. There were heated arguments about the eviction of rough sleepers living in cardboard houses in the vicinity of the Shinjuku train station in Tokyo during 1992 and 1993. People who had no fixed abode, who had been hidden from the public since the beginning of reconstruction after WWII appeared again. The economic crisis in 1997, brought on by the instability of Asian currencies, led to further acceleration in the numbers of rough sleepers. The Ministry of Health and Welfare estimated that there were 20,000 rough sleepers in 2000, and 24,000 in 2001. The first national survey (by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare) found 25,296 rough sleepers in 2003. In 2007, a second national survey (by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare) found 18,564 rough sleepers in Japan. The number of rough sleepers has been decreasing and their characteristics have been changing since 2002. However, the number of invisible homeless people, who stay at internet cafes, comic book shops, or coffee shops all night is increasing. The circumstances of the homeless population in Japan are changing, and these changes must be addressed in the near future.

Causes of Homelessness in the U.K. and Japan

In Europe, social, economic, and political mechanisms, as well as individual mechanisms, have been discussed as possible causes of homelessness. For example, some Europeans have suggested that changes in economic structures such as world economics, the freedom of capital transformation, and the freedom of labor transformation have contributed to homelessness. Other possible factors influencing homelessness in Europe include changes in social and demographic structures such as increasing longevity, the growing number of individual households, and increasing divorce rate, and changes in social policy such as deregulation, the decline of the welfare state, and the increasing economic gap between the rich and the poor. The European Federation of National Organizations working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) has compared homelessness and homeless policies throughout the European Union using the typology of the welfare state produced by Esping-Andersen (1990), taking account of the differences in welfare legislation, culture, and economics in every country (Edgar & Doherty, 2001; Edgar, Doherty, & Mina-Coull, 1999, 2000).

Similarly, in Japan, economic, demographic, and policy changes have been important to the rise in homelessness. The right to a healthy life is guaranteed by the Constitution of Japan, in Article 25:

All people shall have the right to maintain the minimum standards of wholesome and cultured living. In all spheres of life, the State shall use its endeavors for the promotion and extension of social welfare and security, and of public health.

However, despite this constitutional provision, the government does not provide the sort of “cradle-to-tomb” social security system common in Europe. Rather, the government focuses on economic growth, and leaves much social policy to companies. Larger companies provide better pay levels as well as more extensive welfare programs. As in many other Asian cultures, families are also seen as responsible for individual welfare. Thus, families and companies have been supporting the social security system in Japan, and home ownership and savings are seen as the basis of family welfare (Hirayama & Hayakawa, 1995). Many families own assets in the form of the property they live in and saving rates are high.

Economic changes in Japan include changes in the structure of industry and in international finance and commercial services. Globalization has led to fluid capital and work forces, and a new age of intense competition has emerged. The central government increased public investments to combat the economic recession in the early 1990s, and the number of construction industry workers increased. However, the prolongation of the recession led to a surplus of construction industry workers. Because recruiting methods in the increasingly competitive construction job market favored young, healthy workers or cheaper foreign workers, there was a decline in the function of the *Yoseba* where older workers tended to be found (Nishizawa, 2000). The new economic structure and changing management practices have led to growing instability of employment throughout the society (Minister of Health, Labor and Welfare, 2003). Self-declared bankruptcies rose from 14,625 in 1985 to 43,414 in 1995 (Task Group for Social Support Services, 2000). The practice of lifetime employment is ending as many enterprises cut off male middle-aged and elderly workers in the name of corporate streamlining. In their place, firms hire women and young people, but do not offer stable positions, so that these workers become job hoppers. The number of part-time job hoppers increased from 0.5 million people in 1975 to 1.5 million in 1995 (Task Task Group for Social Support Services, 2000). These young and female workers have been cast in the role of an economic buffer for companies, but as Kasai (1995) pointed out, more former workers for small- and mid-sized companies are found on the street. The aging of Japan’s population has exacerbated problems created by the changing structure of employment. Workers over 50 have few options.

Japan has also seen changes in family structure. The rate of divorce has grown from 0.7 per thousand persons married in 1960 to 2.3 per thousand in 2002 (Vital Statistics of Japan, Trends in indexes of vital statistics, p. 81), and the average household size has decreased from 4.1 in 1960 to 2.7 in 2000 (National Population Census). The change in divorce rate is less extreme than in the U.K., where the annual rate in Wales and England was 2.1 per thousand persons married in 1961 and 13.5 per thousand persons married in 1991 (Office for National Statistics, 2001).

However, the decrease in family size has been more rapid in Japan, although households remain somewhat larger. In Great Britain, the average household size was 3.1 in 1961 and 2.4 in 2000 (Office for National Statistics, 2001). In both the countries, there are increasing numbers of single-person households. These changes are arguably more important to homelessness in Japan, where family support has underpinned the welfare system in the modern age (Izuhara, 2000). Thus, the recent weakening of social and family cohesion has destroyed the base of Japanese social security and will likely lead to an even greater increase in the numbers of rough sleepers.

Changes have also occurred at the policy level in Japan. Social security programs, already a comparatively small amount of the national budget, have been cut further (Miyamoto, 1998). In 1955, 1,929,408 people received income support, compared to 1,349,230 in 1975 and only 882,229 in 1995; Task Group for Social Support Services, 2000). Deinstitutionalization policies for the elderly, handicapped, and mentally ill have been introduced from the Scandinavian countries into Japan and, as a result, long-term care facilities have been decreasing. The number of facilities fell from 351 in 1990 to 292 in 2002, with capacity decreasing from 22,287 in 1990 to 20,116 in 2002 (Health and Social Statistics Division, Statistics and Information Department, Minister's Secretariat, 2002). At the same time, the number of rough sleepers has been increasing, widening the gap between need and availability of services.

The next section of this article compares the characteristics of rough sleepers in England and Japan through existing survey reports, and attempts to explain differences in terms of history, culture, and policy.

Method

The English survey, conducted in 1991, interviewed 1,346 homeless people throughout England, including people found in hostels and bed and breakfast lodgings (Anderson, Kemp, & Quilgars, 1993). For purposes of this comparison, I focus on the subset of 351 rough sleepers in day centers, and 156 rough sleepers found on soup runs. The primary source of Japanese data (and all un-referenced numbers and tabled data) is an unpublished survey of 199 rough sleepers in Nagoya, Japan, conducted by the Committee to Consider the *Sasashima* Issue in 1999 (Committee to Consider the *Sasashima* Issue, 1999) (*Sasashima* is the name of the *Yoseba* in Nagoya, so the "*Sasashima* Issue" refers to the homeless in Nagoya). I also draw on a survey of 887 rough sleepers conducted in Osaka in 1999 (Osaka City University, 2000), for demographic data only. Osaka and Nagoya are Japan's second and third largest urban areas (after Tokyo), with total populations of 2.6 and 2.2 million, respectively. Osaka is a commercial center in the western part of Japan. Nagoya is an industrial center. The headquarters and several plants of the Toyota Motor Company are located in the area.

Results

Gender, Age, and Duration of Rough Sleeping

Rough sleepers were predominantly male in both the countries, but there were somewhat more women in England (45 of 501, or 9%) than in Japan (3 of 199, or 1.5%), $\chi^2(1, N = 700) = 12.46, p < .001$. Age categories were not precisely comparable in the two surveys, but it is clear that rough sleepers in Japan were substantially older, with 73% in Nagoya (and 79% in Osaka; Osaka City University, 2000) aged 50 or older, whereas 61% of men and 80% of women in England were 44 or less. Less than a tenth in England (7% of women, 9% of men) but over a quarter in Japan (27% in Nagoya, 34% in Osaka) were 60 or more.

The duration of rough sleeping was far shorter in England than in Japan, with 67% of 421 rough sleepers reporting that the period of current rough sleeping was less than 1 year compared to 39% of 196 in Japan, $\chi^2(1, N = 617) = 42.91, p < .001$. Indeed, 38% of respondents in Nagoya had been sleeping rough for 3 years or more at the time of the interview.

Employment Status and Sources of Income

Table 1 shows the employment status of rough sleepers in England and Japan. A fifth of rough sleepers in Japan reported that they were employed, but presumably they did not make enough to be able to afford accommodations. A much smaller percentage in England reported working, but half of the remainder said that they were looking for work (unfortunately there was no question in the Japanese survey assessing intention to find work, rather the response items were employed, unemployed and not looking for work and long-term sick or disabled). Comparable proportions of rough sleepers in the two countries reported sickness or disability.

Table 2 shows respondents' sources of income. Rough sleepers in England could report more than one source of income, but those in Japan were asked for their primary source. Given the differences in rates of employment just shown, it is

Table 1. Percentage of Rough Sleepers in England and Nagoya by Employment Status

| Status | England ($n = 499$) | Nagoya ($n = 199$) |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| In paid work | 7 | 21 |
| Unemployed and looking for work | 47 | – |
| Unemployed and not looking for work | 25 | 25 |
| Long-term sick and disabled | 14 | 16 |
| Retired | 3 | – |
| Other | 5 | – |

Note. The Nagoya survey omitted several items. The long-term sick and disabled category in Nagoya include the aged.

Table 2. Percentage of Rough Sleepers in England and Nagoya by Source of Income

| Source | England (<i>n</i> = 499) | Nagoya (<i>n</i> = 197) |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Wage /salary | 6 | 21 |
| Unemployment benefit | 7 | 1 |
| Income support | 40 | – |
| Other state benefit | 16 | 2 |
| Asking people in the street | 20 | – |
| Scavenger | – | 36 |
| Busking | 3 | – |
| Other sources | 7 | 10 |
| No income | 21 | 31 |

Note. Percentages add up to more than 100% because some respondents in England received income from more than one source and due to rounding error.

not surprising that Japanese rough sleepers were more likely to report income from employment; an additional 31% reported scavenging for pieces of cardboard or empty cans to sell. At the time of the study, 1 kg of aluminum cans sold for \$0.50, so it was very difficult for rough sleepers to support themselves by scavenging. Strikingly, 63% of rough sleepers in England, but only 3% in Japan, received some form of income from the state (unemployment benefits, income support, or other state benefits), reflecting the substantial differences in the welfare state. In the absence of such benefits, nearly a third of Japanese rough sleepers, compared to a fifth of those in England, reported no income at all. A fifth of rough sleepers in England reported asking people in the street for money. Begging in Japan is so unusual that the committee designing the questionnaire did not include a question on this topic.

Most Recent Accommodation of Rough Sleepers and Reasons for Leaving Last Home

Table 3 shows the most recent accommodation reported by respondents in the two countries. “Tied” accommodations, rented to employees by their employers, were reported by over two-fifths of respondents in Japan, but were rare in England. Respondents in England were more likely to have lived in their own or a rented home and to have stayed with relatives and friends than respondents in Japan. A seventh to an eighth of respondents in the two countries had last stayed in temporary accommodations, such as flophouses; institutions were rare in both countries. Note that the options of a squat or never having had a home were not asked in Japan.

Reasons rough sleepers gave for leaving their last home also varied between countries, as shown in Table 4. Three quarters of respondents in Japan cited employment-related reasons such as unemployment or the disappearance of day-labor jobs. Employees who lived in tied accommodations, such as dormitories or housing for construction workers, became homeless when they lost the jobs

Table 3. Percentage of Rough Sleepers in England and Nagoya by Most Recent Accommodation

| Accommodation | England (<i>n</i> = 507) | Nagoya (<i>n</i> = 199) |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Home | 37 | 26 |
| Friend/relative home | 29 | 5 |
| Tied accommodation | 2 | 43 |
| Temporary accommodation | 12 | 15 |
| Institution | 3 | 3 |
| Other | 4 | 7 |
| Squat | 4 | – |
| Never had a home | 8 | – |
| Missing data | 2 | 2 |

Note. The Nagoya survey omitted several items. Percentages do not add up to 100% due to rounding error.

Table 4. Percentage of Rough Sleepers in England and Nagoya by Reasons for Leaving Last Home

| Reason | England (<i>n</i> = 442) | Nagoya (<i>n</i> = 181) |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Family/relationship reasons | 32 | 5 |
| Accommodation-related reasons | 22 | 3 |
| Employment-related reasons | 13 | 75 |
| Institutional-related reasons | 4 | – |
| Other specific reasons | 18 | – |
| Other | 14 | 1 |

associated with their housing. In England, family/relationship reasons were reported as the most common single reason cited by rough sleepers for leaving their last home. Accommodation related reasons included problems with rent or housing benefits and eviction. Other specific reasons included harassment or insecurity in accommodation, and alcohol problems.

Discussion

Although this comparison of surveys undertaken in Japan and England is limited by the somewhat different set of response options offered in the two countries, the striking differences that emerged are unlikely to be methodological artifacts. The British data are similar to findings reported in this issue from other European countries and North America; the Japanese data are not. I first discuss some of the reasons for differences between England and Japan in the demographic characteristics of rough sleepers and their sources of income, and then turn to housing issues in more depth.

Possible Reasons For Differences Between Rough Sleepers In England And Japan

Rough sleepers in England appear to be dominated by those in their 40s or younger, whereas in Japan they were dominated by the middle-aged and the

elderly over 50. Young people in England may be more severely affected by the breakdown of relationships with parents, relatives, or friends, as well as economic problems such as unemployment, and political issues such as housing benefits, leading to higher rates of rough sleeping among the young (Fitzpatrick & Clapham, 1999). On the other hand, in Japan young people are better able to obtain jobs in the labor market as low-wage laborers, whereas those over 50 are less likely to be able to find employment at all. The pensioner welfare system covers people 65 years and over, leaving those between 50 and 64 in a void between the labor market and the welfare system, and possibly resulting in them becoming rough sleepers.

The number of female rough sleepers is low in both countries. In the U.K. literature, gender discrimination, domestic violence, and harassment problems are often discussed as possibly contributing to a hidden problem of homelessness for women (see e.g. Neale, 1997; Watson, 1999). In Japan, such issues have not been raised and there remain questions as to why numbers of female rough sleepers are so low. However, there have not been genuine discussions concerning female homelessness in Japan, and certainly harassment and domestic violence exist in Japan, too, with 2,418 reported cases in 1999 (Task Group for Social Support Services, 2000), a likely underestimate. A more recent study in Nagoya, conducted in 2003, found that 3% of rough sleepers were women (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2003), and it is possible that this number is on the rise.

The current period of rough sleeping appears to be shorter in England than in Japan. The duration of rough sleeping can be affected by factors such as availability of accommodation, the environment of rough sleeping (e.g., differences in climate), and support systems for rough sleepers. In Japan, almost all institutions for rough sleepers are located outside of the city center, for example one of the institutions in Nagoya is 10 km from the central Nagoya train station. In addition, in Japan rough sleepers need to pay to stay at one of the public institutions. Inconvenient location and cost can make it more difficult for rough sleepers to find accommodations in Japan, compared with England. Support systems are also minimal. People in Japan who are between 50 and 64 and do not have a job and do not have family on which they can rely may have no choice but to sleep rough. Once someone becomes a rough sleeper, it is easy to stay trapped in this state.

The reported employment status and income sources of rough sleepers also suggest a difference in the social systems. In Japan, over half of rough sleepers were working, a fifth in paid work and over one-third in scavenging, whereas in England less than 10% of rough sleepers were working in any form although half of the rest claimed to be seeking jobs. These high rates of employment and job seeking contrast with the common image that homeless people do not wish to work. The problem remains that even while working, some remain rough sleepers. In Japan, although homeless people had been able to work occasionally, almost all

jobs were day labor with insecure status and unstable income. Furthermore, only 3% of people received benefits and allowances (compared to 63% in England). Unemployment insurance for day laborers in Japan is dependent on the particulars of recent employment. If a person has no job but had worked more than 26 days in the last two months, he/she becomes eligible for benefits. Day laborers who have been unemployed longer than the specified period receive no benefits and may have no choice but to live in public spaces such as roads or parks. Only people who have a mental or physical illness, are elderly, or have disabilities can get welfare provisions, and those with no fixed abode receive only limited support. It is recognized that the number of applicants for disability benefits is quite low in Japan (Oono, 1988). The poor Japanese social security system forces people to work and sleep in the rough.

Rough sleepers engage in begging in the streets in the U.K. and the collection of empty cans and cardboard in Japan (begging is virtually unheard of in Japan, whereas scavenging is rarer in the U.K.). The different approaches to securing informal income stem from both cultural tradition and legislation. In the U.K., poor people are expected to be supported by the greater society; in Japan, the poor are expected to be supported by family, relatives, or by themselves (Izuhara, 2000). Fitzpatrick and Kennedy (2001) suggest that, in England, in some conditions, begging is seen as deserving or legitimate. The National Assistance Act defines people who deserve to receive assistance as those poor due to circumstances beyond their own control. As such, they can receive money, food, or accommodation from the government (Thane, 2000). With this governmental recognition that their situation is not their fault, some might feel empowered to ask passers-by for money in a public space.

In Japan, begging used to be more common but nowadays it is very rare. One reason may be the economic homogeneity in contemporary society in Japan as indexed by the GINI coefficient, mentioned above. More than four decades ago, this gap was greater in Japan, perhaps leading more of the wealthy to be moved to help the poor they saw on the streets. After the income distribution leveled out (Tachibanaki, 1998), public begging disappeared. The paucity of public benefits in Japan may also lead poor people to feel less right to support from society, and hence reduce begging. Finally, recent laws in Japan forbid begging in public spaces.

Perhaps, the most striking difference between rough sleepers in Japan and England is in their previous accommodations and their reasons for leaving them. In Japan, accommodation tied to employment was very common (43%) and three quarters of respondents cited employment-related reasons as the primary reason for leaving their last home. Loss of a job often directly leads to loss of a home in Japan, whereas reasons for homelessness in England were more varied. I thus turn to a discussion of housing policy in the two countries to explain the stronger link between employment and housing in Japan.

Housing Policy in Japan and U.K.

Housing policy has contributed to homelessness in both the U.K. and Japan, but there are critical differences between the countries in the amount of responsibility that government takes for housing. In the U.K., housing and town planning systems were developed after the industrial revolution. The 19th century, industrialists built houses for their workers. Their motives were not entirely philanthropic: They built their factories cheaply on rural land; as a consequence it was necessary to house the labor force outside the city, and they got a modest return in rents for their investment (Hall, 1992). The World Wars then created a severe housing shortage. In the early post-war years, local authorities undertook most construction of dwellings while private enterprise building began to take off during the 1950s. There has been more construction by private enterprises than by either registered Social Landlords or local authorities in most years since 1959. Total construction over the last 50 years peaked in 1968, when 226,000 dwellings were built by private enterprises and a further 200,000 by the remaining public sectors. Since the early 1990s, the local authority house-building program has been minimal (Office for National Statistics, 2001).

Housing-related factors that contribute to rates of homelessness in the U.K. include changes in availability of public housing and the concentration of the population in London. A rapid decrease in available public housing resulted when tenants were given the “right to buy” their publicly supported housing. From 1980 to 1998, a cumulative total of 1,857,629 public housing units were purchased by tenants (Wilcox, 2000). This phenomenon brought two problems: First, some people who could not actually afford houses chose to buy anyway and became homeless when they defaulted on their mortgages. Second, the purchase of social housing resulted in a shortage of low-income rental units. As a consequence, homeless households in temporary accommodation, or shelter, in Great Britain increased rapidly during the 1980s and peaked in 1992 at nearly 68,000 (Office for National Statistics, 2001). The concentration of the population in the London area has left many vacant council houses in the provinces, and contributed to a lack of affordable housing in the London area.

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 it has played a minor role in the building of housing since the 1860s. A White Paper on Construction (2000) mentioned that over the years 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. Local governments subsidize construction companies and suppliers, but provide little support for the residents themselves. Such measures by local authorities have been described as insufficient for residents and haphazard

(Van Vliet & Hirayama, 1994). The government expects most people to find their own housing. There is only a very small amount of public welfare housing—and no government guarantee—for people who are elderly, disabled, or otherwise unable to get housing in the housing market. Low-quality and low-rent private housing, rather than public housing, has provided accommodation for low-income people (Hirayama, 2000).

The phenomenon of company housing in Japan is particularly salient. 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 the people's housing (Donnison & Hoshino, 1988). In the 1990s, no one who was newly employed in a large urban area, especially Tokyo, could afford to live close enough to commute, so large companies constructed or leased houses as company houses. Though much more common than public housing in Japan, company housing is thought of as a springboard to home ownership, and in many cases there is a restriction on the length of stay. Such housing leaves low-income workers vulnerable to homelessness if they lose their jobs.

Substandard housing remains a problem in Japan. Although there has been substantial investment in housing, with the average dwelling having been built within the past 30 years, this investment has not necessarily improved the standard of housing. The minimum housing standard was established in 1975 by the Ministry of Construction but, in 1998, 5.1% of general households were still under the minimum standard. According to Hayakawa (1990), the high investment in housing has been fueled by the demolition of houses for the construction of commercial facilities and office buildings, and as a result the lowest quality housing remains unaffected.

Homeless Policy in Japan

This section will discuss how recent policy in Japan has attempted to tackle the problems of homelessness and rough sleepers. The central government first established a contact committee for rough sleepers (including the Minister of Labor, the Minister of Construction, the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the mayors of the five largest cities) in February 1999, and began to examine possible emergency measures. The present policy, proposed in May 1999, and implemented in 2002, addresses three types of rough sleepers (Fukuhara, 1999). The first type includes those who have the will to work but do not work because they cannot find employment. The second type includes those who need medical or welfare support due to alcohol dependence, mental or physical illness, old age, or some other disability. The third type includes those who refuse socialization. The contemporary homelessness policy in Japan mainly involves employment support for rough sleepers and welfare measures for those who are unable to work due to disability. The latter are eligible for support in institutions. The government has very recently begun to

build self-help centers, which provide accommodation for rough sleepers for up to 6 months.

For the most part, government provides only the information about recruitment and consultation for job seekers. Tokyo and Osaka (Japan's two largest cities) are exceptions in that they have implemented clean environment projects to employ at least some of the homeless and, in turn, support their lives. Local authorities that have many rough sleepers in their area sometimes provide temporary shelters between the end of December and beginning of January (when the weather is cold and the annual cycle for hiring in many jobs is slow). However, the capacity of these shelters tends to be insufficient for the number of rough sleepers. Shelters are sometimes located far from the city center and the rough sleepers must share rooms, restricting their privacy, and adhere to various other strict rules.

Various non-profit organizations have also begun to provide services for homeless people. 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 people threatened with homelessness, and support self-help. The Support System is composed of an anti-unemployment contact society, welfare organizations, neighborhood associations, and academics. Some non-profit organizations offer soup runs, accommodation, and health consultation. Others, following the recommendation of the contact committee for rough sleepers, seek to promote self-help (Matsushige, 1999). General welfare support remains low. However, the increase in homelessness, along with indicators such as bankruptcy, job-hopping, and domestic violence, mentioned earlier, suggests that broader social welfare policies are needed.

Interpretations of the reasons for the increase of rough sleepers in Japan are divided into those focusing on the problematic situation in the *Yoseba* and those focused on newer urban problems. Okamoto (2000) contrasted two types of rough sleepers in Nagoya, based on their geographical location. Those found in the *Yoseba* or its outskirts were mostly day laborers in construction. Those found elsewhere had held jobs that were not based on the *Yoseba* but became homeless due to unemployment and isolation. The former rough sleepers stayed in the *Yoseba* area, however, their increasing numbers have made them more visible. The latter rough sleepers who sleep in streets or parks are the type the Tokyo metropolitan government calls the "new urban problem." Both groups would benefit from improving existing welfare provisions.

Comparisons of Policies in the U.K. and Japan: Lessons Learned

The homelessness law in Japan was passed in 2002, whereas the Homeless Persons Act in the U.K. was established in 1977, after discussions about it began in the 1960s. There is about a 25-year difference between the U.K. and Japan in the development of a serious homeless policy. The policies also reflect broader national

differences in social security systems, housing policy, social policy, and social structure. The aim of homelessness provisions is to integrate homeless people into main-stream society in the U.K. and into enterprise society in Japan. But, it may be possible for the two nations to learn from one another.

In Japan, attempts to address homelessness have often been discussed from the viewpoint of economics, especially employment issues. Efforts involve sorting people into those who can and cannot work, encouraging self-help to work for the former, and supporting the latter, but there is little assistance for rough sleepers who are unemployed due to socio-economic reasons. More recently, the discourse has been changing to emphasize welfare and housing measures, in part due to the age of the homeless and in part due to their seemingly ever-increasing numbers. However, government policies have not changed, and discrimination and prejudice against people without a fixed abode continues to impede improvements in services for them. Indeed, in recent years, youngsters have attacked and abused rough sleepers, for example, by throwing a rough sleeper into a river, setting fire to their property, and even killing them (Fujii & Tamaki, 2003). The very limited supply of public housing, and the difficulty that unemployed people have in securing housing in the private market, suggests the need for broader welfare measures. The elderly and those who are made redundant should be supported by a secure social security system. Society should provide accommodation with various supporting services for homeless people to live in neighborhoods by themselves. If Japan continues to respond only to market economics, over time, this approach might bring levels of homeless in Japan to the much higher rates seen in the U.K.

The U.K. has not enjoyed the relative income equality and lifetime employment benefits that may have protected Japan from higher rates of homelessness in the past. Rather, its social security is designed to support jobless people. Local government is required by law to provide accommodation and other support for homeless people so that unemployment does not necessarily mean losing accommodation. Also, preventive and strategic homeless provisions have recently been developed. Consequently, the number of rough sleepers in the U.K. appears to be decreasing (see Anderson, 2007). However, the overall rate of homelessness in the U.K. may still be higher than many other European nations (see Toro et al., 2007). As the U.K. moves to reduce its welfare system, it should reflect on the problems created by lack of welfare supports in Japan.

According to Miyamoto (1998), in Japan the public is seen as the governor, rather than individual citizens. All private rights are supposed to conform to the public welfare. For example, there are many evictions of homeless people from public spaces such as parks in Japan, and local governments have said that parks are for local people, not for rough sleepers, even though the rough sleepers are also mostly local people.

Japan needs to live up to its constitutional guarantee of a minimum standard of living for its citizens, and to acknowledge fundamental human rights in order to

solve its problem of homelessness. Without this acknowledgement, the situation may continue to worsen, and may eventually even surpass other countries in its seriousness.

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