

SURVIVAL STRATEGIES OF HOMELESS MEN: HOME, SCAVENGING, WORK, AND
WELFARE IN TOKYO, JAPAN

By

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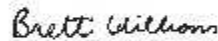
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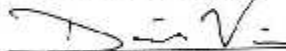
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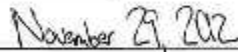
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To Akiko, Masato, and May and the men who welcomed me into their lives

In Loving Memory

Joel Henry Wickens

July 9, 1941-June 27, 2011

SURVIVAL STRATEGIES OF HOMELESS MEN: HOME, SCAVENGING, WORK, AND WELFARE IN TOKYO, JAPAN

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Matthew Henry Wickens

This dissertation is a story of men dealing with the challenges of poverty and homelessness in Tokyo, Japan. The homeless men I describe are mostly over fifty and face a daily struggle to secure the necessities of life. They live a few blocks from department stores selling luxury goods, which is ironic as Japan promoted itself as a classless society without poverty before the recession of 2008. This dissertation details how many men are resourceful and use a variety of strategies to survive and shows how Japanese society values older men who do not work.

The dissertation revolves around the lives of the men in and around Ueno Park and focuses on two things: their homes, past and current, and their survival strategies. Discussing their homes includes how they became homeless and their relationship with their family. By home, I mean examining their current life in Ueno Park including how they built their home in the park. I discuss their relationships with their neighbors, fellow homeless men, and the authorities in the park. The hardships that many men experience, including health problems, facing death, loneliness, violence, and difficulties getting along with others show the difficulties in their lives.

Survival strategies are crucial for homeless men. Their strategies include scavenging for aluminum cans, newspapers, magazines, cardboard, or copper wires; working a variety of jobs including those provided by welfare centers, a friend, or a coworker; and attending soup lines or applying for welfare. Since many of these strategies provide money, I examine common patterns

of managing money. Some of the issues regarding money management that arose were not saving, living for the day, gambling, and living very frugally.

Finally, the dissertation concludes by offering ideas for further research and policy recommendations for the Japanese government to improve the men's lives. I make several suggestions including the Ministry Health, Labour, and Welfare doing a better job of providing welfare for homeless men, giving them postcards so they can contact their families, and giving the men cash. Additionally, I propose a governmental agency to coordinate the various soup lines.

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My committee made my dissertation much stronger. I am grateful to Dr. Geoff Burkhardt for serving on my committee and offering comments that helped me to see the forest through the trees. His comments made the dissertation much stronger and I am grateful for his kindness. I thank Dr. David Vine for his encouragement and insights into homelessness and Japan that immensely improved the dissertation. I will remember his kindness, enthusiasm, and spirit long after I have graduated. I could not ask for a better adviser, Dr. Brett Williams. She asked questions and offered insights that pushed me to think and write a better dissertation. Her patience and unfailing support helped me when I struggled. Her comments always made me smile.

My family provided support. I am grateful for my late father reading a preliminary draft of a chapter and his encouragement and guidance throughout my education. I am indebted to my mother for introducing me to soup kitchens and food banks as a teenager. My brother and sister

pushed me to finish as only siblings can. I acknowledge my paternal grandmother for inspiring me with a sense of social justice and my maternal grandmother for showing me how to ask pertinent questions.

My in-laws in Japan offered extensive help for a project that was difficult to understand. My mother-in-law always pushed me to gather more data and made sure I never missed a newspaper article about homelessness. She often asked insightful questions about my research. My father-in-law let us stay with them. Without his hospitality, this research would not have happened. His generosity is very much appreciated. Finally, I owe tremendous debt to my wife, Akiko, for her support and patience throughout this project. Without her, I would not have finished. She answered many questions and offered insight into Japanese culture. Her encouragement helped me to complete the dissertation. I appreciate her sacrifices. Our children were born while I was conducting research and writing. Their presence helped me to think and write better. Their birth exponentially increased my empathy for homeless men, especially those men separated from their children.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1.	Guide to Ueno Imperial Park	8
2.	Map of Northeast Tokyo	12

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	Error! Bookmark not defined.ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2 “THINGS HAPPENED SO I LEFT HOME:” HOW MEN BECOME HOMELESS AND THEIR HOME IN UENO PARK	44
CHAPTER 3 “I HAVE MANY THINGS TO FORGET: LIFE HAS CHANGED COMPLETELY:” THE DAILY STUGGLES OF HOMELESS MEN.....	77
CHAPTER 4 “I CANNOT EAT IF I DON’T SELL ALUMIUM CANS:” GATHERING AND SELLING RECYCLABLES TO EARN MONEY	110
CHAPTER 5 “THAT’S WHY I’M HERE:” WORK, GAMBLING, AND MONEY	135
CHAPTER 6 “FOLLOW THE LAW”: WELFARE AND SOUPLINES	161
CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION.....	194
REFERENCES	213

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I stood on the side of the road talking to Otani-san,¹ a sixty-six year old homeless man who collects and sells aluminum cans for a living. After he finished telling me that he gave his social security money to his daughter so she could buy a house, I asked about his plans when he is older. Describing his future, he pointed to the curb about three feet from us, where he often took a nap, and said he will die sleeping there.

This story is about men like Otani-san. It is a story of their survival and neglect. This dissertation describes their homes, both past and current, their lives, and their endurance on the street. It is about making a living when you do not have a home. It asks how homeless men survive. This dissertation seeks to answer two important questions about homeless men: first, how do they become homeless and why do they decide not to return to their natal, marital, adult, or sibling's home, and second, once they are on the street or in the park, how do they survive?

Before discussing the men and how they survive, a note on terminology is necessary. Throughout the dissertation, I refer to the men as homeless. Many men referred to themselves as homeless, although they did not mean they do not have a home. Rather, they meant the life they are living, attending soup lines, scavenging for cans, working odd jobs, and sleeping in the park. A few men had homes outside the park and others considered their tent in the park their home. Since the men described their lives as homeless, I use that word, although scavengers, day laborers, or park residents may be more accurate.

With little support, few work opportunities work, and almost no savings, homeless men in Tokyo use several methods to get by economically and physically. These methods include

¹ Otani is a pseudonym. Because many homeless men use a pseudonym among themselves and at the various soup kitchens they attend, often times I did not know their name.

gathering and selling aluminum cans and other recyclables, attending soup lines, participating in workfare jobs, working occasionally as day laborers, searching for anything of value in public parks and roads and exchanging goods with a network of friends and other homeless men. They had a variety of reasons for choosing a particular method of survival including their need for privacy, their ambitions, and their health. Trying to make more money, some men tried new strategies and later returned to old strategies. Finally, government policies and the economy affect the success of their choice. The hardship conditions under which the men work became worse as the Japanese economy experienced a severe recession in autumn 2008. The harsh economic conditions severely tested homeless men's ability to make ends meet.

Beginnings

The roots of this dissertation began when I volunteered at a soup kitchen in York, Pennsylvania as a teenager. Homelessness in York surprised me as it is a small city and because rural life obscures homelessness. I felt strong empathy upon seeing the hungry men, women, and children and was excited to help. The men and women who came in for a hot meal raised questions. Where do they live? How do they get by from day to day? Do they have families? Why are they here?

Years later while living in Tokyo, I further developed my desire to understand homelessness and the class differences and poverty it reflects. Two details about homelessness in Tokyo intrigued me. First, some homeless men congregated near large train stations, sometimes selling used magazines and comic books, but no one panhandled or asked for money. Second, the amount of wealth in the city amazed me, particularly when contrasted with the plight of the

city's homeless men and women. Many people carried and displayed symbols of wealth especially Coach, Louis Vuitton, Prada, and Hermes bags and wallets. I found the presence of such displays of wealth adjacent to homelessness astonishing in a society that believed it was classless. These observations and experiences raised questions: why do so few homeless men panhandle, how is wealth distributed in Japan, and what are homeless men's relationships with their families?

My experience living in Tokyo helped prepare me for conducting research. I lived in Tokyo for three and a half years from December 1999 to July 2003. During this time, I intensively studied Japanese for two six-month periods. I also helped start the Taito Ward Food Pantry by participating in planning meetings, helping with some of the first soup lines, which were little more than two people distributing food to homeless men, and organizing a fundraiser.

To answer my questions about homelessness in Tokyo, I conducted fieldwork among the homeless in Tokyo, specifically in Ueno Park and the surrounding area. Upon entering Ueno Park in March of 2008, I looked for familiar faces from my preliminary research in the summer of 2005 with mixed feelings because finding a familiar face meant the homeless man had spent two and a half years in the park but it would make my entry into the community smooth. I saw Yamada-san. He remembered me and greeted me with a big smile and a look of surprise. From this reacquainting, my research began. Yamada-san introduced me to others. Then on my own I met homeless men throughout the park and in Sanya, a neighborhood that changed from a *yoseba* (day laboring district) to a welfare neighborhood with many men who can no longer find work as day laborers.

My second entry into the research area was at Sanya Workers Association.² I greeted the social worker in charge as he was finishing his dinner. They serve a hot dinner to about thirty homeless men and women. I told him a colleague had conducted research in Sanya, and that I would like to help them and do research. He welcomed me and assigned me to pour tea downstairs. After spending the evening occasionally pouring small cups of hot green tea to the men waiting for a referral or hanging out, he said I was welcome to come back any time. I joined them for the Monday and Friday *pachōru* (patrol), a Japanese loan word from the English word patrol. In this context, it means holding their soup kitchen in a nearby park followed by distributing *bentō* boxes and checking on nearby homeless men.

A conversation I struck up with Ishi-san facilitated my final entry into the community. As he stood along the edge of the Tent Village, I introduced myself and we talked. Tent Village is my name for a community of twenty tents and carts behind the park office and hidden from view by some large trees. I spoke to all twenty men and one woman who live there, but no one ever referred to Tent Village with a name. Many of the men in Tent Village actually do not have permanent tents, but they keep their carts there and move them somewhere else in the park in the evening to set up their bedding and in some cases a tent. Four months later, after I visited Ishi-san in the hospital, the other members of his group sincerely thanked me because they could not visit him. While I visited Hara-san to answer research questions about his family and out of concern for his health, it had the added benefit of greatly helping me become part of the small group of men in Tent Village who were his friends.

Otani-san and Ishi-san reflect the demographics of Tokyo's homeless. Because very few women become homeless, nearly all the homeless are men and my research focuses on them. The welfare system prevents women from becoming homeless. Kitagawa explains that the

² This is a pseudonym.

“demographic imbalance only means the welfare systems have more options available for women in dire poverty, such as protection through the Anti-Prostitution Act and the Child Protection Scheme” (2008, 213). According to the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare the number of people experiencing homelessness is growing and more than twenty-five thousand people are currently homeless in Japan (Hasegawa 2006). There are about six thousand homeless people scattered throughout greater Tokyo (Kennett and Iwata 2003), and several hundred gather in Ueno Park. The demographics of the homeless in Tokyo show that they are predominantly men in their fifties who have completed required education, which for Japan means junior high school (White 2002; Bernstein 1983; Kennett and Iwata 2003). The homeless are over ninety-seven percent male, roughly half are in their fifties, and over half are junior high school graduates who never married (Iwata 2003).

Becoming homeless usually begins in two places, work and home. Some men have a fight with their relatives, either their wife, siblings, or parents and leave their home. Many of the homeless worked as day laborers. Once day laborer recruiters decided they were too old to work, they could not find work. Without work and little or no savings, if they chose not to return home, they became homeless. Many men often spent time having fun with their friends and spending whatever savings they had from work before coming to the park. Their savings may have been small because prior to becoming homeless they faced declining wages. Gill has pointed out that when working as a day laborer, wages and work opportunities decrease as one gets older, contrary to most types of work (2003). Many homeless men have ailments from their hard life as day laborers that result in their life expectancy being twenty years below the national average (Gill 2001). According to the World Bank, the national is 79.3 for men (2012).

While ignoring the demographic research about homelessness, the media in Japan typically portrays them in several ways, including as men with mental illness, temporarily displaced factory workers, or men with homes who for some unexplained reason enjoy being homeless. My research indicates that there is some truth to these explanations, but the context is crucial. While some men own homes, usually other family members are living in them and they chose not to return or their family members have asked them not to live there. These severed relationships contribute to some men becoming or staying homeless. Since they lack the wealth to rent an apartment, which usually requires several months' rent upfront in various fees, they became homeless.

Many of the homeless men I knew were well aware of why they are homeless. Ishi-san, for example, explained, "I used to bet a lot before I came here (Ueno Park) and that's why I'm here." He never mentioned any children and talked about his siblings, nieces, and nephews. When I asked about horseracing, his face lit up and he became talkative. Matsuo-san also had thought about why he was homeless. When I asked if he contacted his siblings or relatives, he explained, "It is my responsibility that I am homeless, not theirs. No one would think it is right for me to get help when I spent all my money at the track."

I spent a year, from March 2008 to February 2009, conducting research among homeless men in northeast Tokyo, specifically Ueno, Sanya, and Asakusa. I continued to visit homeless men occasionally throughout 2009. This research took place at the end of a twenty-year period of stagnant economic growth from the early 1990s. From March to October of 2008, the economy had sluggish growth and experienced a terrible recession during the fall of 2008 and the winter of 2009. The recession had a significant impact on the homeless men in Ueno and Tokyo.

Research Setting

My research site, Ueno, has a large national park at its center. I chose Ueno Imperial Park, hereafter Ueno Park as it is commonly known, because I became friends with some homeless men living there during preliminary research in 2005. Ueno Park is large, over 133 acres. The grounds contain several museums, a concert hall, a zoo, a temple, a shrine, concession stands, small restaurants, a large pond, an outdoor concert hall, a large fountain, and two police boxes. Various groups usually representing rural towns and distant prefectures hold festivals where they sell local products and foods in the area in front of the large fountain. Churches host *takidashi* (soup lines) in the open area behind the fountain towards the back of the park on Tuesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. On weekdays, especially Mondays, when the zoo is closed, few people come to the park, but the park becomes crowded on weekends with families going to the zoo, couples on dates, and friends visiting museums. During rush hour, commuters walk through the park and in the afternoon picnickers enjoy eating outdoors. Weekdays, midmornings and early afternoons are the quietest times in the park.

The map on the next page, Illustration 1 Guide to Ueno Imperial Park, shows Ueno Park and highlights some of the key areas discussed in the dissertation including *takidashi* (soup lines) areas, Tent Village, Suzuki-san's area, can-buying areas, and the area in front of the cultural hall where men from tent village who do not have tents sleep. Tomita-san and a few other men slept there too.

Illustration 1. Guide to Ueno Imperial Park

The University
of Tokyo

Nippori・Yanaka



Throughout my preliminary research in 2005, many homeless men lived in blue tents they built, but by 2008 when I began my research many of these men had moved due to the success of a city-run program. Tokyo city began the dramatic change of removing many men from the park during my preliminary fieldwork with a program offering housing for three thousand yen (\$30)³ a month to homeless individuals for two years.⁴ If the program had the goal of removing many homeless men from the park, then it was successful. The image of the park changed radically. Before visible blue tarps made into tents lined every large open land in the park and now there were only a few tents next to the amusement park and in behind the park office. A scholar at a conference session on Japan asked almost rhetorically where did all the homeless go. The difference in the number of homeless men in the park before and after this program is significant. However, even with the park's appearance changing significantly, still over 500 men come from the surrounding areas and greater Tokyo. The program succeeded in transforming the park and removing homeless men, but it ended and more people became homeless. Some homeless men reported a rumor of some men in the program committee suicide and someone finding them in the apartment after a long time had passed. These men expressed fear at being found alone after dying and lamented how shameful it would be.

While many men moved out of the park, several small groups of homeless men and a couple of women continued to live in the park. I spent time with most of these groups. While a few men had permanent tents, the majority did not. Men without a permanent tent kept all their belongings on a cart and had to set up a tent each night. Their tent was not a camping tent, but

³ The exchange rate for 2008 was 103.39 yen to the dollar.

⁴ See Matsubara 2004 for more information on this program.

some cardboard placed on the ground with their futon and bedding placed on top. They would use a blue tarp to provide privacy and protection from the elements as it functioned as a roof.

As I followed the day-to-day lives of the men, my research area expanded beyond the park. Similar to the homeless that Wolch and Rowe interviewed, homeless men in Tokyo often use “mobility paths” to meet their basic needs (1992). My research site expanded to include the paths that they followed and their networks of fellow homeless men living in other parts of the city. These networks provided an important resource for exchanging information such as where and when a soup line takes place.

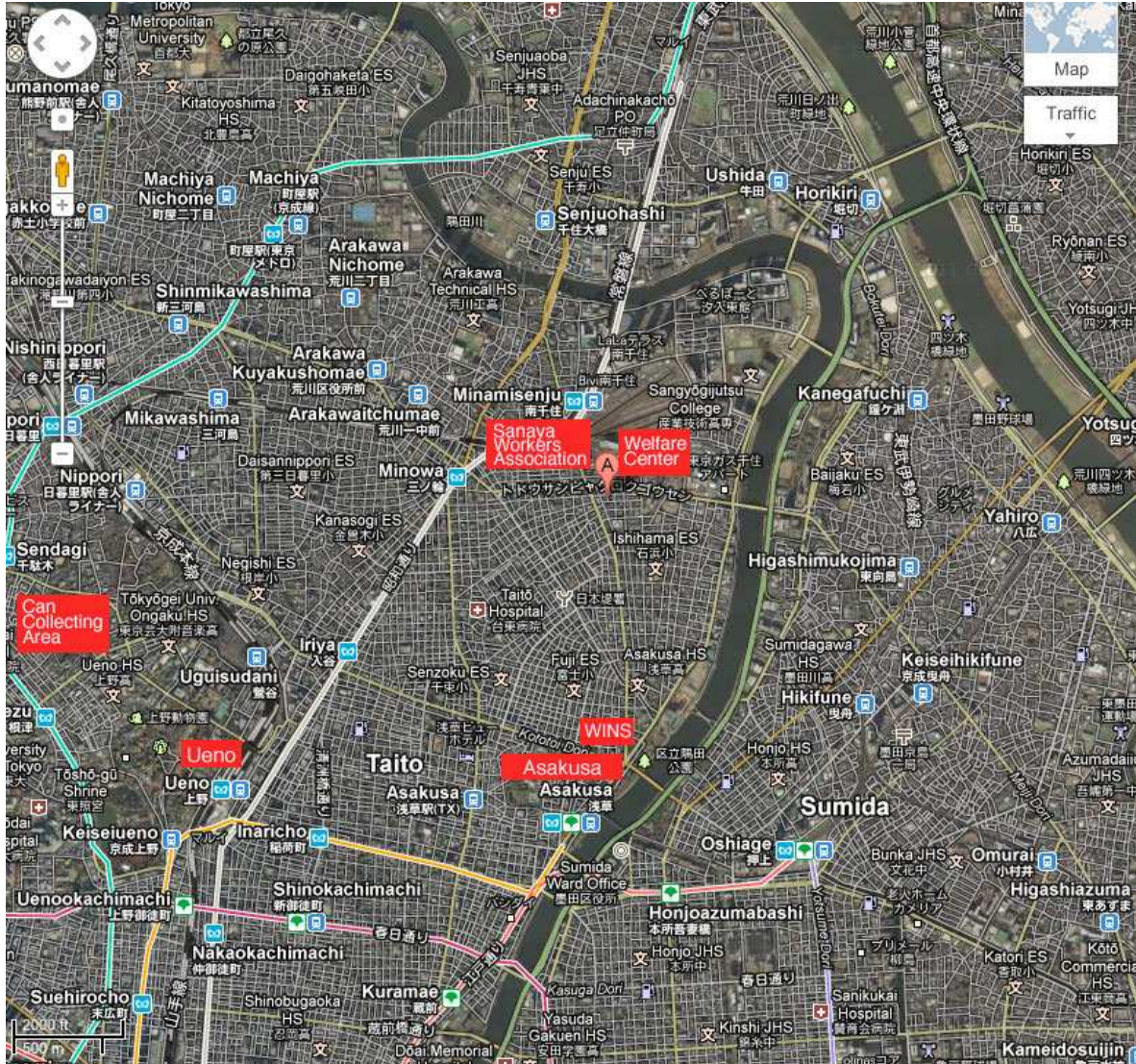
To encompass these paths, I included several areas close to the park in my research site including the two train stations adjacent to the park both named Ueno station, but run by two different railway companies. The underground passage and the stations provided shelter during heavy rain and snow for the men. Since the bridge connecting the park and the large train station was sunny, several homeless men used it to stay warm. A block from the station was Ameiyoko, a long shopping district with several restaurants, clothing shops, and vendors selling fresh meat, vegetables, fish, and fruit. These shops and restaurants sometimes gave unsold food such as sushi or bread and recyclables like aluminum cans or cardboard to homeless men.

Beyond Ueno Park, two neighborhoods, each a forty-minute walk from the park, became part of my research site. I included Asakusa, a traditional neighborhood, as part of my research, because homeless men went there to attend various soup kitchens, to place small bets at the Off-Track Betting, OTB, facility in Asakusa, and to collect aluminum cans in the neighborhoods between Ueno and Asakusa. Some homeless men lived in Asakusa in a long, narrow park next to the Sumida River and slept beneath stores’ canopies at night.

Northeast and next to Asakusa is Sanya. The area has several nonprofit agencies in Sanya, including Sanya Workers Association, a nonprofit agency well respected by the homeless that distributes clothing three times a week and provides referrals to a local hospital. They have two soup kitchens on Monday and Friday in a nearby park. I volunteered at Sanya Workers Association in 2005 and again during my research.

The map on the next page, Illustration 2 Map of Northeast Tokyo, shows where the men spent time including Sanya Workers Association for medical help, Asakusa to attend *takidashi*, WINS the name of Japan Racing Association OTB, the welfare center, and aluminum can-gathering areas including Asakusa and one northwest of Ueno. Another gathering area is actually off the map.

Illustration 2. Map of Northeast Tokyo



Ueno Park

The park was an ideal place to examine how homeless men survive and ask about their families for several reasons. First, on Saturdays the people at the park demonstrates class differences with middle class families going to the zoo, retirees and young women going to the museums, couples dating, and several hundred homeless men lining up for two different soup

lines. Seeing families in the park raised questions about the relationship the homeless have with their families and watching happy families going to the zoo provided an opportunity to ask questions about their families. Second, when I began my fieldwork I immediately noticed that many of the blue tarp tents I observed in 2005 were gone. I wanted to know where they went, and more importantly, why these homeless men had stayed, how they survived, and what prevented them from enrolling in welfare programs.

Beyond the park, the history of Ueno symbolizes the westernization of Tokyo as it became associated with a place to host expositions and to visit museums (Seidensticker 1983). The area from Ueno to Asakusa was mostly temples and their land until the government established Ueno Park in 1873 (Seidensticker 1983). Ueno Park had the first zoo, art museum, and electronic trolley, and the government officially called it Ueno Royal Park (Seidensticker 1983). Historically, Ueno station was an important access point for many Tokyo railways and it was especially important as the terminal station for many trains from the northern rural Tohoku region (Cybriwsky 1998). Sorensen describes Ueno as one of “Japan’s most enduring central city entertainment and shopping districts” (2002, 2). Cybriwsky found that the passengers at Ueno station include “disproportionate numbers of job seekers in the city” (1998; 173). In chapter two, I hope to show how this pattern continues.

While Ueno Park was the center of my research area, I also included Sanya, discussed earlier, and Asakusa, a historic site that attracts many tourists. Ueno Park and Asakusa share similar traits in their history and it is not surprising that homeless men commute between the two areas for soup lines, gambling, and socializing. Seidensticker quotes a poet comparing Ueno and Asakusa, “Ueno is for the eyes, a park with a view. Asakusa is for the mouth, a park for eating and drinking” (1983, 119). The 1920s saw both areas develop with plazas, which symbolized

Japan's change from river-based transportation to land-based transportation (Jinnai 1995). Asakusa focuses on entertainment and dining while Ueno's core interest lies in education (Seidensticker 1983). Ueno and Asakusa are both considered *shitamachi*, which Bestor defines as, "the part of central Tokyo that traces its social ancestry - real or imagined - to the merchant neighborhoods of the preindustrial city" (2004). These areas are the heart of old Tokyo, and tend to have strong communities.

Research Question

I intended to research the intersection of debt and family relationships among the homeless, but early in my fieldwork I discovered that these topics were sensitive and men would not discuss them. This issue became clear after asking Yamada-san, a homeless man I knew well, about his past, his family, and debts. He always told me the same answer, "Various things happened that led me here." His vague response was typical of those homeless men who zealously guarded their privacy. I continued to pursue these questions, but men consistently refused to discuss their debts, if any. I had more success asking about their families, and some homeless men talked about their relationship with their family.

Because their relationship with their family and their debts, if any, were off-limits, I expanded my research questions. While continuing to learn about their relationships with their families, I explored broadly and deeply their survival strategies. I asked: how do homeless men in Tokyo make a living? What do they do to ensure that they have food to eat, a place to sleep, clothing, the essentials for life? What is their daily routine? What are their lives like? Where do

they sleep? How do they obtain food? Do they work? What kinds of relationships do they have with their friends and family? Do they contact them?

Since many men rarely, if ever, contacted their family, they relied on soup kitchens and their network of homeless friends and acquaintances for help. For men who work, attending soup kitchens stretches their money, and for the few men who do not work, soup kitchens provide most of their food. Following these networks illuminated how homeless men use their friends and soup kitchens to compensate for a lack of support from their families. For example, homeless men exchange information on where soup lines are, sometimes lend each other money, and often give each other food.

Early in my research while spending time with homeless men, their challenge of finding food and shelter became clear. It was their most significant issue, and easy to notice, because many men's daily routine involved going to work, gathering recyclables or waiting for a *takidashi* (soup line). Since so much of their everyday lives revolved around work or other strategies to get food, shelter, or money, many men were too busy or too exhausted to discuss their past. Others simply would not talk about it, nor would they explain why. Some men described many homeless men as having sensitive or embarrassing stories about becoming homeless. Men talked about their work, which could be a day laboring job or collecting and selling recyclables.

Within this group of homeless men, there are many methods to gather food, earn money, and find shelter. None of the strategies is easy. As I will discuss later, each method involves making sacrifices and difficult choices that reflect their age, health, past, and desire and ability to work. Some men earn as much as twenty to thirty thousand yen a week (\$200-\$300) selling recyclables like aluminum cans, newspapers, and cardboard. Other men chose not to work and

instead scavenge for coins and used cigarette butts. Economic conditions and the information they have about work and welfare limit their options. For example, some homeless men believe that welfare caseworkers contact applicants' families and choose not to apply because they do not want their family to know they are homeless. Welfare officials do contact family members in many cases (Nagata, Kiyokawa, and Iwata 2008).

Beyond their survival strategies, my experience with homeless men in Ueno Park and the surrounding neighborhoods highlights two aspects of ethnographic fieldwork. First, spending much time with homeless men created bonds of friendship and compassion. I hope readers see the men I describe as complete individuals, not as a monolithic group, but as a diverse group of individuals with a variety of backgrounds. Second, when learning about their problems such as exhaustion from work, hunger, or that they became homeless because they are sacrificing for their family, my heart broke for them and for the inequality they embody. Finally, I frame their lives within the social and political-economic conditions that create homelessness. I expect that readers will learn and appreciate the hardships that homeless men face and their response to them.

In addition to describing the adversities homeless men have to overcome, I challenge several stereotypes about Japanese society. The Japanese media and government often portrayed Japan as a wealthy, homogeneous society known for close-knit families that respect and care for the elderly. Many Japanese people believe in an ideal that in Japanese society men are secure in their lifelong corporate careers. Therefore, the plight of numerous homeless men in their fifties, sixties, and older challenges many commonly held notions about what it means to be a Japanese man, both to outsiders and to the Japanese. Consequently, this research has significant implications for understanding homelessness, the public misconceptions about the hardships

suffered by homeless Japanese men, and for illuminating larger anthropological and sociological concerns about the role of social networks, families, and work particularly when faced with the is challenge of poverty. I hope that activists and government officials can use this research to alleviate poverty and homelessness.

Friends, relatives, and homeless men often asked me how my research would be beneficial and what my research questions are. I usually answered that I am studying social welfare and comparing homelessness in Japan and the U.S., and this generally satisfied most people. Although I sometimes needed to add more details, many men simply did not believe that I wanted to study their lives. Often their view of themselves reflected society's view of them. In other words, they would ask, "Why would you study something *kudaranai* (trivial and worthless like our lives)?" Kobayashi-san reflected this view. After I told him my wife and son live with her parents, he replied, "No wonder ("You have to live with your in-laws"). All you do is walk around here and do useless research."

The men had two views of my presence in their lives. A small group understood the research process, but most everyone else saw my choice to study them as worthless. The men who understood about the research process frequently asked about my work and in some cases defended it to others. Similar to a teacher checking on a student's progress, Okamoto-san often asked me about my report. He thought my report was due twice a week, but I corrected him and I explained it was due in March at the end of my data collection. He and his friends sometimes asked me to include something in the report such as there is no work or that Ueno is an interesting place. Occasionally, Okamoto-san explained my presence in the park to a new person telling them I am studying social welfare, writing a report, and working hard. His last point legitimized my presence to other men who saw me as unemployed and spending my free time

hanging out with them. Another example of men defending my work occurred when Matsuo-san insisted to Hara-san to tell me the truth because I am writing a book about their lives. These men supported my research and efforts.

Other homeless men, especially those less familiar with research, criticized my choice to study them. The more they learned about my life the less satisfied they were with my decision to spend a year hanging out with them and not working. Some men were surprised to learn that I was married and that my wife lets me spend so much time in the park. They wondered how I supported my wife. My answer—that I had a scholarship and before coming to Japan I had a proper job—generally satisfied them. However, I inadvertently shocked Ishida-san by telling him that I have an infant son. My timing, a cold Tuesday in December during *yamagari*, a monthly cleaning of the park, did not help because many men dislike *yamagari*.

Additionally, this *yamagari* occurred after the economy had crashed and making a living became more difficult. When I told Kobayashi-san about my son, he started his usual rant that it is my fault he cannot make money because the U.S. economy is in a recession and now he does not get much money when he sells cans. He added, “You should get a job and stop playing around every day.” When Ishida-san heard him mention my son, he shook his head in disbelief and admonished me, “You should get a real job immediately.” They both agreed I have to live a serious life now and gave me a stern, harsh lecture about responsibility, like parents to a rebellious teenager. It was clear that they would not listen to any attempt to explain my research, work history, or plans.

Methods

I used participant observation and in-depth interviews to answer my research questions. Some of my daily activities included hanging out on park benches, walking to soup lines, assisting a nonprofit organization with their soup line, helping homeless men gather and crush aluminum cans, and participating in a variety of exchanges. Men often exchanged information about soup lines, food, alcohol, and cigarettes. A typical day might include arriving in the park before eight, talking to men selling aluminum cans or helping men crush cans, chatting with them while they waited for a soup line, talking to men after they have eaten lunch about the church's soup line, and helping men clean up before bed. After seven months of research, my questions expanded as the economy entered a recession to include how the men were adapting to a significant loss of income

My main method, participant observation, often began with an introduction. Yamada-san, a homeless man who became a good friend, and *aibo* (partner, friend) Takayama-san, served as my introduction to their group, which gave me confidence to reach out to other groups. They helped me gain access to other homeless men in their area of the park. Some people asked me directly what I was doing in the park and others learned from a rumor that I was a student or researcher. A few people refused to greet me, but they were unusual. Other times someone wanted to talk about issues like U.S. politics or the history of World War II. Many men expressed concern that their family or debt collectors would find them, so they did not want me to record interviews. Many men even frowned on my taking notes. They protected not only their own privacy but also the privacy of other homeless men. For example, after a middle-aged

woman went to several *takidashi* (soup lines) looking for her husband, a couple of men commented that even if they had seen him they would not say anything.

In addition to the men in Yamada-san's area of the park, I joined two other small communities of homeless men and asked how they survive. First, I introduced myself to a couple of different men around the park. They introduced me to others. For example, Ishi-san, described earlier, was open to a conversation and friendly. He told me about the men in the park and I told him about my time conducting preliminary research in the park in 2005 and my current project.

The next day I saw Matsuo-san, a homeless man in his fifties with four pet cats, and we talked. Because his cats attract people, it was not unusual for him to talk to me. Once he knew about my research, he staunchly defended it. Two months later, when Ishi-san was joking with me, Matsuo-san reprimanded him to be serious and not lie, because I am writing a book about them. I defused the tension by saying I knew Ishi-san was joking.

I had similar self-introductory conversations around the park with two other groups of men. While many of the longtime residents knew journalists and other students who occasionally came to the park, my daily presence lent legitimacy to my fieldwork. Building on these self-introductions gave me four or five small communities to join.

The second area where I conducted participant observation was at a non-profit agency in Sanya, Sanya Workers Association, which served homeless men in Ueno, Sanya, and Asakusa. Sitting on chairs or standing in front of their consultation room on Mondays and Fridays, I spoke to many homeless or formerly homeless men. The men at Sanya Workers Association were especially willing to talk because many of them receive welfare and had told their story to a caseworker or lawyer. Men living in Ueno walked to Sanya Workers Association to receive medicine or to check their blood pressure.

While these areas offered an interesting setting, conducting research among homeless men had several challenges. Because their past was off-limits and they lived in the open, many men would only talk without a tape recorder. Some men permitted me to write notes in a small notebook, but these men usually knew me well. When quotes appear in the dissertation, they are quotes I memorized or wrote down immediately after an interview and are my best recollection of their words, so in some cases the quotes may not be one hundred percent accurate. Another problem with conducting research among the homeless is that men drift away. This happened several times, but sometimes I ran into men later and they would explain why they had moved.

A final challenge was how to participate in their lives. I debated how they would perceive my involvement with any of the organizations that helped them and decided to volunteer with Sanya Workers Association. As most groups holding soup lines are churches, I hesitated to join a church since I did not know how the men perceived them. This turned out to be especially important, because many men had a strong perception of all groups being churches. For example, Taito Ward Food Pantry, a small food pantry, has a weekly soup line and even without a minister preaching and with a sandwich board explaining who they are, many homeless men identified them as either a church or as a group from the U.S. military bases.

Since formal interviews with homeless men, even the men I knew exceptionally well, were impossible, I took copious field notes. Men were happy to talk about their daily lives anytime and after numerous conversations, I learned some of the paths to homelessness and some of their reasons for choosing survival strategies. To have many short conversations required frequent visits to the park and using ethnographic data to find the men. For example, as I learned that Suzuki-san usually begins his route around the large pond at five p.m. I could walk around the pond and find him. Similarly, knowing that Takayama-san, Nishi-san, and Yamada-

san walk around the neighborhood near Higashi Ueno Park looking for aluminum cans on Sunday afternoons, I often walked the neighborhood and ran into them. In short, my knowledge of their lives and schedules helped me create serendipitous situations. I took over eight hundred single spaced pages of field notes that were haphazard bits and pieces of the men's lives, which I sorted to look for patterns. I also collected various documents including notifications from the park office to vacate the park for a certain time, the annual report from Sanya Workers Association about the health of the men, and handouts from the various churches that held soup lines in the park.

Given the sensitive nature of some of the topics I discussed with homeless men, I worked to build rapport and to verify information men shared with me. Otani-san became a great source of information and was open about his life. Still, when possible I checked what he told me. For example, he said he collected cans from a couple of nearby hotels and I later saw him collect their cans.

Ethnographic methods capture a point in time and while the dissertation may read like a static picture, the lives of homeless men are fluid. I hope this dissertation and its data show the lives of homeless men as full and changing. To do this, I expanded my questions and the places I went with homeless men to include visiting them in the hospital, coffee shops for interviews, collecting aluminum cans in neighborhoods and from trashcans throughout the park, and walking with them. While this may sound as if I constantly moved from one activity to the next with homeless men, in reality I spent lots of time with the men sitting on benches or standing around with no purpose, just waiting. Sometimes, this down time was useful for talking with them about their past or asking about what we did. Other times, they did not feel like talking, because they were tired from their work.

A brief note explaining some of the key Japanese phrases that appear in the text and their significance will help the reader understand Japanese culture. The most relevant phrase, *ningen kankei*, is generally translated as dealing with people, but it is really much more. It reflects an accepted belief and expectation that human relationships with acquaintances, neighbors, friends, and family can be problematic. While many homeless men have a history of difficulties of getting along with others, within the framework of Japanese society, it is not unusual to have such trouble. For homeless men, it is the frequency and severity of their troubles that cause problems. A common explanation of the *ningen kankei* phenomena is that Japan's lack of land forces people to work and live in tight spaces making dealing with other people necessary and problematic. An anthropological approach would show that the *uchi/soto* (inside/outside) group thinking reflects and amplifies the difficulty of getting along with other people.

Another insight into Japanese culture can be gleaned by looking at the words used to describe homeless men by Japanese society and the men themselves. These words include wasteful, lazy, disgusting, and pathetic. While the men claimed lazy, wasteful, and pathetic to describe themselves, they knew how society views them. Together these words paint a bleak picture of how many Japanese people views unemployed, dirty men. These words show the strong emphasis on cleanliness and hard work in Japan and a few incidents described below will show how the homeless men challenge and support these attitudes.

Critical Issues

Poverty and homelessness have a long history in Japan (Hane 2003). While most research on homelessness in Japan begins with the 1990s (Aoki 2006; Ezawa 2002; Margolis

2002; Marr 2007), Gill's ethnography of day laborers in Kotobuki-cho, a day laboring district in Yokohama, traces the history of the exploitation of workers to the beginning in the 17th century (2001). The homeless of Japan illuminate the plight of the poor and their lack of rights. Ezawa suggests that they "shed light on the continuities in patterns of inequality, unemployment, and downward mobility, and lack of family or welfare support" (2002, 280). As homelessness is the most glaring public example of poverty, homeless men embody all the issues Ezawa describes.

Homelessness in Japan intertwines with the history of the *yoseba* (day laboring district) as day laborers sometimes experienced periods of homelessness when they could not find work (Gill 2001). Several studies explore the conditions and changes taking place in the *yoseba* (day labor market) (Caldarola 1968; Fowler 1996; Gill 2001; Margolis 2002; Marr 1997; Milly 1999). The *yoseba* refers both to the morning market where day laborers compete for jobs and the neighborhood surrounding the market (Gill 2001). Fowler describes the *yoseba* and the day laborers who gather in the early morning hours to get work assignments, and documents the change during the recession of the early 1990s (1996). He describes the change from 1991 to 1995, "More men than ever cannot find work, and the homeless population, which had numbered in the dozens in and around Sanya, now numbers in the hundreds" (1996). Gill (2001) and Fowler (1996) both show that many day laborers experience periods of homelessness and that the *yoseba* has changed from a day laboring neighborhood to a neighborhood with many welfare facilities and recipients.

As the bubble economy of the 1980s was ending, the day laborers were the first to notice that there were many fewer jobs, and as the recession took hold increasingly, day laborers became homeless for extended periods (Gill 2001). During interviews with longtime members of the Sanya community, a neighborhood known for having a large *yoseba* (day laboring district),

interviewees often commented that the neighborhood had changed. They would point to the increase in welfare recipients and foreign tourists, usually backpackers taking advantage of cheap youth hostels that became popular and well known during the 2002 World Cup hosted jointly by Korea and Japan. In the early 1990s, older men living in blue tent-like structures along riverbanks and in large and small parks throughout Tokyo became noticeable to the public as homelessness left the *yoseba* and society recognized as a social problem (Ezawa 2002).

Once homelessness, men and women have to make ends meet. A pertinent study of survival strategies among the homeless is Dordick's (1997) research on several groups of homeless individuals in New York City. Both her research and the experiences of the people in her study are comparable to the men in Ueno. She conducted research with several groups in different parts of New York City. Dordick also documented the use of drugs and alcohol among homeless individuals in New York (1997). While many homeless men in Tokyo drank to stay warm in the winter and to relax in other seasons, especially summer, unlike Dordick, I never saw or heard any discussion of drugs. Dordick describes surviving at one of her field sites as a "full-time job" (1997, 6). She explains, "The homeless anguish over getting money, procuring food, and, most important, protecting themselves in an uncertain and unforgiving environment" (Dordick 1997, 6).

While she shows how some homeless men in New York beg to earn money, in Tokyo, homeless men rarely ask for money. In the course of my fieldwork, only three men asked me for money. One explanation in the literature is that Japanese men's pride and the cultural understanding and implications, specifically shame, prevent them from begging. Gill found, "relatively little begging in the *yoseba*," (2001, 182) and Fowler notes the beggar is "a

particularly strong epithet in Japanese” (2005, 133). In contrast, Dordick observes how homeless men in New York panhandle, although asking for money also hurts their pride (1997).

In addition to the description of begging, both Gill (2001) and Fowler (1996) found that homeless men have separated from their families of origin. However, current research does not explain when, why and how the relationship became severed (Aoki 2006; Ezawa 2003; Fowler 1996; Gill 2001). In the past and to a lesser extent today, families served as a default welfare system, but Japanese families are changing from traditional extended families to nuclear families with smaller networks of family and friends (Aoki 2003; White 2002). Literature on homelessness in the United States has shown that families will push out difficult members but it has not explored how this happens (Williams 2004; Hopper 2003). As I will show in chapter two, when the family member leaves his family and the neighborhood, he may lose their networks of friends and neighbors. Losing their network, especially when they are becoming homeless, prevents them from calling on it for help. Additionally, once homeless, homeless men often refuse to ask for assistance.

A recent, and highly relevant, study of homelessness is Margolis’ research among the homeless in Ueno Park (2002). Her study, while done ten years prior to my fieldwork, looks at how “homeless persons do homelessness” (2002, iii). She focused on “how the homeless negotiate their identity as homeless, as individuals, as men and women, and as Japanese” (2002, 9). She describes how homeless men performed the same daily rituals as other Japanese such as serving tea to a guest and removing shoes before entering a home (Margolis 2002). Her argument that, “the discourse of doing homelessness, as active, creative, and disciplined, contests perceptions that reduce homeless agency to acts of desperation and an innate need to survive,” may have been true for homeless men during her research (Margolis 2002, 12). However, when I

conducted my research, many homeless men focused their energy on surviving. Margolis stressed that, “the discourse of doing homelessness was socially, politically, and culturally engaged. It cannot be reduced to a tactic of survival” (2002, 6). She describes “doing homelessness” as doing the acts of living in the park, collecting aluminum cans, and attending *takidashi* (soup kitchens) in a way that reflects traditional samurai spirit (2002). I argue that homeless men who remained in Ueno Park ten years later are not interested in producing discourse, that the remaining hardcore men’s situation has become so perilous that survival is their discourse. The explanation for the different findings may go beyond our theoretical approaches to the different groups of homeless men in Ueno Park during our research time.

In Japan scholars and homeless men classify homelessness as an identity and not surprisingly this identity differs from homelessness in the U.S. Margolis documented how homeless men and others saw homelessness as something one does, like an occupation (2002), while in the U.S. homelessness is not a categorical answer to describe activities. In the U.S. homeless men may be job hunting, looking for housing, or scavenging for cans. In Japan, a homeless man may answer they are “doing homelessness,” which could include any of these activities. Another difference is that common attributes of homelessness in the U.S. such as drugs and many homeless women and children are absent in Japan. Women and children are the majority in the U.S., but men on the street—the face of homelessness—are not representative. A final difference is that while there are a few shelters in Tokyo, the scale and rules are much different than in the U.S. In Japan, the focus of the welfare system, in theory, is creating self-reliant men.

While many people in the U.S. view homeless people as victims of poverty or lazy, in Japan the view is that generally homeless men enjoy the lifestyle and have homes but prefer life

on the street. Another view emerged after the Lehman Brothers bankruptcy and the subsequent economic downturn led to the eviction of many temporary workers from their company housing. This view saw homeless men as temporary workers who cannot find jobs.

A final difference with the U.S. is the cost of housing. In Japan, the move-in costs are significantly higher. While rents in Tokyo can be high, rent does not push men to the street since many were living in single room occupancy hotels as day laborers. The issue similar to rent that keeps them homeless is the initial cost of renting an apartment often includes six months' rent upfront in fees (Margolis 2008). Sometimes caseworkers have been burned by clients when after, "handing over the deposit and rent for the first month, the homeless individual disappears with the money" (Iwata 2007, 154).

Homelessness in Tokyo and Ueno Park had many homeless men living in tents made of blue sheets and other construction materials during the time Margolis conducted her research. When I conducted my research years later, many homeless men had moved out of Ueno Park and had enrolled in the three thousand yen (\$29) a month apartment program. The Japan Times quotes an official with the Tokyo government's Bureau of Social Welfare who describes the logic behind the program, "Having their own residence will be the first step for self-dependent life, which, in turn, will work as an initiative for people to pursue financial independence" (Matsubara 2004). This program was just underway during my preliminary research and many men at that time were skeptical of joining the program, because it had a two-year limit, after which the government increases the rent. During my fieldwork, many homeless people assumed that their former homeless friends who had enrolled in the program had returned to the street or died. Their assumption about their friends shows what they think have happen to them in the same program.

Beyond research on Ueno, scholarship on networks among the poor builds on the anthropological theories of Stack (1974) and others (Braman 2004; Hopper 2003; Kwong 2001). The personal kin on whom people rely and share resources are flexible. Emphasizing networks and family, Wright asserts that, “a person is not homeless simply because he or she is an alcoholic or mentally ill, but because these disabilities exhaust the patience or resources otherwise available in one’s social network” (1990, 90). While Wright is describing homelessness in the United States, in Tokyo mental illness is not prominent among the homeless. Instead, after losing their job, poor *ningen kankei* (human relationships) or depleted savings from a gambling habit often leads to homelessness.

Within these networks, the Japanese family structure shows why some men become homeless. Japanese families have followed the *ie*, which Pelzel defines as, “both the household at a given point in time and a more durable entity, the ‘house,’ which exists over time and is composed of only one household in each generation - that household headed by the male who is the legal successor to the former household head” (1970, 229). The key element of the *ie* is the succession of households through each generation (Pelzel 1970). Under this system, younger members are indebted to older members and duty is the key concept (Hendry 1992). Because of its reliance on the Imperial Family as a model, the government officially abolished the *ie* family structure after World War II, although it continues in rural areas.

Currently, “Most urban families are nuclear households for much of their life span” (White 2002, 9). These nuclear families “had to take responsibility for their own ‘social welfare’ in relative isolation,” according to White (2002, 8-9). Nuclear families share the work of providing welfare with the company (Aoki 2003). Aoki argues that “both family and company in Japan function as a private welfare system” (2003, 373). Nuclear families may be more fragile

and vulnerable to hardships and not have the space or desire to house a homeless member. Aoki argues that the impact of the decrease in company lifetime employment, the collapse of extended families, and a greater reliance on nuclear families contributed to the increase in homelessness (2003, 362).

Away from their families, men receive much of their identity from work. Since many homeless men can work, their presence challenges the traditional image of men in Japanese society (Gill 2003, Dasgupta 2003). The media then searches for explanations, and presents numerous reports that foster the belief that people choose to be homeless and that strong family ties can prevent homelessness (Kaneko 2004). Some reports even suggested that many homeless men have homes but choose not to return to them. A report by the Tokyo government, for example, describes homeless individuals this way: “there are people who have homes in their hometowns who live on the street in the city. In these instances, it can be possible that they choose to live on the street” (Guzewicz 2000, 83). While many Japanese people accept these reports as accurate, they neglect to see choice as complicated and not as simple as the media describes. Some research challenges the claim that men chose to be homeless by showing that their poverty limits their options, but this research does not examine the relationships homeless men have with their families beyond describing them as separated (Fowler 1996, Gill 2001; Margolis 2003; Marr 1997).

Since scholars (Gill 2001; Margolis 2002; Marr 1997) have identified many homeless Japanese men as former day laborers, the economic recession limiting construction jobs affected them. It pushed some men into homelessness, because they could not afford rent when they could not find another day laborer job. Once homeless, they continued to live by the values they developed as day laborers. The values of day laborers in Japan have been well-documented

(Aoki 2000 and 2003; Caldarola 1968, Fowler 1996; Gill 1999 and 2002; Marr 1997). Gill describes day laborers as having “a lifestyle oriented to the present,” which “renders people extremely vulnerable to bad weather, bad luck, and aging” (1999, 125). I found these same characteristics influence their lives once they become homeless, and like day laborers, homeless men gamble and do not save their money. Men described to me how day laborers do not save money because tomorrow is another job and many homeless live for the day, because tomorrow may bring illness or death.

I will show in chapter three that Gill’s point regarding their outlook does not hold true for all homeless men. Some men lived for the day, but others planned for their future. Tomita-san planned to apply for welfare when he turned sixty-five and Wakai-san had built a solar panel to provide electricity for his tent. Other men managed to save some money for a rainy day.

Moving beyond Tokyo’s homeless, my research builds on the growing literature on poverty and homelessness globally (Caldwell 2004; Glasser 1994; and Poppendieck 1998). Specifically, my research in Japan contributes to theories on homelessness by answering questions about the networks of homeless men, their survival strategies, and their relationships with their families (Gill 2001; Hopper 2003; Lyon-Callo 2004; Spradley 1970; and Wolch and Rowe 1992). My research extends the idea of family to include their social networks. Williams describes how, “For years, American ethnographies have disclosed broad social networks of reciprocity and exchange, credit and debt, sharing and pooling, through which people cope with poverty” (2001, 96). My research explores this connection while building on and expanding the ethnographic research cited by Williams (2001).

Historical Background of Sanya

Historically urban homelessness primarily occurred among day laborers who experience episodes of homelessness (Gill 2001), and in Tokyo, this means they slept in parks in Sanya, one of the largest day laboring district in Japan. Sanya's history is one of shame. In 1657, it served as a red light district and now there is a red light district adjacent to Sanya (Gill 2001). By the end of the 1930s, Sanya had become an established area for day laborers and men separated from their families (Gill 2001). After the Second World War while many of the buildings burned to the ground, the government designated Sanya an area for prostitution for the occupying forces (Gill 2001).

Soon after the neighboring red light district began operating, Sanya returned to being a day laboring district (Gill 2001). Sanya flourished from the mid-fifties until the early seventies (Fowler 2005). It stopped being a bustling day labor district during the oil crisis in the 1970s, and day laboring had a smaller role as the economy recovered (Fowler 2005). The burst of the bubble economy in the early nineties significantly eroded day laboring and Sanya slowly changed to an area with many men using welfare to make ends meet (Fowler 2005). Today Sanya has changed to a welfare district with a smaller day laboring area but the history of shame continues. For example, a local community group is attempting to rebrand Sanya in English as North Asakusa, giving it the illusion of being similar to the historic Asakusa district.

The day laborers in Sanya often come from rural areas to Tokyo looking for work, cannot find a regular job, and settle in Sanya, working as day laborers (Fowler 2005). They comprise a significant percent of the homeless. I will show in more detail in the next chapter that many of the homeless in Ueno Park came from Sanya when they lost their job and could

not find another one. Fowler describes the men in Sanya as, “career alcoholics and gamblers, deadbeat dads/husbands, laid-off workers who have bailed on the job market, fugitives from creditors or the law, men with criminal records, the physically and mentally disabled” (2005, xvii). Fowler’s description of Sanya seems a little heavy handed, especially looking at Sanya today as it now has many elderly welfare recipients. Additionally, his string of labels neglects to see the complexity of their lives. These terms also describe numerous homeless men, and many others fit more than one category, as chapter three will show. They challenge these descriptions by wanting to work. They have not “bailed on the job market.” The job market has bailed on them.

Finally, for men working as day laborers, age negatively influences their chances of finding work. When men reach their fifties, finding work becomes more difficult as employers prefer to hire younger men, and they either go to another day laboring district, return to the countryside to look for contract work, or head to the streets (Fowler 2005). Since many day laborers have a life span of between fifty-five and sixty, those day laborers who become homeless are too old to find consistent work and not old enough to successfully apply for welfare (Gill 1999).

Prior to Fowler’s research, Caldarola described *yoseba*, day laborers, and their hobbies, work, and values (1968). He depicts conditions of day laboring similar to Fowler’s description thirty years later (1996). Both Fowler (1996) and Caldarola (1968) found men unlikely to have health insurance or any savings for retirement. While Japan has national health insurance, the self-employed pay thirty percent of the costs, beyond the reach of the homeless. Both groups of day laborers enjoyed playing *pachinko* (Japanese pinball) (Caldarola 1968; Fowler 1996). Most discussions and translations on *pachinko* consider it a form of gambling. Alcoholism was also

high (Caldarola 1968). Finally, both studies found men in and around Sanya did not ask for money (Caldarola 1968; Fowler 1996). However, one difference—in the sixties men refused charity, but now they accept it—shows the changing economic conditions of Sanya, day laboring, and the poor (Caldarola 1968; Fowler 1996).

While most homeless men had worked in Sanya, not all homeless men were familiar with Sanya. Some men had no experience working as day laborers. Men unfamiliar with Sanya have a disadvantage since they did not know the welfare resources in Sanya including the various soup lines, clothing banks, and medical assistance. Ezawa explains the “new homeless” (2002; 279) as a change in the homeless population: “Beyond the typical stranded and aging day laborer, the homeless however also include an increasing number of people from other occupational backgrounds” (2002; 284). She stresses that lifetime employment applies to a tiny fraction in Japan and small companies provide fewer benefits and have many older workers (2002). This combination along with less stability in small companies pushes them to bankruptcy and unemployment for older workers. This is significant because “the dominant majority of homeless, specifically those aged 50-59, quote unemployment as their reason for becoming homeless” (Ezawa 2002, 284). Regardless of one’s occupational background or type of company, it is the unemployment that led to many men becoming homeless.

Political Economy of Japan

Political economy, particularly urbanization and the economic recessions, played a key role in creating and growing the *yoseba* and in turn leading to homelessness. By 1920 with the end of the Meiji Period, Japan realized that poverty was a risk to anyone, especially the working

class, and efforts to reduce poverty were under way (Chubachi and Taira 1976). For example, the 1922 Health Insurance Law provided health insurance to employees (Aspalter 2001). This law was a reaction to the rice riots of 1918, but the law was delayed because of the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923 (Aspalter 2001). Around the same time, Japan began to define urban ghettos as “an area of substandard housing rather than a habitat of the poor” (Chubachi and Taira 1976, 399). The Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 was a huge help for urban renewal in Tokyo (Chubachi and Taira 1976). By the 1930s, many Japanese people view of social stratification had changed. Prior to the 1930s and during the Meiji period the poor were classified as *saimin*, “lean people, petty folk, connoting weakness, powerlessness, and dependency” (Chubachi and Taira 1976, 396). *Saimin* as a category existed long before the 1930s. A survey conducted by the Home Ministry in 1897-8 revealed that 22.7 percent of the population was classified as *saimin* (Chubachi and Taira 1976). Their occupations were tenant farmers, day laborers, unemployed, doers of odd jobs and the underemployed (Chubachi and Taira 1976). From the 1880s to 1920, Japan was captivated by the *hinmin-kutsu*, grottos of the poor, because of the extent of misery this group of poor people experienced and because of the difficulties in understanding the causes that created and maintained their misery (Chubachi and Taira 1976).

Japan’s economic shift to a nation-state from a feudal one is rather recent and occurred during the Meiji Period (1868-1912) (Bestor, Bestor, and Yamagata, 2011). Prior to the Meiji Restoration Japan was mainly an agrarian society similar to other Asian nations (Okawa and Rosovsky, 1973). These farming traditions continued to exert influence as “at least half of the nation-those who resided in small villages and country towns” (Allinson 1997, 11). By the early nineteen thirties old customs from farming life were mixing with the rapid industrialization that had been occurring during the Meiji Period. The nineteen thirties saw a rapid period of economic

expansion that led to growth in cities, industries, and middle-class life (Allinson 2004).

Unfortunately, “The strongest forces in Japan, the military and their supporters, had by then set the nation on a course toward war” (Allinson 2004, 12).

During the prewar period, inequality was pervasive (Allinson 2004). One’s status was more fluid in urban areas than in rural areas where land ownership, especially the size of land, determined one’s status (Allinson 2004). Poverty was prevalent in the countryside and certainly noticeable in the city (Allinson 2004). Farming, which usually meant subsistence living, “was still the largest employer (about 50 percent of the work force) by the end of World War II” (Dolan and Worden 1994). Poverty continued after the war as large-scale poverty and homelessness occurred immediately after World War II (Hasegawa 2006). It continued into the 1960s, well after the economy lifted many people out of poverty, which shows that the government did not take the constitutional guarantee of “a minimum standard of living” seriously (Hasegawa 2006, 33).

During the fifties and sixties, the government focused on and extensively promoted industrial growth. This rapid growth “spurred industrialization to new levels and rapidly moved Japan’s rural population to cities” (Bestor, Bestor, and Yamagata 2011, 2). Since the end of postwar era, urbanization has proceeded unabated. Waley describes it as, “If there was one constant in the half-century since the beginning of the rapid postwar growth, it is the conversion of green into gray and the urbanization of Japanese landscapes” (2011, 89). During this time, many people from rural Japan moved to cities and a new urban middle class developed (Bestor, Bestor, and Yamagata 2011).

The success of the economic growth after the war was celebrated by the Tokyo Olympics in 1964 and the 1970 World Expo in Osaka (Bestor, Bestor, and Yamagata 2011).

However the economic miracle and success hit a major setback with oil shock in 1973.

Hoffmann argues that this was a “watershed event in Japan’s industry” (2010, 4) and that the Japanese government shifted to developing industries that relied on “intellectual resources and technological know-how” (2010, 4).

The eighties saw another economic boom time for Japan including extensive construction projects, which led to growth and employment in the *yoseba* (Fowler 1996 and 2005, Gill 2001). During this time, day laborers could count on a steady supply of work at a high salary (Fowler 1996 and 2005, Gill 2001). With the end of the bubble in the early nineteen nineties, work became much harder to find and homelessness became a public issue as homeless men moved beyond the *yoseba* (Fowler 2005, Iwata 2003, Hasegawa 2005). With jobs rare, those who were young had an advantage finding work and the workers who were elderly could qualify for welfare (Fowler 2005). It was those men in between who were in the worst position. Fowler points out that they lost their income and since they were in their fifties they were “too old to work but still too young to qualify for government support” (2005, xix).

The economic growth led to lifetime employment, which became the dominant mindset in Japan, since large influential corporations used this management style. However, these large corporations actually employ only ten to fifteen percent of Japan’s employees in the private sector (Mouer 1995). The government uses lifetime employment as a model, but “nearly 80 per cent of Japan’s employees are in firms with less than 100 employees and without union representation,” (Mouer 1995, 59). Ezawa’s concern that employees of the small business will be the first fired during a recession is worrisome (2002) because the government has recognized that welfare conditions for those working at small and medium size companies are considerably less than those for workers at large companies (Kennett and Iwata 2003). One reason is that workers

at smaller companies receive significantly fewer benefits than their counterparts at large companies receive. I will argue in the conclusion that knowing that employees of small companies are likely to become homeless or laid off, the government should support and create policies that provide additional benefits to smaller companies. These policies could prevent homelessness.

Since the end of the bubble economy in the early 1990s, the condition of the poor has become more precarious. The changing role of the family and several economic changes associated with globalization in the 1980s, specifically, the change from a manufacturing to a service economy and the increase in deregulation and privatization by the Japanese government has exacerbated the situation of the poor and homeless (Hasegawa 2005). Additionally, globalization and the recession forced companies to change their policies regarding lifetime employment (Aoki 2003).

These large economic and political changes hurt those struggling financially. The move away from a manufacturing economy began in the 1970s and continued through the 1990s (Hasegawa 2006). Since many of the working class worked in industry, this change presented many difficulties. Housing changes hurt day laborers as *doya* were remodeled and single room occupancy cost increased. Hasegawa shows redevelopment spread to areas beyond the traditional business districts surrounding Tokyo station to include Taito, Sumida, and Arakawa wards, areas with many day laborers and homeless individuals (2006). In the 1980s as Tokyo became a global city, “The growth of office space and middle- and high-income housing led to higher rents for low income workers” (Hasegawa 2006, 41).

Hasegawa stresses that homelessness continues to increase in Japan because “a larger segment of the low-income workforce has been subject to simultaneous exclusion from

employment, housing, and welfare” (2005, 1007). She suggests that changing from a manufacturing based economy to a service based economy, along with urban redevelopment and a policy shift toward privatization created this exclusion (2005). Regardless of the macro level causes, the lives of poor men became more unstable. The weak economy undermined families’ ability to help members of their kin group and thus weakened kin ties.

Homelessness existed prior to the recession in the 1990s. In the seventies, the economy continued to grow, until the oil crisis of 1973 (Kennett and Iwata 2003). After the oil crisis, homelessness began to increase in the *yoseba*, and then spread to other areas (Kennett and Iwata 2003). Homelessness among older day laborers began occurring in the 1980s and significantly increased after the recessions began in 1992 (Hasegawa 2006). Hasegawa argues that the homeless population expanded beyond older day laborers to include other day laborers and low-income workers who lost their housing during the recession (2006). The government cut programs designed to help low-income people and helped increase homelessness, “by facilitating the process of industrial shift, redevelopment, and gentrification” (Hasegawa 2006; 42).

For many older Japanese, poverty is a memory from the postwar years and for younger Japanese it is a well-known part of Japan’s recent history. After the war, Japan’s economy grew rapidly. Hara and Seiyama argue that, “The period of rapid economic growth in the advanced industrialized societies brought about a substantial resolution to ‘the poverty problem’ afflicting them” (2005; 161). They argue that as Japan became affluent during the 1960s and 1970s, “Poverty was pushed into the recess of people’s minds” (2005; 2). For older Japanese, especially in the cities, poverty is a memory, while people from rural areas may continue to experience difficult times. While poverty is more likely in rural areas, homelessness in Japan is

predominately an urban issue, as over two-thirds of homeless individuals live in cities (Kakita 2004).

Historically efforts to help the poor, like welfare, became centralized during the Meiji Period (Takahashi 1997). The centralization can be viewed as part of the overall effort by the central government to take control of many policies that had been administered on the local level (Takahashi 1997). The efforts to help the poor through the Relief Ordinance of 1874 can also be viewed as “a manifestation of the mercy of *tennô* (emperor) to his subjects” (Takahashi 1997, 34). Provided the applicants had a fixed address and registered in the family registry, local officials could then, according to the law, provide “a small amount of ‘relief money for fifty days’” (Takahashi 1997, 35). After fifty days, the Home Ministry would reconsider each case (Takahashi 1997).

The approach to dealing with the poor changed significantly, after the 1918 Rice Riots occurred (Takahashi 1997). Social work took the place of mercy as the way to help the poor (Takahashi 1997). Volunteer district commissioners who helped with social surveys and provided advice to local residents were given the power to support applications for help, but newspapers reported that some commissioners abused the power and denied applications based on moral grounds (Takahashi 1997). Finally, in 1932 the Relief Law replaced the ordinance from 1874 (Takahashi 1997). However, Takahashi points out it, “did not make such an immediate and profound breakthrough in practice, because the idea for citizens to demand support from the state as their ‘right’ was not accepted in the principle of the law” (1997, 42).

Welfare in modern Japan began with Article 25 of the national constitution (Gillb 2005). Gill explains the law, “Article 25 of the national constitution, backed up by the 1950 Livelihood Protection Law (*Seikatsu Hogo-hō*), guaranteed every citizen of Japan a ‘minimum standard of

living' ” (2005b, 192). However, homeless men face discrimination when they apply for welfare, so some men refuse to apply even when social workers encourage them. The Asahi Shinbun, one of the largest newspapers in Japan, reported that after applying for welfare, officials “check their income, assets, ability to work, whether they can get support from relatives and other factors before making a decision on payments” (Nagata, Kiyokawa, and Iwata 2008). While government officials have programs to help them, in reality, “middle-aged single men have largely been excluded from the Livelihood Protection system” (Hasegawa 2005, 1003). Karan points out homeless applicants “must prove both that they are unable to work and that they have a fixed address—conditions the homeless cannot fulfill” (2005, 201-2).

Organization of the Dissertation

At the beginning of every chapter except three, I include a brief profile of one of the men that illustrates dominant themes in the chapter. I dive into the research questions in chapter two by beginning with a discussion of what is home from several perspectives. First, it looks at how men in Japan become homeless and where they lived before becoming homeless. It asks what are some common paths to homelessness? How did they arrive in Ueno Park? Can they return to their natal or sibling's homes? Second, it describes their current home in Ueno Park, on the street, and other areas around Tokyo. With this background, the chapter focuses on their relationship with their family, both natal and marital, asking are they in contact with their families? How often do they contact their siblings or parents? What is their relationship? What have they told their relatives about their current living conditions? Finally, the chapter identifies

several subgroups of homeless men in Ueno Park, the rules of the park, the implications of the rules for homeless men, and the impact of dignitaries visiting the park.

The next chapter moves the discussion to their current conditions, especially looking at the hardships they face daily and how they survive. These problems include maintaining proper hygiene, not getting along with other homeless men, dealing with authorities, guarding their identity, and maintaining their health. While much of this chapter shows the despair and difficulties in their lives, it also illustrates how they depend on each other to endure life in the park and examines the numerous exchanges between homeless men. The exchanges help them carry on and their friends make life bearable.

Then the focus shifts away from home to work including the two different types of paid work that numerous homeless men do. The next two chapters, chapters four and five, demonstrate that many homeless men earn a living and work difficult hours with no job security and little pay. Chapter four examines the first type of work, collecting and selling recyclables, including aluminum cans, newspapers, magazines, cardboard, and copper wiring. Chapter five looks at the second type of work, day laboring jobs, which is run through a city jobs program, and other jobs that the men find through their connections. This chapter also describes how they manage their income. It asks how they spend their money. What items do they consider important? How do they save money? These chapters show how the Japanese and global economies have affected the homeless.

Chapter six turns to the safety net and Japan's welfare system. For some, this means applying for welfare, social security, or a pension, once they reach sixty-five, and for others it simply means waiting to die. This chapter examines the welfare system, both formal and informal and government efforts to help homeless people. What options do the men have to leave

the streets? It seeks to show how the government offers the homeless assistance and how nonprofit agencies and churches work to supplement the government's efforts. *Takidashi* (soup lines) are the main efforts of groups to help the homeless and this chapter explores them. Finally, the conclusion makes policy recommendations, proposes areas for future research, and explains the central argument, namely, that homeless men can and should be viewed as a neglected cohort of men who at reaching their fifties or older could not find work, and once homeless using human agency and with larger structures limiting their options, choose survival strategies.

CHAPTER 2

“THINGS HAPPENED SO I LEFT HOME:” HOW HOMELESS MEN BECOME HOMELESS AND THEIR HOME IN UENO PARK

Otani-san

Otani-san is in his late sixties with dark hair. He often walks with his neck and shoulders slightly bent from a repetitive work injury caused by lifting a *jackibase* (a Japanese sledgehammer) to crush aluminum cans.

His family life has not been easy. His first marriage ended when his wife passed away soon after the birth of their second child, a son. He later married again, had a daughter, and later separated from his second wife. Otani-san complained that the Japanese government does not support single fathers. He raised his three children and fondly recalled good times taking his daughter fishing near Tokyo and raising his family in a government subsidized high-rise apartment with a view of the ocean.

Now he has many places to rest but no space to call his own. His current home reflects his work and survival strategies. Otani-san's home is wherever he parks his cart, which during the day means along the road dividing the park. He nurses a glass of sake while crushing aluminum cans and takes a nap sitting on the curb when he finishes his work. Late at night, he parks his cart in a small outdoor dining area across from Ueno station and sleeps until the first commuters begin arriving around five a.m.

His cart, which he pushes everywhere he goes, serves several purposes. First, it functions as his closet, where he keeps his clothing. Second, when he collects cans, it is his

workstation. Often, a tall metal pole has a bag of aluminum cans hanging from it waiting for him to crush them. Finally, it is his storage unit and kitchen, where he keeps a gas burner and frying pan. Near the end of my fieldwork, he kept a baseball bat on the cart for security, but he never used it.

While he makes most of his money from selling aluminum cans, he has a couple of other ways to get food and money. Like a few other homeless men, he receives some rice from an *obachan* (elderly woman, grandmother) who works and lives near Ueno. His assumes she lives nearby because the rice is hot when she gives it to him in the morning and she wears a uniform, so he thinks she is going to work. An unusual way he earns money, cleaning the trash rooms of large condominiums and apartment buildings in Asakusa, provides an extra layer of income security. The building manager pays him one-thousand yen (\$10) to clean the trash room. Occasionally, he also receives food and supplies including sushi and a cutting board from the businesses that know him from his route collecting cans.

Before living on the streets, he went through a process of becoming homeless, that as he tells it, reflects a noble gesture on his part and some bad luck. His employer went out of business when the boss lost much of the company's money betting on horse races. Otani-san, then fifty-eight, helped many of his coworkers find new jobs but he could not find one for himself. Given his age and the mandatory retirement age of sixty that many Japanese companies have, he faced a steep challenge finding work. While looking for work, he spent a year drinking with friends around Tokyo spending lots of money. He said he stopped having fun with his friends because his "money ran out." When he was working, he would often spend the evenings drinking in bars around his office, and the police knew him well as he often got into fights.

After his money ran out, he left his home to his oldest son and told him that he is in charge of the family and left. Only Otani-san's daughter knows he is homeless. He immensely enjoyed her only visit to see him during my fieldwork. He put on his best clothes and washed up. His daughter, her husband, and their son took him to an expensive restaurant, twenty-five hundred yen (\$25) for a set meal in Ueno for the summer *Obon* holiday (Buddhist time to pray for deceased relatives). The best part of dinner was the beer, but the good feeling of seeing his daughter, grandson, and son-in-law quickly faded, since after dinner he went back to his harsh life on the street. In various conversations, he told various stories demonstrating that he clearly cherishes the memories of raising his daughter.

His family situation with his children is unusual. He claims that he receives a pension or some retirement money, and uses his daughter's address, so she has access to the money. Otani-san said he gave it to her so she could buy a house and have financial security. Although he misses the good times he had when all of his children would gather at a restaurant, laugh, and tell stories from their lives, he said, "I don't want to live with them." I asked him about his unusual situation with his children several times and he always told me the same story so his consistency led me to believe him.

Okamoto-san's story provides a similar example. He has two houses, but only one home. His wife, their oldest son and his family, and a family friend live above the bar he owns in a neighborhood near Ueno Park. He used to own three but two went out of his business and the remaining may not be making much money. Okamoto-san does not live there, because he does not feel welcomed there. It is not his home. His home consists of the space in Tent Village in Ueno Park that he has claimed as his during the day and the coveted area under the roof in the back of the concert hall in Ueno Park at night. Homeless men want this evening space for two

reasons. First, because the few people who sleep there stay dry if it rains, so they do not have to worry about sudden rainstorms while sleeping. Second, they can sleep whenever they choose, unlike men sleeping in front of the back doors to the concert hall, who must wait for a concert to end before setting up their tents. Two bars of the three bars he owned went bankrupt so he jokes that he went from being a *shacho* (company president) to being homeless. Okamoto-san says that he prefers living in the park with his friends and not at home dealing with troublesome relationships. In the park surrounded by friends, as the leader of his group, he makes decisions for his small group of friends, and enjoys his life.

This chapter explains how homeless men became homeless, and describes their current home in Ueno Park. To understand how homeless men survive, one must know their history and the process that led them to live in the park. As part of their background, I describe their family life and their relationship with their family. All the homeless men I describe lived in the park or on the street. Some men built a simple tent every night, which provided protection from the elements and privacy, while others had a permanent tent. The men with permanent tents personalized them and had a relationship with their neighbors.

Critical Issues

Urban anthropologists have shown the importance of networks. When a person leaves his family, neighborhood, and home, they may lose some members of their networks of friends and neighbors. Bestor has written extensively on networks in neighborhoods in Tokyo (2010; 1996; 1993; and 1990), examining “old-fashioned, seemingly traditional patterns of community organization in Tokyo, on patterns of social organization that are frequently thought to be

historical survivals from preindustrial life” (1992, 23). His work reflects scholarship on networks.

Among research on the poor, my research builds on the anthropological theories of Stack (1974) and others (Braman 2004; Hopper 2003; Kwong 2001). Using anthropological theories of kinship to study domestic networks, reciprocity, and survival strategies in a low-income African American community, Stack showed that poor African American families adapt to poverty through strong complex support networks of friends and family (1974). People rely on and share resources with personal kindred, and this kindred changes. For example, if a biological father claims a child as his own, he gives that child a place in his domestic network. More recently, Donald Braman (2004) draws on Stack’s framework to show how incarceration of a family member reverberates through the network, not only depriving the family of a valued, productive member, but also placing difficult economic and emotional strains on the family.

Many of the homeless in Tokyo cut their ties with their networks when they became homeless (Ezawa 2002; Kennett and Iwata 2003). Wright, quoted earlier, alludes to class and wealth within the network of the homeless person and that the network lacks the resources to prevent the person from becoming homeless (1990). Hopper describes the family dynamic of homeless men in the early twentieth century in the United States (2003). He explains that “it was custom and kinship that eased the bite of misfortune, not the interventions of the state” (2003, 40). Hopper clarifies the benefit to the family when they became homeless: “Making themselves officially homeless alleviated the burden at home” (2003, 40). I hope to show that I found a similar pattern among some men in Tokyo, although they rarely portrayed their choice as a sacrifice. Some homeless men could not imagine returning home, because they felt ashamed because they thought they had failed in life.

Research shows that homeless men have left their families of origin, but does not explain when and why families cut off a relative (Fowler 1996; Kennett and Iwata 2003; Gill 2001). Literature on homelessness in the U.S. has shown that families will push out difficult members, but it has not explored how it happens (Williams 2004, Hopper 2003). Japanese culture weaves family and nation together, and this entangled relationship could be an additional cause of stress (White 2002; Kelly and White 2006). Kelly and White explain, “The ‘good family,’ the social service institutions, media, and politicians agree, should take care of its own, and in doing so take care of the nation” (2006, 66). These values put pressure on families to care for their members, so homeless men leave or do not ask for help, to alleviate pressure on their family. The assumption in Japanese culture is that families will help in time of need.

In her book on Japanese families, White argues that patterns of family life “demonstrate the basic principle of family life in twenty-first century Japan as it has ever been, *accommodation*, rather than adherence to rigid cultural norms” (2002, 25). Often the relative determined, frequently without consulting his family that living with them was not an option or a life he could tolerate. Many times men went directly to the streets or a park rather than return to their parents or sibling’s home. Knowing that nuclear families “had to take responsibility for their own ‘social welfare’ in relative isolation,” it is not surprising that poor men chose not to return home (White 2002, 8-9).

This is important because Aoki points out that, “unemployed men without family support have no welfare system” (2003, 373). When men lose their jobs, if they decide not to return to their families, they limit their social network. Significantly, White describes the pressure on families to take care of elderly relatives by highlighting critics who fault families and argue that

Japan, “is becoming the “throwing-away-Granny society—a national disgrace” (2002, 26). More importantly, for homeless men, society tolerates Grandpa living on the streets and in the parks.

The presence of many homeless men on the streets show that while families are theoretically supposed to take care of ill or poor relatives, not all can or do. The families may not know their relative is homeless, especially if the homeless member chooses not to tell his family. White defines the responsibility of families, particularly those who have a dependent member as: “Filial piety now means protecting the state of the nation through caring for dependent family members” (2002, 187). Finally, sometimes their children cannot look after them financially or may not want to support them. This runs counter to the image of Japan as a place where the elderly are respected (White 2002). White stresses that there is a “gap between ideals of Confucian filial piety and circumstances of the elderly’s place and care” (2002, 162-163). The many homeless men in their fifties, sixties, seventies, and eighties highlight this gap. This chapter assumes living with family in time of need is one option and that accommodation as White highlighted is the standard (2002).

How Men Become Homeless

Understanding why homeless men chose not to ask a sibling or their parents if they can live with them is important, because doing so and staying with them could have prevented them from becoming homeless. Several reasons exist as to why men left home. These include a divorce, a fight with a family member, lack of work in rural areas, not finding a job in the city. For men in their fifties and sixties, living on their own after a divorce or after becoming unemployed rather than asking to live with a sibling or elderly relative seems a popular and

understandable choice. A typical pattern of becoming homeless might include a divorce or fight with a family member followed by a move to Tokyo. Without skills and connections, men eventually end up in Sanya working as day laborers. When they reach their fifties they become too old to be hired and not old enough for welfare, so they cannot find work. A final step occurs when they lose their job and the job associated housing and run out of money. Scholars have documented this pattern (Gill 2001; Iwata 2003; Fowler 1996).

Before further discussing the reasons men do not contact their families, I will describe various paths to homelessness and provide some examples. Often the last step before becoming homeless was losing a job and not finding another one before money ran out. When it became clear that they would become homeless, some men spent their money having a final good time playing *pachinko* (Japanese pinball) or many nights out drinking with friends. Saito-san, whose passion is playing *pachinko*, spent a year looking for work, having fun and playing *pachinko* before becoming homeless. He had lost his job and company housing from a well-known company in Nagoya. Other men spent a similar time gambling and playing *pachinko* before and after they became homeless. One volunteer who works with the homeless explained their approach to spending money and having fun as similar to a soldier before leaving for battle. Since the men think their lives are over once they become homeless, they have a final good time. Many men continue to spend their extra money playing *pachinko* or placing small bets on horse races after becoming homeless. Given their intense interest in maintaining the privacy, providing exact numbers of men who spent their money playing *pachinko* is impossible.

Takayama-san represents another route to homelessness. He took an interesting but somewhat common route to Ueno Park that reflects the typical life of rural men who become homeless. His route did not involve playing *pachinko* or drinking with friends. While living on

Hokkaido, the northern most island, he lost his job and was tired of the cold weather so he took the train to Tokyo and got off at Ueno station, the terminal. Since he had bought the cheapest ticket, it did not cover the expensive fare from Hokkaido, so he walked around the station looking for a lost ticket he could use to exit the station. He found one, exited the station, and went to Ueno Park, where he has lived for several years.

His path from northern Japan to Ueno Park and homelessness represents a common journey for numerous men, especially before the Tokyo Olympics in 1960 (Cybriwsky 1998; Fowler 1996; Gill 1999; Margolis 2002; Marr 2007). Cybriwsky describes men from rural areas who come to Tokyo looking for work (1998). Unlike their predecessors who found work in a strong economy, they cannot find work because of the poor economy and age discrimination (Cybriwsky 1998). Finally, the men are forced to “live off whatever savings they brought with them, occasional small earnings, and make do on the streets when the money is depleted” (Cybriwsky 1998, 184). Iwata describes the process, “After using up their savings in inns, many of them appeared on the streets. Because they are old and their skills and qualities are no longer required in today’s society, they struggle to find another job” (2008, 152).

Homeless men like Ishikawa-san followed a different path that reflects larger economic conditions. Years ago, he was a company president and owned a small business with twenty to thirty employees working at a small factory making radios, cassette players, and other electronics. Ishikawa-san described his company’s position as “at the bottom of the chain.” He is referring to the *keiretsu* (the hierarchy of business companies in Japan). Given his company’s position and lack of significant economic growth in Japan for twenty years, it was not surprising that his company went bankrupt. Hasegawa describes what happened during an earlier recovery, “a number of male workers in smaller firms were forced into the streets in the 1990s as they lost

jobs as a result of firing or bankruptcy” (2006, 45). While this may not have happened until earlier this decade for him, it shows that the economy played a significant role in his life.

Another common pattern that emerged shows how the fractured relationship that many homeless men have with their families contributes to their becoming homeless. Many unemployed men chose to leave their families or once homeless not ask them for help. Okamoto-san, described earlier in the chapter, is an example of men who left their families. For other men, their pride prevents them from returning to their families. It is important to consider their age and that they never married or are divorced, so family means brothers and sisters because their parents are elderly and they do not have a social network through marriage. When I asked about their family, they often responded, “They don’t know I’m living like this. I don’t want them to know.”

In addition to their pride, Confucian ideas and expectations for men of their generation to take care of their parents makes returning home to live financially dependent on an elderly parent embarrassing and shameful. White points to conservative politicians and commentators who “remind the nation, filial responsibility prescribes care of the elderly at home” (2002, 208). Thus, unemployed or homeless men cannot return to their elderly parents without implicitly neglecting their duty to the nation and family. At the same time, the nation neglects to care for elderly homeless men. Since it is the responsibility of homeless men to take care of their parents, many men refuse to return to their parent’s home without a job and ask for help especially when their parent(s) may be living with a sibling.

Some of the homeless men I interviewed were in a similar position to the men Hopper described, who left home to make things easier for their families (2003). The significant difference is that many homeless men in Tokyo did not leave home, but would not return home

for help when their life in the city failed. For example, Ishikawa-san knew he was not welcomed at his home in Nagano, so he stayed in the park. Others, like Matsuo-san, could have asked siblings for help but refused to ask and they saw being homeless as a penance for poor decisions and not saving money.

Matsuo-san spent winters in the countryside and returned each summer to Tokyo to work as a day laborer. He spent the money he earned from his work as a day laborer betting on bicycle races. After his company cancelled his job one summer and he could not find another one, he came to live in the park. Knowing that scholars have described the Japanese welfare system as based on family and work (Aoki 2006, Kitagawa 2008), I asked him why he did not go home to live with his siblings. Surprised by my question, he explained they would not help him for more than a few days or weeks at the most and he asked rhetorically, “Why should they? They saved money and lived a proper life while I spent my money frivolously. My parents told me many times to save money, but I did not listen.” He does not gamble, play *pachinko* (Japanese pinball), or drink alcohol now, but when he worked he spent all his money each month and did not save any. He would place bets like his neighbors do now, but in the old days, the bets were ¥10,000 (\$97). Now his neighbors place one hundred yen (\$1) bets.

You Can't Go Home Again

My original research questions asked how families and a family member become separated resulting in one member becoming homeless, so I spoke to many men about their past. Very few men, four or five out of eighty men, sat with me for an interview about their families. This is not surprising, since many men had debts, trouble with the *yakuza* (organized crime), or a

falling out with their family and therefore guarded their privacy. The men who talked to me were either not running or hiding from anyone or they were confident they would not be found. They tended to be better off financially than other homeless men. Although I rarely conducted a long formal interview, homeless men would sometimes say something about their families, and I would eventually piece together information about their families. After a while, I had an understanding of their background. As I spent more time with some homeless men, they would tell me a little about their past and then a few days or even a week later, they would tell me something new. This process of learning about their families worked most of the time.

This method also worked for homeless men comfortable talking about their families and their past, who did not want to sit for an interview, so we had a series of conversations. After several conversations, I had picture of their family information and their path to homelessness. For example, Akita-san told me a good deal about his background on a cold Saturday in November while drinking a *chuhai* (a canned alcoholic beverage made from distilled barley, rice, or sweet potatoes, and carbonated water with lemon flavor). He came to the park nine years ago at 49, which he described as “young.” His employer, a construction company, fired him during the recessions of the early 1990s. In a later conversation, he said his older brother, who is 72, runs the household in the countryside and he calls home once a year at New Years. They usually have an extremely brief conversation, not much more than exchanging greetings, and Akita-san laughed as he imitated their conversation. In another chat, he said he was divorced and has a son, but when I asked about the circumstances, he became irritated and clearly said he did not want to talk about it. Later, Akita-san had been drinking and he felt more comfortable to tell me his wife and he had a fight and he cannot go home. When he first came, he planned to have fun, but after

spending his money and not finding another job, he stayed. His sister lives an hour away, but he does not want her help.

While a few men told me a great deal about their families, most men limited their comments to vague expressions like, “*iro iro jijou ga atta*” (various things happened). At first, this repeated response frustrated me, but I accepted that some men, no matter how well I knew them would not discuss their families. Takayama-san illustrates this point. A homeless man in his early sixties whom I knew well, he never talked about his family. We spent many hours together sitting and chatting on park benches, collecting and crushing aluminum cans, and walking to soup lines. I saw him almost every day, but know very little about his family. He would talk about his work history, but would not say anything personal beyond the name of his hometown and that he has a father and younger brother. For instance, when I asked if his brother had children, he replied he thought he did, but was not sure. However, this information was more than I heard from his partner, Yamada-san, who is talkative. All I know about his family is that he has a younger sister and he is from Hokkaido. When I asked questions about his family Yamada-san always gave vague responses. During a conversation about family graves, I asked who is taking care of his family’s grave, and he said, “Somebody probably is.”

An illustrative example of the difficulty of getting information about his family is how I learned Yamada-san has a sister. I complained about changing my son’s diapers and Yamada-san teased me it is easy now with Pampers and cloth diapers were much more work. He said he has changed his sister’s diapers, but then changing the topic said, “Raising kids is tough. Your life won’t be the same.” We had a couple of similar exchanges and he never elaborated with more information about his sister even though I asked. Like others, Yamada-san was always vague.

These responses contrast to his willingness to share his knowledge and thoughts about his daily life in the park. In these areas, he never hesitated to share his opinion.

They Thought I was Dead

From conversations with the men who did talk about their families, several themes emerged. Hogo-san's visit to see his family illuminates some of them. Originally from a rural part of Chiba prefecture, a suburb of Tokyo, Hogo-san receives welfare, which is unusual considering that he appears to be in his thirties, and is one the youngest homeless men I met. To receive welfare at a young age, social workers usually require the applicant to be in poor health and although Hogo-san appeared healthy, he claimed to have several health issues, which he never fully explained beyond saying he has stomach and back problems, and gets sick easily so he cannot work.

He cheerfully discussed his visit to Chiba with other homeless men and me on a warm Friday afternoon in May. To our surprise, he said that he recently visited his parents, sister, and her children for the first time in four years. He used his welfare money to buy the train tickets and gave money to his sister's children because, "They are cute" (*kawai kara*). The trip and reunion were costly. He gave his niece and nephew ¥10,000 (\$97) each and he gave his parents ¥20,000 (\$194). The train ticket cost sixty dollars. He laughed as he told us the trip cost him ¥46,000 (\$447), nearly a third of his welfare income. He went because his caseworker worried about him and encouraged him to reconnect with his family.

The reaction of other homeless men to Hogo-san's story shows their understanding of relationships between homeless men and their families. The men listening shook their heads in

disbelief several times. First, since they are not receiving welfare, the costs of Hogo-san's trip represented a luxury they cannot afford. They thought he foolishly wasted money. Saito-san, who was listening to the story, teased him, "*okane mochi!*" (You're rich!). Second, in a different conversation, Nishi-san echoed a common belief about contacting family among homeless men when he later told me, "All homeless men, especially those at the *takidashi* (soup line) have something that keeps them from going home or applying for welfare and these reasons are often the same." Third, the reaction of other homeless men shows that many homeless men strongly believe homeless men cannot contact their families.

His family's reaction showed the men that they can return home but the meeting might be awkward. He laughed when telling us that his family said they thought he was dead, although when I followed up privately, he said his family had not added his name to their grave marker. While they thought he was dead, they had not yet buried him. His trip was exciting for him and he retold the story to anyone who would listen.

When I related a similar story about a homeless man who occasionally has dinner with his aunt and uncle to other homeless men, they simply did not believe me. Homeless men reacted like Hara-san, who shook his head in disbelief and shouted, "*shinjeranai!*" (Unbelievable!). These examples demonstrate that prevalence among homeless men of a dominant belief that other homeless men would not visit family members. Endo-san shows this belief, because he did not tell other men about his visits with his aunt and uncle. Hogo-san was one of a few relatively young homeless men, so his parents were relatively young. For other homeless men, their parents, if living, would be in their seventies, eighties or older. Homeless men visiting relatives did not make sense to other homeless men, particularly those estranged from their family, but it happened occasionally.

Still, other men did not contact their family for assistance or return home because they felt ashamed or had a fight with their family. They did not want to face the disgrace they would feel if they went home. Yusuke, a young man in his thirties who was temporarily homeless after losing his job at a *pachinko* parlor, explained his thinking, “My siblings all have houses and proper jobs, but I don’t. If I go home, they will judge me and look down on me for being a failure. I can’t go home in this situation.” While he has not had a fight or falling out with his family, he refused to ask for help. For other homeless men having had a fight makes returning home more difficult. A fight cuts off their family and if they move their network of neighbors and friends.

A fight with their parents or siblings, divorce limits their network. Those who are divorced have lost contact with their wife and children. In Japan, divorce usually ends the relationship with spouses not contacting each other and usually one parent, most often the mother, receives sole custody of the children.

The falling out with their parents or siblings is particularly difficult for men who are divorced or never married, because it means they have no family. For example, Hara-san, who never married, described his situation, “After my father died, I had to become the man of the house, although I was only twenty-four. Seven years ago, I got fed up with it all, had a fight with my mom, and left home.” Hara-san had worked in a Mitsubishi factory for many years, but his supervisors did not promote him because he did not have a college degree.

For other men who have left their families, they did not want their siblings or children to see them living on the streets. Whenever a TV camera crew came to Sanya Workers Association, some men fled the area, even though it could mean missing their only meal of the day. Endo-san, who has dinner with his aunt and uncle occasionally, asked them to keep his homelessness a

secret, because “*marui no hito kawai sō*” (The people around me live a sad life). He did not want other relatives to know his situation, and he did not want his homeless friends to know he visits his aunt and uncle.

Many men refuse to contact their family, and it has considerable consequences for them. It is difficult to put a percent on the number of men not contacting their family but almost no one did. It prevents some men from applying for welfare. For example, men would leave a meeting with welfare caseworkers and not apply because of fear that caseworkers would contact their families (Margolis 2002). The men I talked to had a variety of opinions on this issue. While most men believed that welfare officials contact family members when someone applies for welfare, some men did not care and applied anyway. Their fears were justified as welfare officials admitted checking whether family members can help a relative who applies (Nagata, Kiyokawa, and Iwata 2008). Additionally, since many men refuse to apply for welfare and those who do often have their applications rejected, homeless men must rely on each other, churches, and nonprofit agencies for support.

It Would Be Good If My Family Came Looking For Me

While separated from their family of origin, some homeless men still believe that their family will help them in a crisis or death, and sometimes they do. When a new homeless man, Sensei, began living in the Tent Village, he did not have a car, so the guards did not ask him to leave. Other men protected him by telling the guards he has a home and he is just visiting. Sensei said his family knows he is in Ueno Park, but after a few days turned into weeks, his story, that he likes hanging out in the park, became suspicious. Following his hospitalization for the second

time within two weeks while living in the park, he went home; his family came to get his belongings, and thanked the men in Tent Village for looking after him.

Another example of homeless men counting on their families is Endo-san. After hearing a volunteer say that the ward office is having a difficult time finding a living relative of a recently deceased seventy-four year old homeless man, Endo-san opened his wallet and showed us his sister's address on a small piece of paper. He said he keeps it with him at all times in case something happens to him. In an interview, Endo-san told me he has no contact with his sister and they had a fight a few years ago, but he is counting on her in an emergency although she has no idea he is homeless. While few men stayed in contact with their relatives, only women relatives visited the park, two daughters, a niece, and a wife. The men tended to call or visit their brother's homes.

Some homeless men counted on their families by hoping they would come to Ueno or Sanya looking for them. Takahashi-san, a homeless man who never married, has not contacted his siblings or parents for more than twenty years, but he has seen family members of homeless men and day laborers come to Sanya looking for their relatives. Describing his feelings, he said, "It would be good if my family came looking for me. It would show they still cared and remember me." Another example is Omizu-san, who expressed a similar desire. He lives in a wooden cart along the river. He said that his wife had visited him, but the outreach worker explained that Omizu-san wants to believe his wife came to visit him, but she has not.

These examples reflect a longing to connect with their loved ones and to know that their family remembers and cares about them. However, there are limits to these desires. Some men may not want to see their spouse but do want to see their children. In addition, while many men

expressed feelings of loneliness, not everyone wanted to see their families. Some men never got along with them and are glad to be separated.

The handful of families looking for their relative fueled the hopes of many homeless men that their family is looking for them or is missing them. Twice I saw a family come to Sanya Workers Association asking if anyone has seen their relative and showed his picture. Since I went to Sanya Workers Association twice a week, more families probably came when I was not there. A heartbreaking example involved a young woman in her late thirties who circulated a flier with a photo and information about her missing husband. When the administrator showed volunteers and other staff members the flier at a meeting, some of the homeless men who volunteer said she would not find her husband. One volunteer disagreed, citing a case from the previous year of a family looking for a relative and finding him.

A wife looking for her husband came to all the soup lines asking men if they had seen her husband. Some of the homeless found her approach to finding her husband ineffective. Oba-san joked that she should hire some *yakuza* (members of organized crime) to look for him. He laughed and said they would find him quickly, because it takes special knowledge to survive on the streets among the homeless. Oba-san and Nishi-san thought if her husband did not want to be found, she would not find him. They thought he would run if he sees her and they were convinced he did something bad involving money. Their conjectures probably involved some self-projection as Nishi-san loves to gamble and Oba-san has experience with gang members. While rare, the conspicuous families that come to soup lines raise the expectations of homeless men who want to reunite with their families or at least have their families remember them.

This discussion of the relationship homeless men have with their families includes an implicit assumption that the Japanese welfare system expects families to help their homeless

relatives and that the men should return home. The men who comment here assume that becoming homeless reflects a personal failure. Furthermore, they assume that homelessness is abnormal and therefore bad. While some praised their life in the park as providing freedom, the most common explanation was that becoming homeless alleviated or prevented a bad situation at home.

Home Sweet Home: Ueno Park

Regardless of why they chose not to ask for help from their families and could not find work, many men came to live on the streets. The homeless I knew congregated in three areas: Asakusa, Sanya, and Ueno. Asakusa is a tourist area with a river as a border and a temple in the center, and it contrasts with Sanya, the formerly thriving day laborer district. Ueno Park, a large urban park in the northeast part of the city, attracts many tourists. On many weekends and weekdays, street performers have stations throughout the park year round to entertain the crowds. The park's famous cherry blossoms attract large crowds when they bloom in late March and early April. The number of homeless men in the park fluctuates. On an afternoon when a church has a service followed by a soup line several hundred men attend and about a dozen men will be elsewhere in the park. Other days only a couple dozen homeless men are in the park.

The park was the center of my research and two groups of homeless men used the park. The first group consists of men who visit the park during the day and sit on a bench all day or work occasionally, but they have no tie to the park at night. This group expands significantly on days when there is a soup line. Churches and nonprofit organizations hold soup lines in the park on Tuesday, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. They tend to be all day affairs if waiting time is

included. Homeless men often leave the park on Sundays, especially when crowds of couples and families flood the park and use the benches.

The second group consists of men who sleep in the park. There are two subgroups, men with tents and those without tents. I focused on the group of tents I called Tent Village. In Tent Village, there are tents and an area where men park their carts and spend the day. The park management forbids men without tents to sleep at night in the area where they park their carts during the day.

The subgroup of homeless men who sleep in the park but do not have permanent tents constitutes the largest group. This group of men keeps their carts near the park and each evening brings them into the park and sets up their tents for the night. The carts are similar to a handcart used at airports to push luggage. With few exceptions, men cover their carts day and night with large blue tarps that they buy, receive from a friend, or pick up after someone forgets it in the park. They take their carts from the trash and fix them. Usually, they wait until after five to retrieve their carts and set-up their bed for the evening.

Sleep Tight: a Park Bench, a Nice Thick

Piece of Cardboard

Many homeless men have homes or places to call their own in the park, but the quality varies considerably. None of the men actually owns the space where they sleep or park their carts, but once they have staked their claim to it, no one else will, especially after others recognize the claim. The best homes or shelters belong to the men in Tent Village who sleep in tents they built and the worst belong to men who sleep with nothing but a blanket on a park bench.

Tent Village is located behind the park office, on a hill and surrounded by trees. According to Fukuda-san and Matsuo-san, two long-term residents of Ueno Park, this community began two years ago when the park guards gave all the homeless men with tents scattered throughout the park a notice informing them they had to move to this area. When I asked Matsuo-san what would have happened if he had refused, he adamantly answered, “The guards would have thrown away my stuff.” A wide old paved road, which had become more of a dirt road, divided Tent Village. On one side of the road were individual tents where a few men slept and on the other side, a u-shaped area, where men parked their carts, rested, worked, did laundry, and cooked meals. The u-shaped area had two rows of carts on both sides of the u. These two areas formed one community, but men tended to have closer relationships with the men in their area. They were more likely to share food and other supplies with men in their area. Surrounding the areas with their carts was a six-foot metal fence with a blue cover which doubled as a clothesline and provided some privacy. The road sometimes served as a social gathering place, especially when someone, a past resident, friend, or volunteer, brought food and drinks to share.

The ten men in Tent Village with tents had the best homes. They could sleep anytime and had privacy from other homeless men and the public. In their tents, they had several blankets, maybe food for their pet, which was always a cat, cooking equipment, usually a gas burner, work tools, and a radio. The radio provided an important connection to mainstream society and entertainment. A few men listened to the news, especially the weather. However, for most men, their listening preferences reflected their leisure activities, so they listened to horseracing on the weekends and daily baseball games.

The disadvantage to having a tent is that during *yamagari* (monthly inspections of the park) men with tents have more belongings to move and have to rebuild their tent. Men who did not have a tent argued that having a tent is *mendokusai* (a nuisance, troublesome), because it creates restrictions and requires maintenance. The responsibilities that came with having a tent include maintaining relationships with the park management and neighbors and keeping it clean and neat. While only a few men suffer from obvious mental illness, many men became homeless in part to escape relationships with others because they have had significant *ningen kankei* (human relationships) troubles. Having a tent represented a step towards their previous life.

Although they did not have tents, about thirty men kept their carts in Tent Village and benefited from the friendship and network of the other men. They also had the advantage of being in a good location, an area partially covered with the leaves of several tall ginkgo trees when it rains. By far the best advantage to living in Tent Village is the daily visits by *kyosanto*, a nonprofit agency that I discuss in more detail in chapter six. It consisted of one man who came every day to the park on his bicycle and gave the men in Tent Village *bentō* boxes, day old bread, and fresh fruit and vegetables.

Men who had tents said that the park management prohibited anyone from setting up a new tent or bringing a new cart into the cart section of Tent Village. The park management controlled the number of tents and carts in Tent Village by having the guards patrol the area several times a day and by registering the carts and tents. The guards distribute a flier requiring the owners of every cart in Tent Village to register with the park office every six months. After registering their name at the park office, they received a laminated card to display on their cart. On the front of the white laminated paper is a large black number and on the back are the rules, which include displaying the sign at all times, not sharing or removing it, and keeping the cart

neat and small. When Ishi-san was hospitalized, the park guards came and took his belongings to their office and blocked others from moving or expanding into Ishi-san's area by putting two cones with a bar joining them and taping a, "Do not enter" sign on the bar. The very act of closing the area reminded the men of their powerlessness, but the guards were friendly and the men gave them duct tape so they could tape the sign to the bar.

The other type of homeless men in the park, those who had carts and often claimed a space as their own, do not need to register their carts. They parked their carts outside the park, tied and secured them with a bicycle lock to a railing on the sidewalk out of the way. At night, they retrieve their carts, unpack what they need to sleep and set up their bedding. Most men put cardboard down on the cold hard pavement behind a park bench, and then they place their sleeping bag and add a couple of blankets on top of the cardboard. They get the best and thickest cardboard from a nearby drugstore. Depending on the weather, they may add a blue tarp to keep dry if it is raining. Experienced men construct their tents to keep them dry when it rains.

While guards insist carts be kept neat, the carts serve several important functions for homeless men. They store everything they own, including work clothes, tools, cooking instruments, bedding, and cooking equipment. Typically, these carts include their clothing, coats, blankets, garbage bags, plastic bags to keep things dry, a small gas stove for cooking, and some food. The men buy gas canisters from the large discount store a few blocks away or at the One Hundred Yen store, for three hundred yen (\$2.80) for a pack of three. Some men cook simple meals like instant ramen or reheat *bentō* boxes using their gas stoves, but others cook traditional home-style meals including rice, *miso* (a thick soy paste) soup, grilled fish, and potato dishes. With one gas burner, men can cook one dish at a time, so it takes longer. Those who do more than basic cooking have a tent or semi-permanent location, and in Tent Village, a few men used

the back of the u-shaped area and the fence to make a small kitchen area for cooking, since the fence provides a place to hang dishtowels and cooking utensils. They leave ingredients like spices and eggs out, so they can cook easier and more elaborate dishes than other homeless men.

The smallest and final group of homeless men did not have a cart. They carried all their possessions in a backpack and struggled with surviving from one day to the next. Identifying this group required knowing more about the men than just their appearance. Koga-san illustrates this point, because he spent most of his time sitting on a park bench and walking to various soup lines. For months, I never saw him with a cart, only a heavy backpack until one *yamagari* when I encountered him on his way to retrieve his cart. Another example is Tomita-san. He had a cart with his belongings, but often kept it inside a friend's tent, since he sometimes worked several consecutive days. Since they had so few possessions, men without carts were unlikely to work. Men who carried all or many of their belongings in a backpack often walked hunched over from the weight.

Dealing with Security

Regardless of how they use the park, everyone in the park, has to deal with security. The park has two levels of security. The police are the first and most respected level of security and the park management guards are the second. Two guards from the park management office patrol the park on bicycle during the day and three walk the park throughout the night. The concert hall has one guard who patrols the area around it. While most men do not talk to the police at the *koban* (police box) in the middle of the park, many men are friendly with the guards who patrol the park. For example, Tomita-san had been away for two days and ran into the concert hall

security guard on his way into the park. He greeted the guard with a big smile and he and the guard chatted like old friends. Okamoto-san and his friends in Tent Village have a similar relationship with the park guards. For men who do not have tents and live on a bench, their relationship with the guards tends to be distant, because the guards wake sleeping men and ask men not to crush cans or hang laundry on the shrubs or benches. These men correctly see the guards as enforcers of the park rules because the guards ask men in the area to follow the rules.

While the men in the park treat the police with more respect, the park management is the biggest authority in their lives. The guards, who constantly patrol the park, represent the park office, and insist men follow the rules. All the guards are men, wear uniforms, and are middle-aged or older. They implement and enforce the park rules including asking the men to keep their belongings neat. Only a few official rules govern behavior in the park. These include no selling or advertising without permission, no entry between eleven p.m. to five a.m., stay off the grass, do not feed the pigeons, no motorcycles, no fires or other dangerous things, no camping, dogs must be on a leash, and headphones must be used. I could not find an official rule against living in the park, although the no entry between eleven and five could be interpreted as requiring everyone to vacate the park. Margolis documented that the park officials would remind homeless residents that, “they were living in the park illegally” (2008, 358). Some men commented in moments of candor that they are not legally allowed to be in the park.

The guards enforce unwritten rules regarding the behavior of homeless men such as no drying laundry on park benches. They also track the number of homeless men attending the soup lines. The guards keep the park clean, especially if a man’s belongings become messy. Closing a park bench after a homeless man continually kept his possessions in a mess behind it for several weeks illustrates how they enforce the rules. After asking him to move, they closed the bench by

putting orange cones around it with a bar connecting them so no one could use the bench. Their approach of gently waking homeless men and closing a park bench to everyone is less severe than the urban camping ordinances passed in some U.S. cities.

Generally, the guards have a good relationship with homeless men, but occasionally a homeless man will vent his frustration at the guards. Most homeless men understand that the guards do not make the rules. Matsuo-san succinctly described the guard's position, "The park manager makes the decisions. The guards are only doing their jobs." Men who have lived in the park for a long time believe that the park management enforces rules that the Tokyo city government creates. Matsuo-san described the flow of power "The current park boss is not as nice as the previous one, and he has one more year to go. Of course, the rules aren't coming from the park supervisor. They are made up by the bureaucrats in Shinjuku (city hall)." The rules that affect his life come from the bureaucrats in city hall, who then convey the rules to the park supervisor who relay them to the guards. Finally, the guards tell him the new rules. Men in the park also complain that the management of the park has become stricter and cite the change in *yamagari* (monthly eviction from the park for cleaning) from before when men only had to move their tents three feet to having to move them out of the park.

Yamagari: A Nuisance

One of the worst aspects of living in the park is *yamagari*. After hearing the word for the first time, I got out my electronic dictionary. Yamada-san said, "Don't bother. It is not in the dictionary. It has special meaning. It's our word." He explained it is their word for the monthly special cleaning of the park. *Yamagari* literally means mountain hunting, a violent connotation.

In reality, *yamagari* starts with the guards announcing a special cleaning by giving a flier to each homeless man in the park. They place fliers on carts and tents. The flier indicates when homeless men must leave the park and place their carts either outside the park or in a special location inside the park. When a member of the Emperor's family or other dignitary visits the park, the park management announces a special cleaning. Other times no dignitary comes and the park management use *yamagari* as a monthly opportunity to inspect the homeless men's tents and carts. This keeps the men from accumulating too many possessions.

The process for *yamagari* has several steps. About a week before the guards distribute a flier announcing, there will be a special cleaning of the park, rain or shine, and give the time and date. The night before *yamagari*, homeless men move their carts and tents to the designated area or outside the park. For men with large tents, this requires more work and for some men it takes two or even three days to rebuild their tent after *yamagari*. The park management requires everyone to participate in the monthly *yamagari*, when they walk around the park checking the tents and verifying that no one has moved into the park.

There are several types of *yamagari* and a variety of negative consequences for the men. The monthly inspection of the park is the same every month. However if a dignitary visits the park, some men receive a notice of another special cleaning but the men know this special cleaning is a ruse. There will be no inspection of their carts. It is a notice to vacate the park, to disappear while the important guest visits. Men feel confident that a *yamagari* with an inspection will not occur if the park management already held one earlier in the month.

Which dignitary and where in the park they are going determines the extent of the *yamagari*. Men who read the newspaper know who came and why. When the emperor, his wife, family member, or an ambassador visits a museum, only men who live in the area where the

motorcade will pass receive a notice of a special cleaning from the park management. For example, when Empress Misako visited the park to attend her class reunion in October, only the homeless men in the upper half of the park had to move their belongings. Some men knew that the Emperor's wife visited the cultural hall for her school reunion from news reports.

I had thought the term "special cleaning" was unique to Ueno Park, but I was wrong. Several months after finishing fieldwork while riding the train with my family, we observed a man delaying the train by repeatedly preventing the doors from closing. The staff removed him from the train and the conductor announced that they were taking the train out of service for a "special cleaning." It seems that "special cleaning" is not a special euphemism for the homeless, but their word *yamagari* is. Regardless, the park management does not do any cleaning, but men in the park, especially those with tents, often discard some possessions.

Yamagari has several drawbacks. It almost never occurs on a Sunday, so men who collect cans or who receive work from the center in Sanya lose a day's income, a significant consequence. Rainy or snowy days make *yamagari* worse, because the men have nowhere to go and they cannot escape into their tents. Ishikawa-san complained that the visits by the Emperor and his family, who lives nearby, are, "*gomeiwaku*" (causing others problems) and "*kinjomeiwaku*" (inconveniencing your neighbors). They were not happy to have to sit outside on a cold, damp day until eight at night and not be inside their tents. After *yamagari* occurred frequently in December, several men became bitter. After the guards distributed a flier, they told the men the day before that the park management cancelled it. Okamoto-san explained the reason the park management cancelled this *yamagari*, "*Tenoheika guai warui*" (The Emperor's health is not good.). *Yamagari* creates more than a nuisance because it reminds the men of their powerlessness and limits their possessions.

Conclusion

This chapter asked how men became homeless, what kind of relationship do they have with their family, and how they deal with *yamagari* and security. It asked how men feel about their families and how they maintained a relationship with them and if they did not, why not. Their separation from their families led to a new life and eventually a new home. This chapter described that home in Ueno Park.

Many homeless men could not return to their previous homes because they divorced or separated from their spouses and did not want to see their former wife or her family. Other men never got along with their parents and siblings or they never married or do not contact their families. They have cut their potential social network in half by never marrying or not contacting their former wife. Men who divorced or left their spouses rarely elaborated on the circumstances or their feelings; however, men clearly and repeatedly stated that they did not want to see their former spouse or her family.

While scholars often use shame and embarrassment to describe the stigma and feelings of divorce in Japan, among the men who left their wives, many men expressed anger and bitterness towards their former spouses. They may be ashamed of being homeless, but they are often angry at their wives.

While my research focuses on homeless men, their poverty impacts the family they left. Like Braman's research (2004) that found families suffer when their relative is incarcerated, Fuess found that, "only few parents who did not have custody paid child support" (2004, 158). He cites Osaka who found that less than twenty percent paid child support. In one third of the

cases, the mother did not know where her former spouse was and in another third, the former spouse could not afford payments (Fuess 2004, 158). These numbers indicate that at least some of the men could be homeless. Fuess explains the low payments by pointing out “most divorcing couples belonged to the poorer sections of the population...” (2004, 159). Divorce and separation involving homeless men and their relatives has consequences including a homeless man losing half a network and his children losing their father. The emotional complexity became clear after Iwamoto-san finished bitterly expressing his dislike for his former wife, but said he would not mind seeing his son and daughter again. His sentiments were common. He often recounted participating in their major life events including the *shichi-go-san* (rite of passage for children. Girls observe it at seven and three, and boys at five) occasions.

According to my data, Iwamoto-san is not alone. My findings reflect the findings of Iwata on homeless men (2008). Iwata found that in Tokyo almost 53 percent, of the homeless never married and 41.2 percent of homeless men divorced (2008). In Japan, when a couple gets divorced, custom dictates that whoever did not receive custody of the children leave the family. No doubt, many men have left their family. This separation means no longer contacting family, and family members do not usually come looking for them.

A few family members remained in contact with their homeless relative and give them alcohol, money, and food. The family member dictated the terms of these visits. Considering their age, their children, and not their spouses or siblings, visit them. In two cases, a homeless man’s daughter came to visit. In the first case, Otani-san’s daughter, her husband, and his grandson visited during the summer *Obon* holiday, and it seemed to be a one-time event. Ishikawa-san’s story differed significantly, because his daughter visits every couple of weeks and usually brought a large bottle of sake, and cash, around five thousand yen (\$48). His

neighbors and friends know her. When he is not home, they tell her that he went out and they will tell him she came. They spoke highly of her and praised her as a good daughter. Near the end of my fieldwork during a recession, she came and told her father she could not continue coming.

In addition to family, friends play a significant role in their lives. Because homeless men lost their jobs and since most of their friends are colleagues from work, they cannot help them find jobs. Therefore, their social network of friends lacks money and resources. Not having relatives or loved one to care for them does not mean the homeless lack a social network. A few men kept to themselves, but many men made friends or at least acquaintances with other homeless men. These friendships partially filled the gap left by the separation from their families. For other men, having a network of neighbors and friends they could talk to on a regular basis helped them survive. Some men defined their new friends as families or partners, but others denied they were friends with other homeless men. Matsuo-san and Fukuda-san had been neighbors for more than two years in two different areas of the park. I had seen them eat, drink, share food, laugh, and socialize together. When I asked Matsuo-san if they are friends, he said, “No. Friends are people who you know their real names and have known you for a long time.” Matsuo-san added, “That’s just how it is for us.” Perhaps he was trying to protect himself from losing a friend, since homeless men die frequently. Other possibilities include his defining friendship within the strong prevalence of long-term friendships established in school and based on trust. In their environment, establishing friendship based on trust can be difficult.

In sum, there was a relationship more important than their friends and neighbors. It is their relationship with money. Their view shows the significance of money troubles among the men. The dominant view among the homeless regarding why men become homeless is that they

had money troubles, which in many cases means gambling debts or not saving money. Several homeless men remarked that they quit gambling, but this was usually after they ran up debts and quickly spent their savings. Since many men would not talk about their debts, it is difficult to quantify the number of men with debts. A volunteer who has worked with homeless men explained their outlook is similar to a soldier who leaves for battle in a few days and spends all his money because he may not return. Some day laborers and homeless men share this perspective, since their work pays them in cash and they face dangers on the job and at home. She added that some men think they have no family to care for them and no one to live for except themselves.

CHAPTER 3

“I HAVE MANY THINGS TO FORGET: LIFE HAS CHANGED COMPLETELY” DAILY STRUGGLES

Suzuki-san

The challenges and good times in Suzuki-san's life show the complexity of becoming homeless and the larger societal issues that lead to homelessness. He lived on the side of a road that divides the park into two parts, a higher level on the hill, and a lower level by the pond and temple. He sleeps on the ground between the bushes in the early morning when he returns from collecting cans. He digs through the trash for aluminum cans and anything of value, but takes pride in his cleanliness. For example, when I first met him, he showed me several tickets he had remaining from the pack of ten he bought for the local *sentō* (public bath). Access to free water faucets in the park and for those who have around five dollars a clean bathing facilities makes homelessness in Japan much easier than in the U.S.

During the first half of my fieldwork, before the price of aluminum cans dropped, he proudly said that while he is homeless he does not attend soup lines, but after the price of aluminum dropped, he attended. His attitude, shared by many homeless men, reflects their pride in providing for themselves. Many men proudly said they did not attend soup lines because they have enough money to buy their own food. Suzuki-san has a rain suit for rainy days and takes care of himself, but receives help from an *oba-san* (a local middle-aged woman) who comes occasionally and gives him rice. Since he finds his neighbor, Hara-san, annoying, he avoids him, but cultivates ties with other homeless men.

Suzuki-san's life story has several sad incidents. He has a *nikyukenchikushi* (second-class architectural license) and worked for an architectural firm for many years. However, he lost his job after a series of tragedies. Suzuki-san was married and had a two-year-old daughter. She died when a drunk truck driver hit her. He received a significant amount of money from the truck driver's company, though small by U.S. standards, and used it to have a grand funeral to honor his daughter. His marriage was not the same after this unbearable heartbreak, and his wife later got sick and died.

The tragedy that finally pushed him into homelessness involved his only sibling, a sister. She was a victim of the Aum Shinrikyo cult's terrorist gas attack in the Tokyo subway in 1995. He quit his job and stayed in the hospital to take care of her, bathing and nursing her back to health as best as he could. Since he stayed there for months, nurses and staff often asked if he was her husband, and he would tell them that they are *futari kyōdai* (only two siblings), which was unusual for his generation when there were many large families, especially in the countryside where he was born. They are especially close because their father died when they were young. Their father was riding his bicycle when a drunk driver mistook the gas pedal for the brake and slammed into him.

His sister's family continued to bring both hardships and some happiness to his life. After his sister went home from the hospital, he moved in with them and worked for their small business, a *yaoya* (greengrocer). His brother-in-law often drank, as did Suzuki-san, and they fought. When he became tired of fighting with his brother-in-law, he moved out and spent his savings playing *pachinko* (Japanese pinball) and drinking, which led to him being homeless as he had spent all his savings. Like many homeless men, he chose *pachinko* as a way to forget his troubles and avoid the many misfortunes that he has experienced. His sister's family brings him

to their home for occasional weekend visits to see his sister. His niece picks him up at the park and these trips are the highlight of his life away from the park. During these rare weekends away from the park, he plays video games, socializes with his sister's family, and enjoys the privacy and warmth of having his own room to sleep.

Staying in touch with his sister's family has other tangible benefits. Last summer, he unexpectedly received a case of beer, a real treat, from his niece. He tries to get some money by calling his niece when she received her bonuses in June and December to ask for money, or as he put it, "an allowance." It worked because when I saw him in early January, he told me he had received fifty thousand yen (\$480).

Ishi-san's story also illustrates some major themes in this chapter. He died around December 1st. The news of his death surprised me, but the others seemed to be taking the news well. Okamoto-san told me on December fourth that Ishi-san died a few days ago, so I asked how he knew. He said Ebuchi-san, the higher-ranking of the two guards who patrol the park during the day, told him. Ka-chan, the only woman in Tent Village, told me not to tell anyone because we should not spread this kind of news. I had been asking this group of Tent Village residents if they had heard how he was, but no one knew. Two months earlier on Sunday, September 28, I visited Ishi-san in the hospital and he seemed to be recovering. He told me the doctors found that he has diabetes and that explained why he was sick in the park. After entering the hospital, he never returned to the park. Ishi-san was one of several homeless men who died during my research.

This chapter describes the lives of homeless men as full of hardship interspersed with moments of laughter and camaraderie. The happy times usually occurred when the men are engaged in activities they did before they were homeless, especially when they drank sake or

beer, although they have little time or money to drink. This chapter will show that their lives are full of difficulties that many housed people take for granted. Finally, the chapter's data will show the challenges of the lives of homeless men. Additionally, it will demonstrate the poverty that some men chose rather than face the consequences of confronting debts, the *yakuza* (organized crime), or family members. They refuse to apply for welfare or ask their families for help. We cannot understand how homeless men survive without first seeing the conditions in which they live. This chapter describes their everyday lives, focusing on their hardships.

Critical Issues

The literature on homelessness almost universally describes life on the street as difficult and dangerous (Aoki 2006; Dordick 1997; Guzewicz 1996; Hopper 2003; Liebow 1993). Liebow, describing homeless women in Washington D.C, argues that being homeless is not just difficult, but is "hard living" (1993, 25). To adjust to life on the streets, homeless men and women adopt ways to manage their lives. Lyon-Callo describes ethnographic findings of coping mechanisms such as joining gangs, abusing drugs and alcohol, and others as "actually strategies to cope with historical exploitation and structural inequality" (2001, 296). He argues that research examines the question of why people chose these coping mechanisms rather than challenge the conditions that produce structural violence and homelessness (2001). While the coping mechanisms are different in Japan, Lyon-Callo's argument also reflects the reality of poverty and homelessness in Japan.

As the data will show, in Japan, many homeless people in and around Ueno and Asakusa chose coping mechanisms and avoided challenging the inequality in their lives. Many

men chose drinking as a way to cope. While many men continued to drink, some men had quit drinking. When compared to drinking behavior in Japanese society, those who drank were not especially heavy drinkers. If they could afford it, they drank in the evenings and would sip hot sake to stay warm in the winter.

While some men became angry when drinking, these men do not challenge the system that oppresses them. For many challenging the conditions that led to their becoming homeless and the forces that keep them homeless is unthinkable. Furthermore, many men will not challenge the park management, a rather benign group. No one challenged them, but often the men ignored the guards' requests after they left. For example, the men know about what time the guards will come to their area, so they avoid crushing aluminum cans during that time or they hang laundry after the guards leave.

If they will not challenge the park management, challenging larger structures that Lyon-Callo describes is unimaginable for many men. Sogidan, the day laborers union, and other groups organized demonstrations demanding jobs and welfare. They distributed fliers about an upcoming protest but several men put the fliers in the trash. The men in Ueno had no interest or time to join the frequent protests, especially on a Saturday when two soup lines occur in the park and the neighborhood to collect aluminum cans is only two blocks away. Upon receiving the flier about an upcoming protest, Takayama-san, like other men, paid no attention. As he was busy setting up his home for the night, he said I could have his flier.

On a smaller scale, a few men watched intensely as the guards and staff asked a homeless man to move to another area of the park before a visit from the Emperor. His compliance showed the power of the park management and discouraged them from challenging their authority. As Ishikawa-san and I watched the guards ask the man to leave the bench, he

commented that the man sitting on the bench had not prepared sufficiently to get away with being on the bench during *yamagari*.

Homeless men do not have the time, energy, or interest to participate in protests, because they need time and energy for their work and survival. Men would freely give their fliers to me, if I asked about it. Describing the essence of life for homeless men, Aoki found “the work process and the process of living are intertwined” (2006, 96). While Aoki’s point may be true for most everyone under capitalism, it is more apparent for many homeless men. For example, even when sitting in the park on his bench appearing to be doing nothing but resting, Yamada-san will get up and retrieve some aluminum cans that park goers put in the trash near him. He had been observing what people put in the trash.

While working men might also discuss their free time activities or look for something interesting to read. For example, on his way back from eating lunch in a small park near a cheap *bentō* box shop, Takayama-san will pick up a comic book out of the trash to read later. While Shokunin-san sits on his bench, he sometimes grabs something someone leaves behind. By simply being on his bench when a church volunteer stops by on his bicycle with the basket full of cheap day old breads from a convenience store, men can receive some bread. Finally, on his way out of the park for the night, Koga-san stops at the ashtray and empties it. He uses a stick to dig in the ashtray for any cigarette butts that are large enough to smoke. He lights both ends; first, he lights the butt that had been in someone’s mouth, lets it burn for a minute to clean it, and then lights the stub, and smokes it.

While their work and lives are interrelated, more important to them is their health. The men need their health. Farmer argues that the poor and destitute do not have equal access to health care (1999) and this inequality leads to increased illness and early death, which applies

among day laborers in Japan (Gill 2001). Being homeless affects the health of the poor, because “poverty and other social inequalities come to alter disease distribution and sickness trajectories through innumerable and complicated mechanisms” (Farmer 1999, 13). While Farmer is describing inequality leading to death in New York City, a similar phenomenon occurs in Tokyo. While Japan has national health insurance, it requires the self-employed to pay premiums and thirty percent of the medical costs. Most homeless men have not paid their premiums for months or years and do not have the thirty percent needed to pay for simple medical care. Many men chose not to go to the doctor and self-medicate, such as Otani-san treated his rash with baby powder. Their neglect is not new or unique to Tokyo. Gowan sheds light on why society neglects the homeless. Conducting research among homeless men in San Francisco, she quotes a homeless man describing his rank in society, “Put us out of our misery, I guess. Didn’t I tell you we rank down somewhere with the stray cats” (2000, 74).

The public’s perception of homeless men is one reason for their neglect. The word most often associated with homeless men in Tokyo is *kimochi warui* (disgusting). The government’s attitude towards homeless men is that they should be working, so public bureaucrats in the welfare office often view homeless men as lazy and disgusting and deny them welfare. Former Tokyo Mayor Aoshima’s comment, “Those people like that kind of lifestyle,” reflects an attitude that encourages denying welfare benefits to homeless (Aoki 2006, 279). His attitude filters down to caseworkers who decide if a homeless man receives assistance.

Contrasting to this position are volunteers and people sympathetic to homeless men. Aoki quotes a volunteer who spent a couple of nights sleeping on the streets, “Sleeping rough is tough. I understand that. I do not think there is anyone who has chosen to sleep rough because they like it. They are doing it because they have no choice: because of work, family or for other

reasons” (2006, 279). Without protesting, the homeless continue to live difficult lives stigmatized by Japanese society.

When men can no longer tolerate the challenges of living on the street, they often apply for welfare. Given the fluidity of the men, little quantitative data exist examining how many men apply for welfare. In rare cases, they commit suicide. I will discuss welfare in more detail in chapter six. Here I will provide some information on the criteria and benefits. The benefits include “¥120,000-130,000 a month for a single person” (Gillb 2004) (\$1170-\$1265). The criteria to receive welfare in practice requires men to be over sixty-five or sick and incapable of working. Men usually receive housing in a *doya* (flophouse), which the welfare system automatically deducts from their welfare money. Men who stay at one of the shelters I describe in chapter six receive meals at the shelter. Nishi-san and other men commented on the poor quality of the meals. He complained that although his welfare money pays for meals at the shelter, he has to buy dinner when he returns to the shelter after they served dinner.

Day-to-Day Survival

The lives of homeless men are not easy and their everyday life takes a toll on their bodies. Often hungry, outside dealing with the heat, cold, wind, and rain, they find few comforts in life. Many, if not all, homeless men often walk great distances. For instance, a homeless man with a limp walked several miles to get food at a soup line in Ueno Park. It was common knowledge among volunteers and social workers that homeless men are generally much younger than they look, because of their exposure to the elements. The struggle for food and money and the social isolation takes not only a physical toll, but also a mental one.

Kawabata-san illustrates the toll being homeless takes on the men. He was suffering from years of being homeless and had minimal personal hygiene at best. His cart smelled of urine and mold, and with trash and dirty clothes inside it looked filthy. His appearance was an example of the stereotypical homeless man who elicits the description of *kimochi warui* (disgusting). Kawabata-san's hair was white but he had not washed it for a long time and his fingernails were excessively long and thick. Volunteers and other staff members at Sanya Workers Association, a non-profit agency serving day laborers and homeless men, praised a staff member who after months of trying to convince Kawabata-san to apply for welfare succeeded in getting him to come to Sanya Workers Association. Kawabata-san got a bit of a makeover. He received new clothes, new shoes, hot meals, medicine, and a room for the night. The next day they were to leave to go to the welfare office, but in the morning, Kawabata-san was gone. He had run away. Applying for welfare and integrating back into society was too much for him.

Rarely being inside creates a set of hardships for the homeless. Living outdoors causes the men to shiver in winter and to have sunburned faces in summer. While skin infections like athlete's foot and rashes are common, it is not necessarily because of a lack of hygiene or effort. Since many men are outside without a way to dry their clothing, they have to wear damp socks and other clothing. Hanging clothing on a park bench or a shrub is risky, because guards will ask them to remove it and if it is on a shrub, there is a risk of developing a rash from caterpillars, known as caterpillar rash and common in Japan. *Kemshi* (caterpillars) create a health problem for homeless when their skin or clothing touches the shrubs where caterpillars hatch. Putting their cloths on the bushes to dry in the spring causes their cloths to brush against caterpillars. The caterpillars cause rashes. Some men go to Sanya Workers Association for a referral for treatment, because it requires prescription medication to heal. Other men do not go and try to

cure the rash with baby powder and creams. Otani-san did this, but his rash continued to spread and break into blisters making it painful and extremely itchy.

The difficulties of living outside make receiving food difficult. After participating in a soup line with Sanya Workers Association during a heavy rain, my sneakers, socks, and feet were soaked. We had gone to the park next to the Sumida River by van, but the homeless waited outside and were outside while we distributed the food. For them it must have been much worse. Another example of the weather conditions creating hardships occurred on a cold rainy Friday afternoon. A homeless man who lived in a large covered pushcart was home when two volunteers and I came to distribute two rice balls. The heavy rain was too much to go out. He was usually out collecting aluminum cans, so it was unusual to see him. We knew he was the only person living there, so it was surprising when he said there is another person living with him, so he needs two more rice balls. We pretended to believe him and gave him two more rice balls. The volunteer in charge later said it is okay to give him extra rice balls because he is *kawai sō* (a sad case).

While the weather was a major concern among most homeless men, and although not everyone cared, the conditions affected everyone. Some men, like Takayama-san, did not care to know the weather or news, even though they had access to newspapers. Given the high percentage of former day laborers, their worries about rain are understandable. Day laborers lost money when it rained since they could not work. Many homeless men said the worst part about being homeless is when it rains or snows, because they have nowhere to go. Some men go to the library when it rains heavily, and others stay in their tents all day, but this could mean a day or more without a substantial meal. While soup lines would generally have about thirty percent fewer people attending if it rained, this still means several hundred men standing in the rain for

food. Men tried to escape the weather when it rained or snowed. For example many men went inside to the corridor adjoining the two Ueno train stations on the first day of a winter snowstorm. The following day a private security guard was patrolling the area and prohibiting men from congregating.

In spite of poor conditions, homeless men often highlighted freedom as one area where they feel they have an advantage over housed people. They often report that freedom, in fact, is the best part of being homeless. Men explained that they could eat, sleep, and work when they chose and were free from worrying about concerns of family members who lived with them. However, a closer look shows that park rules limit their freedom. The men who live in the park do not have freedom at night. For example, the men who sleep behind the concert hall cannot set up their bedding until after the concert, and some nights that means going to bed at ten and sometimes they must leave for work the following morning around five or six. Other times the park office has *yamagari* or the park guards tell the men when their tents and carts are getting too messy. For men who live along the Sumida River, the guards patrolling the riverbank play a similar role as the guards in Ueno Park. They have a similar process to *yamagari*, although the river authority schedules it for just once a month, since no dignitaries come.

The miserable conditions homeless men face make many of the daily activities that many housed people take for granted impossible including living with privacy and not interacting with the authorities. The first activity where homeless men differ significantly from housed people is privacy, which homeless men in Tokyo rarely have. It was common to see someone shaving in public or brushing his teeth. Once a homeless man stripped to his boxer shorts and washed his body using a bucket, a washcloth, and the cold water from the faucet on the side of the park bathroom. Except for the few men who had tents, everyone lived their lives

in public with everything they did and said visible and audible to their neighbors. This helped facilitate exchanges because everyone knew what their neighbor received, so if a friend brought a bag of fruit, they would share it. On the other hand, the men used vague expressions to explain their daily activities to their neighbors. Men might say they went here and there or just spent the day hanging out. For example, Tomita-san told me it was a secret that he attends a soup line on Saturdays in Sanya.

If they live their lives in public, they guard their past like an old family recipe. Otani-san helped me to understand why men do not talk about their past. He never asked his friend, whom he had shown the ropes of being homeless, about his past, because he cannot help him find housing or deal with his past. Living in the open space means they see the public, so during cherry blossom season, they can watch families, coworkers, and friends participate in a life some homeless men used to live. For some men, the daily reminder of their past life must hurt. The most common response to questions or conversation about families was, “*iro iro jijou ga atta*” (various things happened). The men I talked to often used and accepted this response.

The second activity that differs from numerous housed people is that homeless people have to deal with the authorities almost constantly. The authorities include the police, the ward office bureaucrats, the park officials, and the park guards. While stealing was a common complaint among the men, they rarely involved the police.

Disagreements or fights seldom led to police involvement, because it would mean leaving the park. While yelling between two men occurred occasionally, physical fights rarely happened, so when they did they generated lots of conversation. Two examples show the role of the authority and the men’s response. First, Akita-san told me that the police warned him after two fights where they had to intervene that the next time he would have to leave the park.

Second, Hara-san bitterly complained to the ward officials when they asked him and the other homeless men along the side of the road crushing cans to move to a different area. He asked them where they were supposed to go, but they ignored his question. Otani-san and Suzuki-san insisted that Hara-san acted foolishly for questioning the ward official and asking him where they should go. He vehemently argued that the correct response is simply, “*Hai. Wakarimashita*” (Yes. I understand.). Otani-san said they can simply ignore the request, but that the ward officials must do something so they can tell the local residents who complain that they did something.

A few examples of dealing with authorities will show how intrusive, frustrating, and shameful dealing with the authorities can be. The first example involves a homeless man and his encounter with a police officer that frustrated him. He related the story outside of Sanya Workers Association as he bitterly complained about the police stopping him late at night. They asked him what he was doing out *burabura* (wandering around without a purpose, to stroll idly, aimlessly) at this hour. He insisted that he was *osanpo* (going for a walk). The latter is acceptable in Japanese society and the former, while used by the homeless to be vague about their plans, has the negative connotation of being lazy.

I better understood his complaint and had more empathy after the police stopped me for questioning. I had heard police stop foreigners without cause, and the first time the police stopped me occurred when I was walking between Sanya and Ueno. As I walked through a small red-light district carrying my bag full of bread and instant rice for some homeless friends in Ueno Park, and a small, heavy handheld computer, three police officers stopped me. They said I looked suspicious, because I was carrying my bag in a strange way. Rather than carrying the bag over my shoulder, I carried it flat in my arms to prevent the computer from crushing the bread.

After a few minutes, they let me continue my walk. Since I was rushing to Ueno Park to see some men before dark, they frustrated my plans and made me angry.

A second incident occurred when two police officers on foot stopped me outside of Sanya Workers Association during the beginning of the month when according to Takahashi-san local *yakuza* members collect debts from welfare recipients. While one officer examined my immigration card, one of the staff members explained that I was a volunteer and that I have a family. The police seemed satisfied with these answers. After these incidents, I better understood the men's frustration, humiliation, and anger towards the police and authority figures.

While privacy and authority issues take a mental toll on the men in the park, the lack of proper sanitation creates another burden. Maintaining cleanliness is difficult. Ueno Park and other smaller neighborhood parks all have water and public restrooms, but no shower or bathing facilities. Homeless men who have 450 yen (\$4.20) go once or twice a week to public baths, but the cost makes it too expensive to go more often. Men who work every day in the summer may go to a *sauna* (a Japanese style bath with small sleeping stalls. The overnight charge is around \$35). It costs a third of their daily salary, 3000 yen, and provides a comfortable place to bathe, rest, and sleep for the night. When men earn a little extra money, they take their laundry to a laundromat, but during lean times, they wash their clothing by hand in the restroom sink and hang it over a bench or some bushes at night to dry.

Even basic hygiene can be painful and embarrassing. Hokkaido-san cut himself and bled in front of everyone while shaving with cold water on a Saturday morning in November. Using cold water on a cold November day to shave in front of others demonstrated his poverty, lack of privacy, and the conditions in which he lived. Living in the park in the open is like living on a

subway train. Everything you do, someone is watching and while doing nothing one must pretend not to notice anything.

Worse than shaving with cold water on a winter day is the frequent hunger and inability to eat nutritionally balanced meals, which are rare at the soup lines and cheap places they buy food. The food at the soup lines and the cheap *bentō* shops contains mostly rice. The diet from the soup lines, while often high calorie, is not nutritionally sound. Half the soup lines serve rice with some seasoning and the others serve rice and kimchee, curry, or meat. The soup lines provide a variety of food, but they do not usually serve fruits and vegetables. One example of a soup line meal includes two rice balls or a bowl of cooked rice with kimchee, and a banana. Another meal was rice, sausage, soup, vegetables, and an assortment of snack food and juices that they get from the U.S. army base. One group serves a variety of western foods like muffins, donuts, steamed vegetables, and sliced bread. The men often complained that the last group's meal does not include rice, but they usually serve a variety of food, often have seconds, and give everyone a bag of cooked *edamame* beans and a small bag of bread or fruit to take with them. While attending soup lines may provide sufficient calories for that day, groups do not hold soup lines every day and not all soup lines provide sufficient food. Men who walk to soup lines quickly burn the calories walking for an hour or more to their home.

Some men do not attend soup lines and others supplement the food from soup lines. Those who have some income may buy a *bentō* box with fish or meat, but few vegetables. Some men cook instant noodles with a gas burner and a pot. Ka-chan and her husband have an interesting and creative dinner idea. They often eat a bowl of hot rice with a raw egg over it. They buy the hot bowl of rice at Sukiya, a beef bowl restaurant about a five-minute walk from the park, for one hundred fifty yen (\$1.45). They buy the eggs at a supermarket a ten-minute

walk away. This dinner provided 433 calories from the rice and sixty-five calories from the raw egg with a touch of soy sauce over rice. This is a normal main dish in Japan that many people consider healthy, but people usually supplement it with other foods. The frequency with which they eat it is unusual and not healthy, but the idea is creative. Lack of food, privacy, and dealing with the authorities show how difficult and taxing life can be for homeless men.

Hardships, Health, and Dying

The cumulative effect of the difficulties in their lives takes a toll on their health. Poor health and death loom in the background for many men. While many Japanese people their age have medication to take and have an annual physical, they do not have easy access to either. While the local ward office has a free medical clinic, men prefer to go to Sanya Workers Association. Most men only go to a doctor when they are sick or if they need medicine for an illness or condition they knew about before becoming homeless.

Men come to expect that if they do not see someone for a while, the person is sick, hospitalized, or dead. When I returned to volunteer at Sanya Workers Association after I did not go for two weeks, the men said *okaerinasai* (Welcome home). When I explained that I was in Japan, they said that when you do not come for a while people ask questions and begin to worry that something happened like an illness, accident, or death. Because many men worked as day laborers and continue to do similar work, injuries are much higher than among the general population (Gill 2001). More men than average had injuries such as missing fingers because they had worked in construction. Disabilities and mental illness were above average. Stomach

illnesses were widespread, which is not surprising given their diet and stress. Even healthy men had to deal with the implications of poor health and death.

Men heard frequent stories of other men dying. An-chan, the oldest man in Tent Village at seventy-seven, has resided in the park for several decades, and has a dirty appearance, perhaps the worst among the men. He wears clothing that is not only dirty, but also falling apart. Matsuo-san complained that he has asked An-chan many times to wear pants, but he refuses. He wore a collection of torn pants that ended just below his knees and resembled a skirt. With an unkempt and wild beard and hair that looks like he has not combed or washed it in months, his appearance is memorable. He can carry a conversation and appears not to have any serious or obvious mental illness. He related a story about death. He described how a few years ago a homeless man died lying on the ground catty-corner from the police box in the park. An-chan said that everyone assumed the man had passed out drunk and no one bothered to wake him. After a couple of days, someone checked on him and he was dead.

During another conversation, An-chan described his death as he talked with Okamoto-san. After An-chan said the park office has air conditioning and heat, Okamoto-san asked An-chan if he is going to live there. An-chan turned and pointed to his tent and said, “No, I am going to die right there.” Okamoto-san joked, “That’s great because there are large rocks right behind your tent that can be your tombstone.” Okamoto-san then pretended to be a Buddhist monk, chanted a prayer, and laughed at his joke. Aoki’s research in Osaka echoes the presence of death. He illustrates their path: “The homeless take one step at a time towards death on the street” (2006, 104). They appear to be aware of their movement towards death, are in poor health, and have shorter lives.

Death appears in the foreground, because occasionally an ambulance shows up and takes a friend or acquaintance to the hospital. Sometimes it is something as routine as passing out from drinking too much or heat exhaustion. Some homeless men resist going to hospitals, because an ambulance is a potent symbol of death. When Fukuda-san was showing me his three long scars across his abdomen from cancer surgery last summer, I asked about the cost of the surgery. He said the ward office paid for it and they told him they would *mendō miru* (look after him) and pay for his welfare and hospital bills anytime. He preferred life in the park because he can drink here and has more freedom. Regardless of his bravado, the presence of death is real. For example, when Ishi-san was leaving in an ambulance after he had spent the morning and afternoon suffering from diarrhea and exhaustion, Kawamura-san cried and repeatedly worried that next time it will be him. Seeing Kawamura-san sobbing surprised me, as he is usually quiet and stoic. It revealed his very real concerns about his health and death.

Not every health concern leads to death, but most lead to suffering and difficulties. Someone like Ishikawa-san represents a best-case scenario. He goes to Sanya Workers Association once a week to get a referral for blood pressure medication. High blood pressure is by far the largest health problem among the homeless. At a large volunteer and staff meeting in July, a social worker distributed several charts with referral data, including one indicating that almost fourteen hundred visits were for blood pressure medication. The next couple of categories, orthopedic disorders, skin ailments, and colds, had about four hundred visits, so high blood pressure accounted for three times as many visits. With a diet high in alcohol, one would expect to find diabetes, but it is surprisingly low on the list of health issues seen at the clinic. About twice a week, an ambulance would come to Sanya Workers Association. The social workers noted this helps facilitate applying for welfare and increases the chances for a successful

application. However, the clinic supervisor always decides to call an ambulance because they have the authority and not the social workers.

While the Sanya Workers Association and other nonprofit agencies do a good job of providing vital medication, they cannot efficiently help men with serious injuries. Sanya Worker's Association is open from ten to three, but since the clinic depends on dedicated volunteer doctors, sometimes a doctor cannot come, so their hours are shorter. However, since many homeless men become intoxicated or work at night or early morning, these hours do not help them if they have an accident. Takahashi-san, for example, fell off a ledge next to some bushes where he was sleeping. He woke up as he fell and used his arm to protect his face and head. Takahashi-san went to the nearest hospital, but it was in a ward that is notorious for rejecting welfare applications, so he left. He slept in front of Sanya Workers Association until they opened in the morning, and then they called an ambulance. Takahashi-san had broken his right elbow. At the hospital, he had surgery on his arm, but lost the ability to grip firmly.

Other times, men often treat their own injuries. When Fukuda-san spilled boiling water from soup he was cooking onto his right foot, the injury required medical care, but he refused to get help. It was probably a bad second-degree burn; the boiling water burned away the skin and puss continued to ooze days later. His friends and I brought him bandages and burn cream to help it heal. He could not work for a while, because he rides his bicycle to gather aluminum cans and without work, he could not afford to buy bandages or food. After two and a half weeks, he had to go back to work. Problems with their health and talk of death continue and show the conditions in which they live. Some homeless men chose to suffer in poor health and die alone rather than apply for welfare and risk their families learning they are homeless. This choice

shows their strong resistance to contacting their families' and their desire to maintain their privacy.

There are Many Strange People Like Him in This World

Given the health issues and challenges in their lives like securing food, shelter, and money, it is surprising that when asked the most difficult aspect of being homeless several men answered *ningen kankei* (getting along with others). Okamoto-san said the worst part of being homeless is "*Taijin kankei*" (interpersonal relationships). It is paradoxical that many of the men become homeless because they did not get along with their families or have had trouble with past relationships and now continue to have problems once homeless. They had thought they escaped dealing with people. Even among the homeless, "No man is an island" (Donne 1624). For example, Nigata-san never got along with his siblings, and left home when he was young to come to Tokyo. Now he has to deal with other homeless men.

Now that they have become homeless where they praise the freedom it brings, they complain about having to deal with other people, particularly other homeless men. Men with mental illness and former *yakuza* (organized crime) members make dealing with people especially challenging. There are few statistics on mental illness among the homeless. Mental illness is not usually a cause of homelessness in Japan. Men testified to the presence of former *yakuza* members and one man casually admitted that his former job was *yakuza*. Aoki found that *yakuza* members sometimes run the work camps where day laborers work (2006). Gill (2001) and Fowler (1996) both document the presence of *yakuza* working in the day laborer districts of Kotobuki and Sanya.

There are two different sets of problems with getting along with other homeless men. First, when men live in close contact with other homeless men they become tired of having to worry constantly about their neighbors. Second, men often yell at other homeless men they do not know well. Nigata-san would sometimes yell at new homeless men to clean up his area. A more severe example of the *ningen kankei* issue is Oba-san, who sometimes has an abrasive personality and others describe accurately as an angry drunk. He drove two homeless men from the park when they became tired of Oba-san's harsh personality. The men who left the park because of Oba-san probably benefited by feeling they lived a proper life in the park and may feel superior to Oba-san.

The first man to leave, Yamaguchi-san, left without telling anyone. The small group of homeless men in the back of the park was surprised one morning to find Yamaguchi-san and his tent gone. No one had an explanation beyond saying, "*Iro iro jijou ga atta*" (various things happened), the same explanation many men give to explain why they are homeless. Several homeless men in this group repeated this vague explanation again two months later when Yamaguchi-san's friend Saito-san left the park in the same way. The truth behind the expression was that both of them had become tired of Oba-san and could not tolerate him anymore. Yamada-san, when no one else was around, explained why they left, "*hen na hito iru kara*" (Because there is a strange person here, they left).

I better understood why they left when Oba-san became upset with me at the end of my fieldwork. He had asked me for a blanket from Sanya Workers Association and in exchange, he would give me a *bentō* box, which he receives from *Kyosanto* (a nonprofit that brings *bentō* boxes to the park). I had told him several times that Sanya Workers Association would not give me the blanket, but he could get one anytime. On a cold Monday in early February, I was sitting

on a park bench talking to Takayama-san and Yamada-san as they set up their beds for the night when Oba-san rode his bicycle towards me. He was yelling about the blanket as he approached us. Two things were immediately clear; he was drunk and furious. Later that evening while walking to a *takidashi* (soup line), Yamada-san explained that Oba-san and I must have miscommunicated and that among the homeless there are men like him. While Oba-san's behavior shocked me, Yamada-san thought nothing of it. When Oba-san was yelling at me, I had hoped that Yamada-san or Takayama-san would intervene, because I had spent much time with them, helped them in their daily lives, and considered them friends. Since they were going to remain in the park, they could not risk alienating Oba-san. They confirmed that Oba-san had similar incidents with the two men who left the area and Yamada-san said, "*Oba-san wa, jigen ga chigau*" (Oba-san is on a different level or dimension than us.). Although Oba-san was missing part of his pinky finger, a common sign of *yakuza* (organized crime) membership, he was not always rough and mean. When sober he successfully collected and sold aluminum cans and spoke excitedly, like a child seeing Santa Claus, about seeing the Empress when she visited the park on a warm autumn afternoon.

Men like Oba-san and the complaints homeless men have about their neighbors contrast sharply to Okamoto-san's positive description of everyone in Tent Village as "one big family." In terms of surviving in the park, Okamoto-san said, "No one can live out here without help from others. Everyone needs each other." Their close living space and lack of privacy makes their relationships very important. Even men who kept to themselves and did not socialize with others occasionally participated in exchanges of food and information. The best part of being homeless, freedom, or as Suzuki-san said, "*jibun no jiyu*" (I have my own freedom) reflects the problems of getting along with their neighbors and other people. When they complain about the lack of

privacy, because their neighbors watch them, and when they argue they need each other, they are discussing two sides of the same coin.

There is another side to the *ningen kankei* (getting along with others) complaint, which is that some men consider other homeless men their friends. Of course, men fight with their friends who are homeless, but the *ningen kankei* issue refers to difficult and troublesome relationships. Even once a man leaves the park after receiving housing and welfare, he often comes back to visit. If he does not stop by, others worry that something happened to him. Kuroki-san, a homeless man who enrolled in welfare with the help of Sogidan, the day laborers union, continued to stop by on weekends and days with large soup lines to see his friends. He receives welfare because he is unemployed and has eye problems, but comes to visit because he has free time. In Tent Village, every couple of weeks, a formerly homeless man visited and he brought beer and sake and reminisced with the men. The same pattern also occurred when men returned to visit friends and staff at Sanya Workers Association.

Loneliness while homeless and after leaving the park was a concern for the men. One man said not having friends was the worst thing about being homeless. Another, Kobayashi-san, startled me by saying he is lonely and then left me speechless by joking that he is considering suicide. When I pointed to his neighbors and friends, he said they are not true friends. Many men responded to questions about the lonesome nature of their work and lives by nonchalantly saying, “I’m used to it.”

The loneliness of homelessness made the camaraderie at Sanya Workers Association attractive to formerly homeless men, so they volunteered, prepared, and served *bentō* boxes. The staff and the volunteers commented accurately that the laughter facilitated by the long time social worker and the concern the men showed for each other created a family. The nonprofit agency

worked hard to make the volunteers, both homeless men and formerly homeless men now receiving welfare, feel at home, but they also held traditional Japanese work events like cherry blossom viewing parties, end of the year parties, and evaluation meetings after their soup kitchen.

While Sanya Workers Association served an important social role for people in Sanya, men in Ueno Park also formed small groups that socialized and helped each other. Socializing often occurred at the end of the workday and usually involved drinking. For example, when a former homeless man stopped by wearing a suit, he and several men drank beer and reminisced about the old days. He told the other men to give their empty beer cans to Kawamura-san so he could sell them and he recalled showing Kawamura-san how to collect and sell cans.

Another example of a social group is the small group in the back of the park where the soup lines occur. They receive twenty to twenty-five bananas from the Thursday church for sweeping the area after the soup line. The church would give them to one person who promptly divided them between the members. Unlike the men in tent city, this group did not drink. A small group of men behind the concert hall drank and socialized after work. These evenings or afternoons of good times were only possible when someone had money to buy drinks and when the weather was good.

A different form of companionship, forming a partnership with another man, occurred infrequently, but having a partner made life easier and the men referred to each other as *aibou* (partner, pal, buddy). For example, when Fukuda-san could not work because he had burned his foot, his partner brought him food and Fukuda-san cooked for both of them, as he usually did. Takayama-san and Yamada-san, probably the most well known partners, sometimes bickered like an old married couple. When they argued, the strength of their relationship showed.

However, like most partners, their relationship was not sexual. On a cold rainy day when they had set up their tents on a side street because of *yamagari*, both of them were in the same tent. Their tents are small, so I asked Oba-san if they have a sexual relationship. He said no, and that it is normal for two men to be in a tent together to stay warm when it is cold. Given Oba-san's macho personality and *yakuza* like mannerism, it would have been difficult for him to say yes.

Men chose their partners for a variety of reasons including kindness and frugality. When I asked why he had a partner, Fukuda-san said he thought his partner was *kawaii sō*, (a sad case). He did not explain further, but his partner is hard of hearing. For Takayama-san and Yamada-san, it seems that Yamada-san, though younger, makes the decisions and Takayama-san defers to him, because he has been homeless longer. In some cases, partners show their partner the ropes and tell them whom to avoid.

Telling another homeless man about someone else is important information. After having a fight with Oba-san during a drinking session, Tomita-san complained bitterly that no one warned him not to hang out with Oba-san. In addition to being friends, partners provide protection. However, not all partners stay together for a long time. Two sets of partners dissolved during my fieldwork. One set involved Hara-san who may have offended his partner with his rants about the poor behavior of homeless men. He often complained that many men are thieves and liars and they cannot be trusted.

Protection is necessary because of the real dangers they face. Gill argues that, "In Japan today, incidents of violence involving homeless people can truly and literally be described as everyday events" (2004a, 1). My research, while not quantitative, did not find as much violence as Gill described, but it happened. A man living along the Sumida River showed other volunteers and me the large rocks and cinderblocks, some quite large, that some youths had thrown on tents

along the riverbank. Another homeless man near the river reported an incident of male high school students using a lighter to set fire to the cardboard that is the base of many homeless men's tents.

Another example of violence is the Friday morning fight between Shokunin-san and Sojiya-san in Ueno Park. These two men did not like each other, and Shokunin-san often warned me to avoid Sojiya-san because he is mentally unbalanced. Near the end of my research, Sojiya-san became irate at Shokunin-san for stealing from him and started hitting him as Shokunin-san quivered on his bench. Once the police came, the fight and Sojiya-san's time in the park ended. A final illustration of protection is along the Sumida River, where the younger and healthier men checked on a man who had mental illness and did not leave his tent much. These responsibilities are important because they make sure their neighbors have food and call an ambulance when necessary.

For homeless outside of a network and without friends for help and protection, life can be especially difficult. Hara-san and Wakai-san chose to live apart from the others. Hara-san hated other homeless men. He would describe them as strange, felons, and *yakuza* members who lie and steal. He said, "*warui hito ga ōi*" (There are many bad people). He said that his neighbor had stolen from him and that some homeless men have lied to the police and use aliases. It seemed he had a bad experience with the people in Tent Village and told me to be careful and repeatedly used derogatory words to describe the men who live there. However, he kept a cart in Tent Village and occasionally retrieved his possessions. Hara-san's neighbors who worked alongside him crushing aluminum cans generally ignored his tirades. Only one neighbor talked to him. Another loner, Wakai-san, kept to himself, but he talked to other people in Tent Village occasionally. For him, it was not that he disliked his neighbors, but he was a self-described loner

and did not much care for people. He was accustomed to this lifestyle. Interestingly, he is in his forties and one of the youngest homeless men in the park. He has been living in the park for years and refused to move into a government run program offering 3000 yen (\$30) apartments to homeless men in 2005.

Homeless men live without privacy, with hunger, and with the presence of death. Since some men consider their neighbors and other homeless men to be their biggest problem, there is no respite from them. Their lives are miserable in many ways. Therefore, the stigma of being homeless and unemployed must be so strong that it prevents men from asking for help from their siblings, their children, or the state. Even though they live with hunger, with the presence of death, and without privacy, they do not ask for help. The next section shows the times in their day when things are a little better.

Yamaguchi-san Laughed So Hard

He Choked on His Bread.

Being homeless is not always difficult and hard. Sometimes men laugh and have fun. Most often, these happy times occur when several men gather to eat and drink at night. When a friend brought a cooler full of fruit and cold canned beverages like tea and juice to Tent Village, several men sat on their stools and enjoyed the drinks, fruit, and laughter. Other times men talked to another man about their passions. Yamada-san and Nishi-san loved betting on horse races and liked talking about them. The two of them and Takeyama-san enjoyed talking about Japanese comedians, television shows, and Western movies like James Bond. They never talked about current programs or *talento* (celebrities), because while Nishi-san occasionally spent a night at a

shelter with television, Yamada-san and Takayama-san have been homeless for more than three years and have not seen recent television programs.

While talking and laughing with friends was fun, homeless men probably did not forget they are homeless, especially if it was extremely hot or cold or if the mosquitoes were biting. Examples of fun times include drinking with friends, playing pachinko, and placing small bets at the nearby off tracking betting (OTB) facility. These were all activities that the men did before they were homeless and worked as day laborers, on the docks, or aboard ships. For example, during the summer Tomita-san often smiled and enjoyed recanting his night at the sauna after a hard day's work, especially in the summer. At the sauna, he took a bath, bought cheap food, watched TV, and slept in comfort, but it cost him a large portion of his paycheck. Well-meaning events like Sogidan's summer festival, which tried to replicate neighborhood summer festivals in Japan, was not necessarily a good time for the men since they described it as a *takidashi* (soup line) and not as a festival. Some men enjoyed volunteering or cleaning the park. Edo-san, who was usually quiet during the week at Sanya Workers Association, seemed to relish his authority on Sundays as the organizer of the people waiting for the soup line for Taito Ward Food Pantry. When asking the men to line up, he yelled at men who did not listen to him.

Exchanges

Exchanging goods was both positive and negative aspect of life for homeless men, because it meant more interactions with other homeless men. The better a man was at dealing with people the better he could survive. Exchanging information and goods with other homeless men was vital. Men often exchanged information about soup lines, work opportunities, free

clinics, anything happening in the park, and other homeless men. The better a homeless man knows the person asking, the more information he shares. He may tell a stranger something vague when in fact he knows all the details about a soup line. The most common goods exchanged include cigarettes, alcohol, food, and medicine. Interestingly, men give cigarettes to men who do not smoke because they sometimes function as a currency. A common exchange is a homeless man receiving a pack of dinner rolls or some fruit and giving one to each of his neighbors.

Sometimes, the exchanges were interesting and comical. For instance, when many men had cases of canned fruit in glass jars, they tried giving it away or exchanging it for something more valuable since they had so much of it. They had taken it from a nearby distributor who had put it out for the trash when it was past the sell by date. For a couple of weeks, the men constantly offered me canned fruit, which became a joke because it was so plentiful. Another time Saito-san was giving away some Korean sweets, and although no one knew what it was because the label was in Korean, everyone accepted it and ate it. A final example is when Oba-san showed up with a plastic bag full of *tonjiru* (pork and vegetable soup) in a Styrofoam box on the back of his bicycle. No one asked where he got it. Oba-san gave us plastic bowls and most men had disposable wooden chopsticks, which Takayama-san gave me. We rushed to eat it while it was still warm and everyone commented it was tasty.

While relationships are important in regular exchanges, one's relationship with other men did not matter much when there was excess food or clothing. For example, on a hot day Shokunin-san received an entire family size container of ice cream, which was melting. He offered it to Sojiya-san, who he does not like, but he had also received a container of ice cream

from the church hosting the soup line and was trying to finish it. This exchange shows how sometimes exchanges can be superficial.

If a homeless man was in a group or other homeless men in the vicinity, they automatically give the excess food, alcohol, or cigarettes to other members of the group. Yamada-san did this when I gave him a bag of five rice balls, and he immediately distributed them to the other men in the area. These exchanges are similar to exchanges others scholars have documented (Stack 1974; Mauss 1923). Men used these gifts in different ways. Some men disliked them such as Otani-san who complained that once you receive or give something every time you meet that person you have to chat and exchange something. He complained, “It’s a pain in the ass.” Otani-san preferred to chat with his friends rather than people with whom he exchanges or receives something from once and then for years every time he sees them he has to give them something. Yamaguchi-san described them not as friendships, but pointed out, “You can exchange stuff with anyone, and when you receive too much you can give it away.”

Finally, relationships with the volunteers running the various *takidashi* can help men receive food. It was not uncommon for a volunteer to give food to someone they knew even though the staff had already announced they were out of food. Men worked to cultivate these relationships, as I saw men give a pack of cigarettes to staff at Sanya Workers Association. They also made relationships with newcomers to the park. Giving food to new people in the park was often done out of kindness and as a way to establish a relationship. For example, Yamaguchi-san gave food to two older sisters, who appeared in the park unexpectedly.

Not everyone likes the exchanges, but almost everyone participates and different types of exchanges take place. Even men who keep to themselves sometimes receive gifts and food from men who received abundance. Better exchanges take place between friends, because they know

each other's likes and dislikes. For example, Kimura-san did not have a tent, but Edo-san had a tent in a small park, and he let him keep his stuff in his large tent. In exchange, Kimura-san would give him a bottle of Coke, his favorite drink.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the hardships in the lives of homeless men and the happy times. It sought to show the conditions of their lives. The chapter asked how men maintain personal hygiene and health and the data showed that the men struggle to maintain both as men die at a young age and live in poor health. Another pertinent question raised, how the men deal with other people, demonstrated that many men commented on dealing with difficult people or outright arguments that created headaches. Finally, the chapter asked how the men survive and use their agency in light of these miserable conditions. The laughter and discussions about their passions, things like pachinko, baseball, and horseracing, show they maintained their sense of humor. Finally, exchanging goods and information helped them adapt to their conditions.

While some men have houses they own, it is unlikely they enjoy their lives in the park and on the street as much as they say they do because they face numerous hardships and difficulties. These hardships make homelessness an awful choice and indicate how difficult not returning home to their families must be and strong the barriers are.

The suffering one endures as a homeless man begins with the obvious exposure to the elements including typhoons, snow, heat, and humidity and continues to the more nuanced difficulties such as injuries and health problems, swallowing their pride to sit in public for hours at a church sponsored soup line, loneliness, lack of privacy, and shame. The shame of sitting in a soup line continues when they wait in line for clothing or when people stare at them. Their fierce

pride and independence as former day laborers, craftsman, and tradesmen makes the situation more painful, especially when someone wants to take their picture as a cultural oddity. Several times homeless men waved away tourists from Asian and Western countries, often yelling at Asian tourists, “*shashin dame*,” (no pictures) or yelling “no” in English to Western tourists. One polite Western tourist approached Saito-san and asked to take his picture. Saito-san shook his head no and made the Japanese gesture for no, putting his hands together to form an x.

While their pride may be hurt when tourists stare or try to take their picture, for some men their homeless friends serve some functions that their former friends and family did. Their friends have limitations. While Okamoto-san described tent village as “family,” the presence of death and illness shows the limits of their family. In many families, someone visits a hospitalized relative, but Ishi-san had only two visitors. Their lack of action shows that this family analogy has limits. After Ishi-san spent most of the day in pain, weak, and suffering stomach problems, the park office called an ambulance. The members of his homeless family pooled their money and one person took the train to the hospital to visit Ishi-san that night. The men assumed that no one could afford to visit him and that he left his family. They did not think his family would visit him. Even those who could afford to ride the train to visit Ishi-san chose not to because they did not want to stick out. Okamoto-san told me he has savings and when I asked why he did not go visit Ishi-san he said, “*deru kui wa, utareru*” (The nail that sticks up gets hammered down.). The pressure to fit in with the others and the stigma society places on homelessness kept him from visiting and showed the limits of their relationship.

The description of their everyday life shows the conditions they would rather face than return home or ask their relatives for help. It also shows they do not consider welfare a viable option for leaving the streets. Leaving the park and life on the streets must be extremely difficult,

because if it were not, most men would leave these deplorable conditions. However, few men complained extensively, although some men commented that life is miserable. The indignities like ducking and hiding to avoid having their picture taken and injustices like working hard for a poor salary in their lives show that Japanese society deems their lives worth sacrificing.

CHAPTER 4

“I CANNOT EAT IF I DON’T SELL ALUMIUM CANS:” GATHERING AND SELLING RECYCLABLES TO EARN MONEY

Yamada-san wakes up in Tokyo at five to go to work. He commutes for an hour to a nearby neighborhood, works four hours, breaks for lunch, and then works two more hours before going home. While he may have eaten a day-old rice ball or *anpan* (sweet bean bread) for breakfast, lunch is his first substantial meal. His job, gathering aluminum cans before the trash pick-up, makes him different from other Japanese men including retired *salariman* (white-collar workers). After he finishes crushing the cans around eleven, he returns home, his bench in Ueno Park. In this chapter, I examine the role of collecting and selling recyclables as a survival strategy among homeless men. I describe the various patterns of collecting and selling recyclables and the impact it has on the men. I profile some homeless men who scavenge aluminum cans, and conclude the chapter by looking at their reasons for doing this work and the role the economy has in the lives of the men doing this work.

The legality of Yamada-san’s work is ambiguous. While it is probably technically illegal to remove trash from the bins, the law is not enforced. Fukuda-san, a homeless man in his sixties with three scars from cancer surgeries the previous summer, was gathering cans one morning when a man, referring to a city ordinance against taking recyclables, told him “*tocha dame desu yo.*” (You cannot take these cans.). Fukuda-san apologized, waited a minute, and took the cans anyway. He laughed at the end of the story, and did not care about the legality of taking cans. While I never heard of or saw anyone arrested for taking cans, several men worried about a potential new law for October 2008 that would prohibit them from taking cans. However, their worries were short lived and in October they gathered cans as always. Ashenmiller studied

recycling in California, and points out that, “the legality of scavenging is not transparent” (2009, 543).

Critical Issues

Much literature has documented the lives of homeless men (Hopper 2003; Aoki 2006; Conroy 1998; Fortuna and Prates 1989; Margolis 2002, Hill and Stamey 1990; Ashenmiller 2009), but they have not explored in depth the role of scavenging for aluminum cans. Gowan’s work is an important exception. She has noted that, “The collection and sale of other people’s trash is a common means of survival for very poor people all over the world” (1997, 159). Duneier’s work with un-housed men who sell magazines and books is a classic that looks at this area of work (2000). He shows how selling books and magazines provided the sellers with respect and money. While many men in Tokyo who scavenge get an income and respect from other homeless men, they do not need to possess the business know how or the bibliophilic knowledge of men Duneier documented (2000).

Aoki’s research is salient as it documents similar work among the homeless in Osaka. Among the homeless who work, 87.3 percent are “collecting recyclable resources,” and aluminum cans made up 79.5 percent of the items the homeless collected (Aoki 2006). Aoki found that over half of the men made less than ¥30,000 (\$290) per month, and that 74 percent of homeless men are not satisfied with their work because it is an “insecure income, and in which the competition is fierce and the work is heavy” (2006, 101). While collecting aluminum cans is an important survival strategy for homeless men, the work reflects several negative aspects that Aoki describes including the competition and tiresome effort necessary for success.

Highlighting the advantage of collecting cans, Aoki argues that, “In the world of people on the streets, even the business of collecting recyclable materials has some status attached to it” (2006, 215). Aoki uses his data, both quantitative and qualitative, to provide a snapshot of homeless men and their work. He does not discuss their work in detail, but presents enough information to support his argument that the homeless “follow a path of falling down the class ladder of street society; from the upper homeless class to the lower homeless class” (2006, 215).

Another pertinent study offers an ethnographic account of homeless men and their work collecting and selling recyclables (Gowan 2000). Gowan focuses on homeless men in San Francisco who take their work of recycling aluminum cans seriously. Her research found that, “the recyclers tend to interpret their work as an escape from stigma. But they do not escape, really. They are still homeless, mostly addicts and alcoholics, and few observers appreciate their efforts” (2000, 75). While Gowan found recycling to be the bottom of the economic ladder for the homeless in San Francisco, my research in Tokyo found that the men who do not sell aluminum cans fall below the recyclers on the economic ladder (Gowan 2000). According to Gowan, the homeless “appreciate and take pleasure in their work as a challenging, socially useful activity, which gives structure to their days” (2000, 84).

One significant difference between scavenging in San Francisco and Tokyo is that in San Francisco many of the men gather cans from bars while in Tokyo most men do not (Gowan 1997). Gowan’s ethnographic data demonstrates that homeless men take pride in their work earning money through recycling. She argues that their effort creates “a broad project to recover and celebrate the routines, productivity, skill, and solidarity of blue-collar work” (2000, 78).

Ashenmiller evaluated California bottle laws and examined the role of recycling among the poor in California, and he determined that, “bottle laws do in fact increase the amount of

beverage container recycling beyond what is captured by municipal curbside recycling programs” (2009, 550). The homeless in Tokyo who take aluminum cans out of public trashcans not designated for cans and sell them increase the recycling rate. His research shows different approaches the poor and homeless take to recycling as an income source. For example, he found that, “For lower-income households the value of bottles and cans is more likely to outweigh the time cost of cashing them in” (2009, 546). The men I knew in Tokyo had the same value towards time.

Finally, Ashenmiller argues, “Because the wage is very low, only the lowest-income people will recycle, perhaps only the homeless” (2009, 540). Regardless of the low wage, men selling recyclables have a job that provides tangible benefits to society. While Liebow (1967) argues that society does not respect low-wage jobs, among the homeless, many men praised others for simply working, even collecting aluminum cans, which offered little benefit for society.

How to Recycle Aluminum Cans for a Living

Gathering and selling aluminum cans in Tokyo has two patterns and requires some local knowledge. One pattern became clear as I started my research. Early in my research, I saw Yamada-san, a homeless man who befriended me during my preliminary fieldwork. For the next several days, I looked for him in the mornings, but he was not in the park. He was busy with his work, following a schedule he determines after learning the city’s trash collection schedule. In Tokyo, like most Japanese cities, each neighborhood has a weekly recyclables trash collection. Most residents put the recyclable metals including steel and aluminum cans in large blue bins

that sit on every block in the morning before eight-thirty, but some people put their recyclables in the box the evening before a trash collection. Sometime after eight-thirty, the city collects the trash. Homeless men gather the cans from the neighborhoods before the pick-up. Most men collect cans in the morning and follow this pattern of collecting cans.

Other men follow a less popular pattern. They gather cans at night and crush them the following morning. Usually these men augment their night collection by gathering cans during the day and crushing them whenever they have some. They gather cans directly from city trashcans in parks, along streets, in trashcans in front of convenience stores, and at businesses they have established an agreement to recycle their cans. They also take the cans that residents put in the recycling bin the night before a trash pick-up.

This pattern leads to sleep deprivation. Otani-san, who collects cans at night, often compared himself to Napoleon, because, like Napoleon, he only slept a couple of hours a night. He often returned to his sleeping area, a nook across from the train station, around three in the morning. He wakes up at five, because morning commuters begin arriving around five. He joked that he is better than Napoleon, because while Napoleon slept for three hours, he only sleeps for two hours. Other men compared themselves to Napoleon, especially when they woke up from a nap or short night's sleep. The story of Napoleon sleeping so little is a well-known in Japan and relates to the Japanese the expression regarding entrance exams, "Pass with four, fail with five." The expression means that students should be studying except for four hours of sleep if they want to pass. By comparing themselves to Napoleon and highlighting their lack of sleep, they are emphasizing how hard they work.

Regardless of when they collect cans, the best place to gather aluminum cans is a *manshon* (large condominium or apartment building). Many men enthusiastically commented

they usually have numerous cans in their recycling bin. Sometimes, if a homeless man arrives immediately after the building manager puts out the recycling bin, he can collect many cans. Enterprising men approach the building supervisor to make an agreement to collect their cans. Similarly, Hill and Stamey (1990) found that homeless men in America make agreements with owners, managers, or workers at restaurants and bars (1990). A few men go to several apartment buildings and collect large amounts of cans, so they have a secure set of cans and therefore income. These agreements eliminate competition and guarantee a certain amount of cans.

Not all *manshons* (large condominium and apartment buildings) have agreements and their blue bins are open for anyone. Even a small building probably has more cans than a regular blue bin. When gathering cans on the recycling day, homeless men sometimes approach a recycling box just a minute or two apart. When this happens, only one of them will collect the cans. For can scavengers, many cans means half a dozen. Often neighborhood-recycling bins have none, one, or two cans because many men walk the neighborhood taking the cans. If no one collected the cans, the neighborhood bins could have more than twenty, but with more than a dozen men patrolling the neighborhood they each only get a can or two at most from each bin. Finding more than two cans or a small plastic bag full of cans was lucky. When I was collecting cans with Takayama-san, he came across a bag of cans, smiled, and said, “*keiko aru*” (There are a lot more than I thought!). He was expecting none or maybe one, but this time he grabbed five or six cans.

The work of collecting, crushing, and selling aluminum cans is not easy. From the park, many men walk or ride bicycles to the neighborhood with the trash collection. Those who walk leave earlier, since it takes them longer to get to the neighborhood. Some neighborhoods are adjacent to the park, but others are quite far. One neighborhood is three train stops away and

another is five stops away, a little more than a two and a half mile walk, so the men cover a large distance to collect aluminum cans. When I went to meet Takayama-san and Yamada-san to collect cans with them, they had already left at five-thirty. Although they walked, I took the train two stops to meet them. They walked almost two miles one way, and once they arrived, they continued walking to collect their cans.

After the work of collecting cans, men crush them. The amount of time varies depending on the number of cans collected, but it usually takes at least an hour. Although the scrap metal buyers do not care if cans are crushed, homeless men insist on crushing them, because they can fit more crushed cans into the clear garbage bags. They buy the garbage bags, so the more cans the men put in the bag the better. Yamada-san explained, “Because the bags cost money, we all try to crush the cans as much as we can. That’s why we try so hard to crush them.” The men reuse the garbage bags several times and use duct tape to make the bags last longer. Since the men reuse the garbage bag, the scrap metal buyers always asks if they want the bags back.

The men usually stomp on the cans to crush them, and not surprisingly, the men who do so often complain that their legs are tired. Typically, a man reaches into his clear trash bag full of uncrushed cans, drains any remaining liquid, which could be soda, tea, coffee, *sake* or beer, props up the cans in rows of three or four, and then stomps on each can. Experienced men know how many stomps per can. For instance, thicker aluminum cans often containing coffee require three to four crushes while the lighter aluminum cans, usually soda or beer cans, need just one stomp. The day the buyer comes provides a relief from crushing cans, because they do not have time to crush the cans they collected that morning, so the men can relax after selling their cans.

The other method the men use to crush cans involves a *jackibase* (a heavy tool similar to a sledgehammer). A *jackibase* weighs 3.3 kilograms (7.3 pounds), and the men lift it to pound

each can several times. A search on Amazon.co.jp confirmed the weight. Lifting and slamming it is exhausting. Using a *jackibase* exercises different muscles than walking or stomping, but those muscles quickly become sore. When Otani-san and Saito-san let me use their *jackibase* to crush a few aluminum cans, they warned me that my shoulder and arm would hurt. My shoulder and arm did not hurt, but I could feel blisters forming on my hand and knew that if I continued my shoulder and arm would hurt. The men often said they have adapted to the weight and aches from lifting it. Similar to the men who crush cans with their feet, they know how many hits it takes to crush a can. Again, heavier cans require three or four hits with the *jackibase*. Because the *jackibase* crushes cans much more compactly, a garbage bag full of cans crushed with it weighs significantly more than a similar bag of cans that the men stomped on to crush them. Some of the men who use a *jackibase* have developed shoulder aches and others have a hunched back and neck.

Whichever method the men use, they need a space to crush cans, and some men crush their cans in the park. The park management permits men in Tent Village to crush their cans in Tent Village, but other men in the park risks the guards asking them not to crush cans, which happens occasionally. Some men use a deserted open space near the back of the nearby train station and others use the road that divides the park. The noise from crushing cans creates a problem for them. Otani-san said the temple across the street asked him to stop using his *jackibase* because of the noise, so he switched to crushing them with his feet. Tourists present a worry when crushing cans anywhere, especially in the park. If someone tries to take their picture when they are crushing cans, they become angry. For example, Yamaguchi-san yelled at a tourist who tried to take his picture, but Sato-san was less confrontational. He sat on the curb behind a

park bench and covered his face with his hat when he thought someone was taking his picture. He feared that his brother would see his picture.

Once the men collect and crush the cans, they sell them to the scrap metal buyer, the last step in the process. Two major buyers come to the park with large white pick-up trucks, cash, and a scale. The most popular buyer pays a little more and comes to the park on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday mornings from eight to ten. He parks his truck on the main road near the *takidashi* (soup line) area in the back of the park. The procedure has a few simple steps. First, the scrap metal buyer weighs the bag of cans. Since many men sell several bags, the buyer writes down the weight for each bag as the men place their bags on the scale. Then he totals the weight and pays the man. If no one is waiting, he opens the bag, dumps the cans in the truck, and usually returns the bag to the seller. Sometimes this buyer gave away plastic bags to everyone. When he did, the more cans a man sold, the more bags he received. When several people arrive at once, the buyer will only weigh their bags and will not dump them in the truck until there is a lull.

The other buyer comes to a different area of the park every day except Sunday and pays five to ten yen less. This buyer follows the same process except he has the sellers sign their names next to the amount on a receipt. He does not ask to see an ID. Homeless men often use aliases so the accuracy of the names on the receipts is questionable. While the younger buyer rounds off the amount he pays, this buyer pays the exact amount. Both scrap metal buyers purchase cans in other areas around Tokyo and pay cash, and both announce price changes periodically.

A few men developed a relationship with the buyer, which had advantages for them. The friendliest buyer, who parked near the *takidashi* (soup line) area, paid the most and often chatted with the men selling cans. This buyer, in his late twenties, enjoyed talking and smoking

cigarettes with them while he bought the cans. The men came in waves to sell their cans, and between these busy times, a few men and the buyer talked. The buyer sometimes gave a can of coffee or other non-alcoholic beverage to men who helped him. For example, if a man threw away the trash, usually worn out discarded plastic trash bags accumulated after the buyer bought all the cans, he gave the man a drink or some plastic bags. The buyer usually asked the men who were his acquaintances to do these favors and receive the free coffee or extra bags. However, the relationship the men established with the can buyer had limits. For example, after the price dropped significantly some men learned of a place paying five yen more, and they went there when it was on their way back from collecting cans on Fridays. They said they still had to go to their regular selling spot other days to maintain their relationship with the buyer. The limits to their bond show that the price mattered as much as the relationship.

The younger buyer replicated many common Japanese business practices and treated the men like clients. A good illustration occurred on January 6, the first day of work after the New Year's holiday. Before buying any cans, he bowed and formally wished the few men waiting a happy New Year and said he hopes they can continue to work well in the New Year. The buyer brought paper cups, a large bottle of sake, and a couple six packs of beer for the men to drink. This gesture proved especially popular and many men enjoyed the sake. Men who did not normally socialize stayed to drink and those who usually socialized hung out, drank, and talked much longer than usual.

Another example, the can buyer's non-confrontational response to a seller trying to cheat him, shows he did not want to create a scene. Since the can buyer is ten to thirty years younger than most of the sellers, age may have been a consideration. Having a younger boss can create tension in Japan where age usually corresponds to rank. Sellers often talked about the buyer with

respect and feared that he would refuse to buy their cans if they cheated or otherwise lost his trust.

Compared to the young can buyer, the other buyer, a man in his early fifties, was all business. He needed help tying a tarp over the back of his truck and whoever helped him usually received a can of coffee and a thank you. This exchange of a can of coffee for help felt much more like a business transaction than a friendly gesture. He usually came at three in the afternoon and stayed about fifteen minutes, while the other buyer stayed two hours. Because he arrived on time, the men had to be there by three. Men begin arriving around two-thirty, line up a few minutes before three, and wait for him to arrive, but occasionally someone rushed to make the deadline. This buyer's customers include ten men and one woman. The men pointed to the rare woman selling cans as evidence that other people besides them collect cans. They may have a point. The Asahi newspaper reported that, "Teachers collect empty cans for recycling to raise cash," at a school for Japanese-Brazilians where many of the parents work in the auto industry and have been laid off (Asakura 2009).

Because the bag's weight determines their income and they depend on the aluminum can buyers to buy their cans, it is not surprising that many men gasped when some trash came out of a bag of cans two men dumped into the truck on the last Saturday of June. The trash included four steel cans, which weigh more than aluminum cans but are worthless, two empty plastics bottles, and a few empty plastic bags. Two men picked out the trash, but neither had sold the bag. The seller of the bag had already left after he was paid and someone put the bag in the pile of bags that the buyer empties into the truck. The buyer had fallen behind putting the bags in the truck. Since they depend on the buyer's goodwill, many men do not do anything like this because they fear he will refuse to buy their cans.

Trash in the bag with the cans happened again when an older homeless man sold a bag of cans, and as some men emptied it in the truck, a heavy comic book fell out of the bag. Seeing this, Saito-san, shouted “*yabai*,” (Shit! You are going to get it from the buyer.). Since it was clear who sold the bag, the buyer subtracted the weight of the comic book from the man’s bag, but he did not do anything else. Later, the can buyer said he has seen plastic bottles filled with water, books, and steel cans in the bags. These sellers cheated by adding trash to their bags. The men take their work seriously. Since these cheating events rarely occur, the buyer does not usually check the bags and trusts his regulars.

The work of collecting and selling aluminum cans makes life better for those who do it. Collecting and selling cans provide a relief from the hunger and boredom and provided men with some much-needed cash. Suzuki-san, for example, always seemed rather determined when he cheerfully remarked, “I’m off to work,” and then he would leave on his route collecting cans. He tried to uphold values of hard work and determination. More importantly, it gives them money, so it is a successful strategy to make ends meet. Nigata-san explained that after attending soup lines for over a year he wanted to smoke and need money to buy cigarettes, so he started collecting cans. While not easy, it helps them earn money without having to give up any personal information so they can maintain their privacy. They do not even need to give their name to the buyer when selling cans.

Men who Collect and Sell Recyclables

Their appearance reflects their work. Most of the men who scavenge for aluminum cans, like most homeless men, are Japanese men in their fifties, sixties, and older. For their work, they

must dress for the weather, so unlike commuters off to work in the morning wearing business attire they wear casual clothing appropriate for being outside. Since they do not have money for clothing, their clothing may be torn, stained, or ill fitting. They prefer to wear jeans, but they are costly and hard to find at the local nonprofit organizations and churches that give away clothing. Because they rarely wear gloves to collect cans, many men have hands stained with the smell and color of alcoholic beverages, as they are the most common type of beverage can.

An aluminum can scavenger differs from other homeless men in appearance, because he either carries a bag full of cans as he walks or he rides his bicycles with clear garbage bags full of cans in the back basket and other bags tied to hooks hanging on the basket. Men who use a *jackibase* have a bag of cans attached to their cart or sitting next to them. They collect cans in the rain and may have an umbrella with them. Scavengers have bags of cans near them, in their carts or hidden behind the bushes in the park. Finally, at the end of the day, aluminum can scavengers walk slowly because they are tired.

Men do not need prior work experience to collect and sell cans. Like other homeless men, many of the collectors worked as day laborers, while others worked in blue-collar jobs. Some men learn to scavenge on their own, but others ask acquaintances or friends how to do it. Like their work as day laborers, crushing cans takes a physical toll on their bodies, especially the men who use a *jackibase* because they have constant aches and pain. Otani-san often sits on the curb and crushes cans with his *jackibase*. He compounds his repetitive work injuries, back and shoulder pain, by sleeping on the curb with his head and shoulders slumped.

To understand these men, I offer three profiles of four men who scavenge aluminum cans to show the diversity within the world of aluminum can scavengers. First, Yamada-san and Takayama-san are partners who work together to collect and sell cans, although Yamada-san

sometimes collects cans in the evening by himself. When I asked about how they do this practically, Yamada-san, who is younger, laughed and said, “It is not like we hold hands.” He said they walk to the neighborhood together and then split up to collect cans. They use a *kari* (a folding cart) they have constructed with an old shelf from a refrigerator as the base of the folding cart. They walk to different neighborhoods five mornings a week and take Thursdays and Sundays off. They said they take Thursdays off because the nearby neighborhood is too crowded, but I remain skeptical of their explanation. The underlying reason may be that they did not want to go to the neighborhood, Sanya. Yamada-san sometimes implied he did not like the going there. They take Sunday mornings off but they usually walk around a nearby neighborhood in the afternoon collecting cans. Usually they are awake by four-thirty or five and leave soon for the neighborhood. By ten-thirty, Yamada-san and Takayama-san are usually behind the train station crushing their cans. When they have finished, they walk for fifteen minutes to the 250-yen (\$2) *bentō* box take-out store, buy lunch, eat it in the small park adjacent to the kindergarten, and then walk back to the park to attend a soup-line or rest until the next early morning.

Unlike Yamada-san and Takayama-san who crush cans with their feet and walk to collect them, Saito-san works by himself, uses a *jackibase* to crush cans and rides a bicycle to collect them. He is typical of homeless men who collect cans since he uses a bicycle to collect them and works by himself; however, using a *jackibase*, is unusual. Saito-san has been collecting cans for several months. Since he rides a bicycle, he leaves thirty minutes after Yamada-san and his partner. After collecting the cans, Saito-san joins a friend and they go to the nearby *teishokuya* (a diner serving set meals), which has free refills on rice. He also receives free *bentō* boxes and fruit from *Kyosanto* (a non-profit agency). After eating, he crushes his cans throughout the day. He works hard, but he also works smart. He has a couple agreements with

some *manshon* (large condominium and apartment buildings) managers that help him have a steady supply of cans.

For an aluminum can scavenger he makes decent money. Saito-san had a job for more than ten years for a well-known company in Nagoya working long hours from five in the morning to ten at night preparing sushi and working as a short order cook at events like weddings and hotel buffets on holidays. Later when working construction jobs, he injured his foot and now he walks with a limp. Because he did not receive any financial compensation for his injury, he lost his job and had to apply for welfare. After six months on welfare, he had to leave his temporary rehabilitation housing. Before coming to the park, he spent all his money playing *pachinko* and then a short time after becoming homeless, he began to collect and sell aluminum cans.

Finally, Ishida-san used to be a heavy drinker, but now he drinks much less for health reasons. With short dark hair, a thin build, and sunburned leathery face, Ishida-san looks older than his age, sixty-eight. He wears worn out clothing and his hands and fingernails are filthy from the dirt of collecting scrap metal and aluminum cans. Originally, from a rural area in Hokkaido, Ishida-san recalled snatching apples and persimmons off the local orchard trees in autumn. His father let him quit school, a common practice for their generation, to help with the family business, fishing. He claims to have no living relatives as his parents have passed away, and he says he has no living siblings, uncles, or aunts. Given that his generation demographically had large families, I doubt his claim.

Ishida-san has had great success as an aluminum can scavenger, because he does not really scavenge. Instead, he relies on agreements he has with several *robu hoteru* (hotels that charge by the hour), and treats his work like a business, buying gifts for the hotel managers and

donating money to *Kyosanto* (a nonprofit agency). By himself, he walks pushing a large flatbed cart to the nearby neighborhood with many hotels, and sometimes spends all night gathering cans and scrap metal like old discarded frying pans. He returns in the morning or late at night with several garbage bags full of cans, but he does not crush all of them. On Saturdays mornings with his friend Matsuo-san, he takes two large carts with over two hundred kilograms (440 pounds) of cans. The sight of Ishida-san selling so many cans always impresses other men, but they do not realize that he is selling a week's worth of cans. He makes more than 32,000 yen (\$310) a week, but he spends it quickly playing *pachinko*, gambling on bicycle races, and according to his friend, having sex with prostitutes.

Negative Aspects to Recycling

Like blackjack, collecting cans is a numbers game and a game of chance. The men scavenged for cans as their only way to earn money and improve their lives. Before I went with them to gather cans, homeless men repeatedly complained that too many people collect cans. When I walked the neighborhoods with them gathering cans, the crowds were smaller than I had imagined, with five or six men gathering around each recycling box. Crowded is relative, and in this case, it meant arriving at a recycling box to see it empty because someone had just come. If a homeless man, often sees just one other person collecting cans before him, then collecting cans in the neighborhood creates a sense of frustration and disappointment and some men use the crowds as reason to take the day off.

A three-day break without selling cans created problems. One buyer did not come on Sunday and Monday, so the men who sold cans on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday struggled to

manage their money for three days from Saturday morning to Tuesday morning without any new income. They sold fewer cans Thursday morning because they did not gather aluminum cans earlier that morning. Days without a *takidashi* (soup line) or way to sell their cans became depressing days with men often low or out of money. To combat the three-day period without money, some men collect cans in the evenings and on Sunday afternoons. Many men walk the neighborhoods looking for households that had put their Monday recycling bins out early. Walking the neighborhood has the added benefit of escaping the crowds in the park.

While they escape from the crowds in the public park on Sundays, the men who scavenge aluminum cans have a complex relationship with the public. On one hand, to the public they appear lazy. Since they work at night and early morning, many men nap or rest in the late afternoon when evening commuters and school groups pass them in the park. Without knowing their work schedules, many men appear idle at best, lazy at worst. Hill and Stamey quote a homeless man who describes the same situation, “At 4:30 in the morning, I’m already out on the street. They don’t see us because when they’re sleeping, we’re working” (1990, 308). On the other hand, men depend on the public for cans. Men who gather cans mostly at night need the public to drink in and around the park during the day and evening. When I accompanied Suzuki-san on his round of the trashcans in the park, he often told me, as he dug through the trashcans looking for cans that, “No one’s drinking outside because of the bad weather” or “Men are not drinking yet, because they are still at work.” He did not limit himself to digging through the trashcans designated for cans, but also looked in other trashcans in case someone put an aluminum can in the wrong trashcan.

The actual process of picking up dirty used cans, tediously dull and physically repetitive, can be physically challenging but not intellectually stimulating. First, since most men did not use

gloves, they cut their hands picking up and crushing the cans. Second, the process is unsanitary because the cans often have liquid remaining, usually beer, so germs and infections can spread. Because of the excess liquid, men often get wet feet, Athlete's foot, thick fungal infected toenails, and even foot infections. Collecting and crushing cans in the rain leads to damp clothing and skin.

Finally, crushing cans in the summer heat and the cold of winter are equally miserable. The misery includes dealing with the intense heat and humidity, the physical toll of the work, and blisters and other minor injuries. I helped Yamada-san and Takayama-san and others crush cans many times, but the summer heat at the end of the rainy season made the conditions unbearable. While I dreamed of a cool refreshing shower, I knew I would get a shower, but they would not. The sun burned our skin, while the heat and humidity made sweat roll down our faces. In these conditions, I calculated an hourly wage of around 220 yen (\$2).

Worse than these physical and health problems is the shame and embarrassment of taking cans from recycling boxes. If the men gather cans in the morning, the neighborhood residents see them, especially when putting their cans in the recycling box. Some people stare and others give them nasty looks. Walking back to the park during rush hour means many people see them pushing a cart full of cans. By far, the strongest emotional reaction I saw from homeless men involved their reaction to someone staring at them.

In addition to the stigma of people staring and the worry that a relative, friend, or former coworker will recognize them, potential negative interaction with the public creates a worrisome work place. Some encounters might just be embarrassing. When an older Japanese woman asked me, "*kan iru no?*" (Do you need cans?), when I waited for her to put them in the recycling box, I was surprised but also happy to receive the cans as I only had a few. While these encounters

remind the men of the stigma of being homeless, the work of waking up early, walking for hours, and then crushing the cans for a couple hours makes them too tired to deal with their mental stress. Their rewards for this exhausting effort remain small. They include enough money to buy a pack of cigarettes, a boxed lunch, and a couple necessities with maybe enough left to spend five hundred yen to bet on horse races or to buy a book of Sudoku puzzles to pass the time.

A homeless man collecting and selling cans does not earn enough money to leave homelessness, but his earnings make life tolerable. When the price of aluminum was 160 yen a kilo their earnings ranged from 640 yen a day (\$6) to 1360 yen (\$13), and as the price dropped by two-thirds, so did their earnings. Rain, *yamagari*, sickness, and luck all influenced their pay. More dedicated men worked in rain and sickness. When asked why they gather cans or why they started collecting cans, many homeless men echo Yamada-san, who explained, “Without collecting cans, I cannot eat,” and “I started gathering cans because I needed money.” Nigata-san, a thin man in his late-sixties, said because, “I have to collect cans or I can’t smoke.” Since he receives food at the various *takidashi*, food is less of a concern.

Conclusion

This chapter examined three key aspects of recycling aluminum cans as a survival strategy. First, it explained how the men collect and sell aluminum cans. Then, it profiled several men who recycle cans. Finally, it explored the negative aspects to collecting and selling aluminum cans for a living.

While many homeless men are self-employed and have freedom to work as much or as little as they like, three variables beyond their control influenced how much they could work.

First, the weather affects how much they work. When extreme weather such as heavy rains or snow occurs, the men are much less likely to gather cans and if they do, they collect fewer cans. However, in steady rain and hot and humid weather, they still gather cans. Second, issues with authorities, including the state, and the park management, influence their work. Tokyo city dictates when they collect recyclables and the park management prevents them from collecting during *yamagari*. For example, if the park authority inspects the area where the men sleep, they cannot gather cans because if they are not with their belongings the park staff discards them.

Third, and most importantly, the price of aluminum significantly influences their income. When the price dropped, many men quit gathering cans or began looking for alternatives. With the drop in price, scavengers who sold aluminum cans did not organize to demand more opportunities for work. They did not demand a higher price for their cans, try to organize a union, or ask anything of the city. The city in turns mostly overlooks their work. Many men hesitate to do anything that would make the can buyer stop coming or cause problems. Most homeless men embrace work, but for now, the reward for such an outlook consists of little pay and hand to mouth subsistence.

Many other aspects of gathering aluminum cans reflect the scale of their lives. While gathering one or two cans may not seem like much, for scavengers it makes a difference. Kawamura-san always tries hard to gather cans including looking around the park while slowly pedaling his bicycle. While this may seem boring and tedious, it indicates the importance of just one or two cans for them and shows how they value their time. Crushing cans to save money by not buying trash bags illustrates the scale that homeless men use to calculate everyday expenses. Crushing cans saves trash bags and may add slightly to the weight of the bags, but bags are

relatively cheap, and each can weighs only 16.2 grams (a little less than half an ounce) (Zheng, Nitta, and Yokota 2004).

The exception to cans being small scale is when Ishida-san and Matsuo-san push two carts loaded with bags of aluminum cans. They have filled the carts to the top with several large garbage bags of crushed and uncrushed cans and cannot see over them. Ishida-san sells two hundred kilos and makes about 36,000 yen (\$348) for a week's work. While this looks impressive, especially compared to other homeless who sold two days' worth of cans and made a couple thousand yen, it is not impressive when placed in a broader context. Ishida-san, in his late sixties, could be retired and living off his pension, but instead makes 130,000 yen (\$1257) a month. Even this exception, can be considered small when compared to the income of other men his age.

The scale scavengers use shows their powerlessness, especially related to the price of the cans as men sell their labor and businesses and the industry set the price. The price for cans remained stable from March to August 2008; 160 yen (\$1.50) per kilo. Shortly before the Beijing Olympics, the price increased five yen from 160 to 165 yen per kilo. Many men attributed the price increase to China's need for aluminum in construction projects for the Olympics, but after the Olympics ended, the price did not drop. However, the price of cans started dropping at the end of September and leveled out in January. The price dropped from one hundred sixty five yen to fifty yen (48 cents) per kilo. The price increased to sixty-five yen per kilo, because many men stopped selling cans, since they determined it was not worth the effort at fifty yen per kilo. The companies that buy the cans raised the price to sixty yen in November through January, but in February, it returned to fifty yen. Some men read the business newspaper to follow the price of aluminum on the markets, so they knew what was happening.

Not surprisingly, some men attributed the drop in price to the end of the Olympics, but others who kept abreast of world events blamed the U.S. economy. They referred to the Lehman Brothers collapse and the burst of the U.S. housing market as prime reasons. Government reports confirm that the economic downturn led to a substantial drop in the price of aluminum (U.S. International Trade Commission 2010). A report by the U.S. International Trade Commission documents that, “From January 2008 to January 2009, the average price of primary aluminum dropped by 42 percent” (2010, 1). The drop in price created a range of reactions. Some men despondently referred to their new circumstances as “the worst” and “the worst ever.”

Others were less negative, like, Yamada-san, who said the days of selling cans for 165 per kilo were “*natsukashi*,” (nostalgic, fondly looking back). The good times that he remembered included long walks to gather cans, crushing them in the scorching sun for more than an hour, and making just enough “extra” money to place some small bets. The reduced pay means that instead of making 640 yen a day (\$6) to 1360 yen (\$13), they made 213 yen (\$2) to 453 yen (\$4). The mental calculations that accompanied the two-thirds drop in their income created real mental anguish, according to Otan-san. He argued, “I can live on any amount of money, even one hundred yen a day. Whatever amount I can live. But, at this price, life is very different. The hardest thing is mentally calculating that you have to live on half of what you had. It is mentally exhausting and depressing.”

With the drop in price, they spent a little more time gathering cans, but even before the price decreased several men commented, “if only I could get a few more cans, life would be better.” Since people did not consume significantly more canned beverages, men spent their energy tightening already tight budgets and not gathering more cans. Cutting back on spending included not gambling, no longer doing laundry at the coin laundry, buying fewer drinks, and

attending more soup lines instead of buying food. Instead of going to the coin laundry, men used the restroom sinks in the park to do laundry.

After the price of aluminum cans dropped from 165 yen (\$2) at the end of September to seventy yen (sixty-eight cents) on November 1, some men also started gathering other recyclables like newspapers, magazines, and cardboard. Others experimented with gathering these items and everyone discussed the drop of price of cans and whether they should switch. Some men changed to collecting and selling newspapers, but their major complaint about newspapers, their weight, discouraged many men, especially those with back trouble. Although newspapers are easy to collect, pushing a heavy cart several times a day did not appeal to the men. Most men continued to collect cans, and the few who did switch to newspapers later returned to gathering cans. Those who experimented learned that like aluminum, the price of paper and cardboard fluctuates and for them this meant a drop in price.

Regardless of their decision to continue collecting aluminum cans, the drop in the price of cans affected nearly everyone. For men who did not gather cans, their friends and neighbors sudden income drop meant their neighbors would give them fewer goods. For example, when the price of aluminum was high, men in a good mood after selling their cans may give a friend or neighbor a can of coffee or some cigarettes, but now the seller does not spend money.

Soon after the drop in price, a tent village of homeless men sprang up in Hibiya Park during the New Year's holiday in January 2009 and the U.S. and Japanese media often reported on it (Kato and Fukue 2009; Kuhn 2009). The media reported many young men became homeless when they lost their factory jobs and were subsequently evicted from company housing (Kato and Fukue 2009; Kuhn 2009). The media attributed the large swell in unemployment to the

layoffs of temporary workers at factory jobs. However, they reported almost nothing on how these larger economic changes affected the men homeless before the recession.

Homeless men who gathered and sold recyclables suffered a sixty percent cut in their earnings, which demoralized many men. Friendly and cheerful people no longer had a bright disposition. Usually men were happiest on payday right after they sold their cans. However, as the price dropped over a month, the men were not particularly happy on payday because they worried the buyer would announce another drop in price. Given their position in society, they could do little about the drop in their new income. Considering their anger and frustration, homeless men rarely complained to the scrap metal buyer.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of aluminum cans and other recyclables that around two-thirds of the men sell for cash. Besides providing an income, selling cans breaks the boredom and monotony of everyday life. It gives homeless men a sense of purpose. I estimate that over sixty percent of homeless men collect and sell aluminum cans and the amount of effort and cans they collect varies widely. Collecting cans benefits society as it increases the recycling rate because men take cans out of trashcans not designated for recycling and recycle them. Ashenmiller found that professional recyclers raised the recycling rate (2009). Without the work involved in selling cans, men would spend almost all their time sitting on benches reading old used *manga* (comic books) and newspapers and attending soup lines.

While Duneier (1999) found that men selling second hand books on the streets of New York needed specialized knowledge and business skills, men in Tokyo did not require the same business skills and knowledge. Unlike the men in Duneier's study, the men I knew who gathered cans did not develop an identity about their work and their main identity was as homeless men, not scavengers. Their work did not need much information like the bibliophilic knowledge of the

men in New York City. This opportunity for work allows some homeless men to maintain their pride, which is especially important for those men worked in construction or other working class jobs and took pride in their work. For example, men commented that someone works hard and they admire him for his effort to succeed. However, some homeless men said they do not collect cans to maintain their pride, but do it to survive. They coopted terms the public may use to describe them to maintain their self-image. For example, homeless men often referred to themselves and other homeless men and women as *putaro* (lazy people). For example, one man asked a homeless man who was helping organize the men for a *takidashi* (soup line) about a new couple. The homeless man referred to them as *futsu putaro* (regular lazy people). Calling themselves lazy people seemed to appropriate a derogatory term others used to describe them because many men had worked hard doing physically taxing jobs. It also shows self-awareness and the limits of their work opportunities to uplift their self-image.

More important than maintaining their sense of self-worth, collecting recyclables gave men a chance to earn cash with no strings attached. Unlike other jobs that may require a connection or giving out personal information, scavenging offers complete freedom. Since many men are hiding from someone or something, they guard their privacy. This makes regular employment difficult, but when collecting aluminum cans, the closest anyone comes to asking personal questions is when one can buyer asks the sellers to sign their receipts. Since this buyer does not ask for ID, men can easily use an alias. Most important, on a basic level, selling cans help them survive. When I asked homeless men why they began collecting and selling cans, they often said something like “If I do not collect and sell cans, I cannot eat.” Collecting aluminum cans is crucial for their well-being, but the status of economy influences the price of aluminum, which dictates their income.

CHAPTER 5

“THAT’S WHY I’M HERE:” WORK, GAMBLING, and MONEY

Tomita-san

Originally from a rural area in northern Japan, Tomita-san has thick wavy gray hair and his friends and neighbors call him *chibi* (short) Tomita to separate him from *dekai* (big) Tomita, who also sleeps behind the large concert hall. With his sunny disposition and friendly personality, Tomita-san bragged he has many friends in Ueno and Sanya. His strong views on the importance of work contained some contradictions. He criticized homeless men, especially the young and healthy who attended soup lines, but he regularly attends Maria’s soup line on Sundays. For him, attending the soup line was a social event, because he has many friends living along the river and in Sanya. As he walked through Sanya and along the river, many men would say hi and offer him a drink.

From late spring until mid-autumn, he spent many days working in and around Tokyo, mostly at parks and occasionally in Ueno Park. He got work from the center once a week and the others days he found jobs through his friends. Tomita-san considered himself a skilled tradesman and felt he did good work trimming trees and other outdoor jobs. Since he was earning around ¥10,000 yen (\$97) a day, he often slept in a sauna, which cost ¥3,600 (\$35). On hot summer days, he said it felt refreshing to take a bath after spending the day outside sweating and getting dirty while cutting trees in the plaza in front of the station. The saunas in Ueno where he spent the night have several different baths, televisions, and individual beds. His neighbor, Okamoto-san, teased Tomita-san for spending a third of his day’s salary to spend the night in the sauna.

In addition to staying at the saunas, he occasionally stayed with a friend, and during winter when the economy went into a recession, he began staying at a shelter in Shin-Okubo, about an hour away by train. Tomita-san’s strategy involved asking the social worker at the large

welfare center in Sanya if he could stay at the shelter, but he only asked on Fridays, because he could stay three nights, since the center closes Friday evening for the weekend. He bragged about his clever use of his knowledge of the system and this example was typical of him.

Tomita-san depended on the center for its reliable, easy work, especially during the cold months. For other jobs away from the center, his friends and contacts refer him to jobs. He connects with his friends by seeing them around Sanya, Asakusa, and Ueno, so he often rides his bicycle slowly looking for friends and circling the *takidashi* (soup kitchens) to see if they are there. For other jobs, his friends call his cell phone. His prepaid cell phone provided a vital link to his work. He thought men who did not have a cell phone were “lazy” and “not smart” like him, because he saw his cell phone as his connection to getting jobs so men without one had not learned how to network successfully.

Tomita-san’s plans as he approaches sixty include applying for welfare once he turns sixty-five in eight years. He is not worried about the welfare office contacting his siblings when he submits his application. Years ago, he was in love and wanted to get married, but his older brother disapproved of his girlfriend and he and his brother had a falling out. His older brother and he are *naka ga warui* (They do not get along) so he does not return to the countryside. Tomita-san never married, so his siblings are his only family.

Similar to Tomita-san, many homeless men make a living working at a variety of one-day or short-term jobs. These jobs can be as formal as registering at the nearby welfare center in Sanya or as casual as a *narabi* (waiting) job, where homeless men wait in line for concert tickets or other events. This chapter describes these jobs, a common method of survival, and argues that government regulations create a problem for some homeless men who receive jobs from the welfare center. Besides these jobs, other homeless men secure food and money without working,

but by scavenging and picking up whatever people leave behind in the park and on the street. This chapter concludes by examining how homeless men manage their money.

One story illustrates their view of work. As I was leaving Ueno station on a warm Sunday morning in the middle of October, I saw Ishikawa-san approaching the station to commute to his job. I said hi and we talked in front of the ticket machines for a few minutes. Tall for a Japanese man of his generation, people born before the Second World War, he wore his typical clothing of a baseball cap, tan pants, and a button-down shirt. Perhaps because he feels ashamed of his work and did not want people around us to know, he whispered to me that his job is a *yabai* (risky, dangerous) job. While he never said exactly what he does, I later learned that his work involves the *mizushobai* (adult entertainment) industry, and he distributes fliers or calls people into adult entertainment establishments. Before he left for work, which pays six thousand yen (\$58) a day, he repeatedly stressed that the men in Tent Village work hard and are not lazy, and he insisted that I include this point in my report.

I define work broadly to include any activity homeless men do that helps them procure food, shelter, material goods, and money. The economic recession of 2008-2009 divided my fieldwork in half, so I observed six months of economic stability and six months of a severe recession. The worst recession since the poverty that gripped the nation after World War II took a long time to recover (Tabuchi 2009). My research shows how homeless men used various types of work to survive during a stagnant economy and adapted to the brutal recession, including much lower income as the amount of work significantly decreased. While the type of jobs did not change much over the past year, the recessing economy caused the decrease in their income and efficiently worsened work as a survival strategy.

Critical Issues

The literature on work and homelessness in Japan went in a new direction with the economic crisis of 2008 and the appearance of Hibiya tent village, an encampment of several hundred homeless people during the New Year's holiday. The visible presence of several hundred men who recently lost their temporary factory jobs lining up for soup lines, welfare applications, health checks, clothing, and a place to sleep dominated the news during the New Year holiday and brought new public interest to the troubles of the homeless and working poor (Assmann and Maslow 2010). These media reports shifted the public portrayal of the homeless from lazy and dirty to victims of the economic crisis. Assmann and Maslow (2010, 1) describe the situation of men in the tent village: "Dependent on low incomes, many temporary workers proved unable to afford employment insurance while the global economic meltdown of 2008 triggered a massive cut of non-regular employees in Japan's manufacturing and service industries..." (2010, 1) The presence of the Hibiya tent village demonstrated the "erosion of legal and social standards in Japan as a consequence of falling incomes and unstable employment" (Assmann and Maslow 2010, 2).

While the Hibiya tent village brought much attention to unemployment, temporary workers, poverty, and homelessness, it did not focus on the men who had been homeless for months or years. Several scholars have studied work and homelessness prior to the economic recession of 2008 (Aoki 2006; Gill 2001; Margolis 2002; Marr 2007). Aoki argues that when the homeless stop looking for jobs, they know their dream of escaping or avoiding homelessness ends (2006). He succinctly describes life for those without work, "...there is no choice other than 'picking up food,' being reliant on soup kitchens, being admitted to hospital or other facilities

and receiving welfare benefits. For the homeless who cannot even manage this, there is nothing but dying out in the open” (2006, 103-104). The harsh life of those men already homeless contrasts with the many resources dedicated to the newly homeless and the national reflection on the plight of the temporary workers who lost their jobs.

Several years prior to the Hibiya tent village phenomena, Gill conducted research on day laborers and his work offers an interesting comparison to homeless men in Ueno Park (2001). He points out that day laborers who cannot find work endure sporadic periods of homelessness. His portrait offers a compelling comparison to homelessness in Ueno (2001). He cites the well-known expression, “You don’t need a knife to kill a day laborer. Three rainy days in a row is all it takes” (2001, 158). Homeless men who work face a similar situation with rain, because many of their employers, including workfare jobs, cancel work when it rains. Another area of similarity, the government’s policy towards day laborers, shows that the government treats most day laborers and homeless men the same. Gill argues that the Japanese government use the *yoseba* (day-laboring district) as a place, “to *seal up* the source of the potential social infection by *concentrating* or *containing* supposedly deviant elements” (2001, 185). Ueno Park and other parks serve as containment zone for the homeless, where authorities can watch them. The presence of few homeless men outside of these areas shows that the government policy has succeeded in keeping most homeless men in large parks and along the river.

Government Sponsored Welfare Jobs

For the poor and homeless willing to work at government-run work programs, the two centers in Sanya provide two different opportunities. The large three-story center in the heart of

Sanya focuses on helping day laborers find work, housing, and medical care, and provides other services for day laborers and homeless men. If men looking for work at this center meet with a social worker, they can sometimes stay at a city run shelter. The center limited men to two nights during the week and three if the stay begins on a Friday. The other center sits on the outskirts of Sanya, consists of a small building, and does not provide other social services. While homeless men sleep outside both centers, the larger center usually has many more people milling around the entrance and surrounding area. Although both centers require workers to register, the jobs often require little work or only giving the appearance of work. Sometimes the men only work five minutes and they laugh at the process. However, when they have to work, they become tired. Since typical jobs include outdoor jobs such as cleaning a park, cleaning guardrails on the highway, and cleaning a park after a festival, when it rains the center cancels work. The center pays sixty-five hundred yen (\$63) in cash for a day's work and provides a boxed lunch with hot soup and transportation to the job from the center.

While this work may appear to be a better option than the labor involved in selling aluminum cans, the inconsistency of the work presents challenges for the men, because the amount of work the center provides varies. After registering, the staff at the center assigns a number to each person and the numbers rotate, so the faster the numbers rotate the more often one works. The center assigns each man a number and when his number comes up in the rotation, he has an opportunity to work. Since knowing these numbers is important for homeless men registered with the center, Sogidan, the day laborers' union, displays the current numbers for Monday on the side of their van at their soup line on Sunday evenings. When the economy had mild growth during the spring and summer, the numbers rotated about once a week, but by January, the rotation had slowed to once a month.

The work at the center does not usually require exertion and sometimes the men only travel to the work site. Knowing how often the men actually worked is difficult to know, but most men echoed Takahashi-san's view. He has spent over twenty years in Sanya volunteering at Sanya Workers Association and doing workfare jobs, which he described in detail several times. He laughed as he explained one easy day, "We got to the worksite, got out of the microbus, put on the safety vests and helmets, and held the tools. We posed for a group photo, put the vests and tools back in the bus, got on the bus, ate lunch, and went back to the center. We did not do any work at all." Japanese workers often pose for a photograph and wear safety vests especially those in the many municipalities that offer community jobs for retired workers. Takahashi-san said the men spent the majority of their time in the microbus driving one hour to the worksite on the other side of Tokyo and another hour driving back to the center. The center gave the men an early lunch that they ate in the van.

Ishikawa-san confirmed Takahashi-san's description when he discussed his workday at the center in similar terms. Other times they work for several hours in the morning, especially in Ueno Park, and the work, raking leaves and gardening, made the men tired. The workday usually begins around eight and finishes by early afternoon and they usually work a short time. Typically, the men cut grass or clean a park for thirty minutes and then they received a *bentō* box and miso soup.

The two centers differ in significant ways. First, the larger center in Sanya requires more information to register and the other center does not need as much personal data. Ishikawa-san chose to work at the smaller center because it required little information to register. Since his wife receives his social security check, he cannot make much money in Tokyo, so the center presents a good opportunity for him. Second, for men who do not want to use the large center,

the smaller center provides an opportunity for work, but only for *koreisha* (elderly) workers. Interestingly, this center defines old age as above fifty-five, quite young for Japan, where life expectancy is eighty-two (U.S. Department of Commerce 2009), but for day laborers life expectancy remains significantly lower (Gill 2001), so the age requirement of fifty-five seems appropriate.

As men reach their fifties, homelessness and male poverty becomes particularly pronounced, so the homeless and the center define fifty-five as old age (Iwata 2005 interview with author). The age of the group influences their work schedule. According to Takahashi-san who has worked at the smaller center for a couple years, they do not work on extremely hot days, which they define as above eight-six degrees, because the staff at the center fears many of the older workers will pass out or suffer from heat stroke.

The larger center focuses much more on helping day laborers and homeless men in Sanya while the smaller center welcomes anyone to apply for work. Fourth, and most important, the two centers differed in the frequency of the work. The larger center had work three times a month, meaning that the numbers would rotate almost once a week, but the other center had *koreisha* (elderly) jobs every four or five days. While the difference, one workday's pay, sixty-five hundred yen (\$63) a month, may not seem like much, for a homeless man sixty-five hundred yen makes a difference. If he managed to work five days at the center, sixty-five hundred yen constitutes more than 15 percent of their income. For men who worked less because of rain, heat, or bad luck, sixty-five hundred yen is a significant percent of their income.

Both have drawbacks. Some men see sharing any personal information as a risk they will not take, so even though the smaller center asks for little personal information, it is still asking too much for some men who strictly guard their privacy. Given their physical condition, health,

and age of many homeless men, the work of cleaning guardrails or sweeping leaves in a park, exhausts them, creating another drawback. While homeless men try to predict the rotation of the numbers, the men do not know their exact work schedule from week to week, which impinges on men who work other jobs. Ai-chan, for example, worked six days a week cleaning a *pachinko* (Japanese pinball) parlor from six to ten in the morning, which paid him one thousand yen (\$9.50) an hour. However, he registered to work at the center, but he can only work on Mondays, his day off from cleaning the *pachinko* parlor. His friends at Sanya Workers Association, where he volunteers after work, often praise him for working hard and say they admire him for his unrelenting effort. If the center set the schedule for each week, men could better plan their week.

Another minor disadvantage, especially for the men living in Ueno Park and the surrounding area, is that the cost of time and money to get to the centers subtracts from their pay and takes energy, especially for men who walk to the center from Ueno Park. By train, it costs 160 yen (\$1.50) and takes thirty minutes one-way, including walking from the closest station to the center. Finally, the men work with their peer group, so if problems or conflicts arise on the job, they may carry over to life on the streets. Since many homeless men had trouble getting along with their families and with other personal relationships, trouble with coworkers seems likely and has the potential to spill into their life outside of work.

You've Got a Friend, You've Got a Job

Besides the jobs men receive from the two centers, some men find a variety of jobs through their friends, coworkers, and acquaintances. These jobs always pay the men in cash including their transportation costs. Since they receive a tax break, Japanese employers usually

pay commuting costs. Some examples of these jobs include working as movers, setting up equipment for outdoor theater performances, gardening and landscaping, waiting for tickets, helping with various food stalls at festivals, and *yabai* (risky, dangerous) jobs, usually jobs in the sex trade.

Most of the men who find other jobs also work at the center jobs, and these jobs supplement their income. For example, Katsumata-san received job assignments from the center, and supplemented his income working other jobs, which ranged from one-day to a week. A week long job meant lots of money and a better life that week. On the lower end of the scale were construction jobs at a *hanba* (construction site) outside of Tokyo,⁵ and since many men had worked similar jobs, they knew the poor conditions and hesitated to take these jobs. At the large Friday soup line, a recruiter came, even in the cold rain, to hire men for these jobs. Sometimes a couple of men talked to him, but most men ignored him.

Another connection for getting work, social workers, proved successful for several formerly homeless men now receiving welfare. Many men receiving welfare worked part-time jobs and in some cases, their caseworker asked them to work. Since homeless men and welfare recipients both got jobs from the center, found similar part-time or one-day jobs and attend soup lines, welfare recipients were indistinguishable from homeless men. Osamu-san's journey out of homelessness through work shows the importance of his social worker, because his social worker helped him find work cleaning the bullet trains from nine-thirty to five-thirty. He made eight hundred fifty yen an hour (\$8), which means he makes sixty-five hundred yen a day (\$63), about the same, as working at the center, but the work is longer and more consistent.

⁵ See Gill 2001 for a discussion of *hanba* and the construction industry in Japan.

Because most men valued work, men who worked regularly earned the respect of their peers. Susumu-san, an older homeless man who volunteered at Sanya Workers Association, and other men often praised Ai-chan, described earlier, for working hard, and praised him. They said he deserves respect for his perseverance and effort. Ai-chan works four hours a day. In another example, Osamu-san received a heroes' welcome at Sanya Workers Association, when he stopped by Sanya Workers Association on his day off from cleaning the trains. Everyone warmly and enthusiastically praised him for working hard and achieving great success. Osamu-san laughed and they praised him more, which embarrassed him and he blushed.

Men value work, in part because they desperately need money, so they consider any type of work. For example, Yamada-san, Saito-san, Takayama-san, Oba-san, Nishi-san, and Yamaguchi-san took the subway across town, which was unusual, for an opportunity to make some money. Nishi-san had a business relationship with two young men who sold cell phone parts, and while the details of this money-making plan never became clear, they only tried it once and returned to selling aluminum cans the next day. Their experience shows some men will try other venues to make money, especially after the economy entered a recession.

A final example of odd jobs takes place in April. When the abundance of tourists come to see the cherry blossoms in late March and early April, many men try to make extra money. Akita-san told me four different groups of picnickers had promised him money and leftover alcohol or food when they finished if he will clean up their area. Other men make money by reserving a space for a group by sitting on their blue plastic tarp until they arrive.

Finding, Begging, Taking

Earning, finding, or exchanging something of value improves their lives, and many men look for valuables. Finding a train pass or gift card with money on it, exchanging information or cigarettes for money, or hearing about a new *takidashi* (soup line) all make life a little better. While rare, finding anything of value made for a memorable day. Sitting on a park bench on a warm July afternoon, Takayama-san talked excitedly about the time he found a train card with some money on it and he chuckled as he recounted the time he got a little money out of the large water fountain after the park staff cleaned it.

The worst and least predictable method of survival involves no paid work at all, but rather looking for anything of value left behind in the park or on the street, so these men have no steady income. The men using this strategy attend daily soup lines sponsored by non-profit organizations and churches around Tokyo. This is the only option for men who do not want to work at the two centers, or cannot collect recyclables. When registering for work at the center, the staff does not ask for much information, but some men escaping past debts, troubled relationships with family members, legal difficulties, or trouble with the *yakuza* (organized crime), do not want to risk any contact with the government. They fear that government workers will contact debt collectors, family members, or accept a bribe by the *yakuza* for their personal information and this fear prevents them from working at either center.

Rarer than scavenging for valuables, some men beg and take things, which illustrates one type of hustling in Japan. Begging, unheard of a few years ago, and while still rare, does occur. A few homeless men target foreigners, especially the numerous tourists who came to Ueno Park. Maguro-san often approaches foreign tourists asking them for money or cigarettes.

Two young women from Europe said they did not understand him, but they gave him some cigarettes. In the beginning of my research, homeless men assumed twice that I did not speak Japanese and asked me for money. They pointed to their stomachs and made the Japanese gesture for money. Men whom I knew well never seriously asked me for money although sometimes they jokingly asked for money.

While I saw men begging for money, I never saw stealing, but men sometimes talked about it. Significantly, men who worked hard collecting aluminum cans or working for the center discussed the possibility of shoplifting after the economy tanked and their income from work dropped drastically. I did not hear these conversations before the recession. Regarding selling stolen goods, I saw Maguro sell a watch. One morning Ibaraki-san and I watched him approach a man visiting the park, and after a little haggling, sell him a watch. Ibaraki-san immediately expressed his surprise and disgust, and repeatedly called Maguro a slang term for thief. Aggressive stealing rarely occurred, but taking something from the trash at a warehouse happened frequently. Yamada-san and Takayama-san periodically took shoes from ABC Mart, a chain store selling shoes. When the shoe store staff leaves the old shoes out overnight, they take a pair for themselves. Taking something from a company happened frequently.

The morning market in Sanya in Tamahime Park for day laborers demonstrates the presence of questionable goods and theft among homeless men and day laborers. All the men refer to the street market as, *Dorobo Ichi*, which means Thief One,⁶ and reflects the belief by many men that the market stalls sell stolen goods. I never saw or heard any reference to it by any other name. It consists of a few stalls and opens every morning from dawn until seven-thirty, and consists of two streets with fifteen stands. Each stall has a folding table or a blanket on the ground with goods for sale including hot *sake* (Japanese rice wine), cigarettes, tools, clothing,

⁶ The one here is not a ranking, but an address.

and entertainment and pornographic DVDs. The vender selling cigarettes sold them by the stick, which illustrates the poverty and spending habits of his customers.

A final strategy to earn money involved scavenging the park for valuables including lost train cards, coins, and gift cards. When this method was successful, homeless men were quite happy with their findings. For example, Suzuki-san found over ¥2,000 (\$19) in foreign currency in the trash, which I exchanged for Japanese yen and returned to him. Since some men have left mainstream society, they do not always know the value of items they find. For example, Daiku-san showed me two cards, a phone card I had thrown away a few minutes earlier, and an arcade card, that he had pulled from the trash and asked if they had value. Both were worthless.

Other men scavenge. Their particular strategy involved frequenting a nighttime drinking area. When drunken businessmen drop their wallets or other valuables, some homeless men take the cash and throw the wallet in the trash. Ta-chan said that many homeless men frequent the area looking for money, and that they walk with their heads to the ground hoping to find something of value.

Finally, some men may appear to do no work. These men depend on the soup lines provided by churches and nonprofit organizations for meals and handouts. This group includes men who scavenged for anything of value. Digging through the trash, they were the lowest economically among the homeless. However, appearances could be deceiving. Suzuki-san often dug through all the park trashcans, but he was working, looking for aluminum cans to sell and other things of value.

Values and Work

Homeless men tend to respect other homeless men who sell aluminum cans, work at the workfare centers or other jobs. Not surprisingly, they look down on men who do not work. Since men who work for the center average about one day of work a week, unless the men who work for the centers tell other homeless men they work, people will not know they have jobs. It is difficult to know who works for the center and who does not work. Some working men harshly criticize young and healthy looking men who sit for hours waiting for a soup line. Sometimes a working homeless man ranted about how the younger men should be working and how the soup lines will soon end because the men leave the area a mess.

While critical for their survival, the work they do tells us about their values. Numerous homeless men complained they could not find work and when asked what they wanted most to improve their situation, many men suggested a job. Homeless men indicate that in the hierarchy among themselves, they place work at the top. For example, Tomita-san complained, while looking at a group of men sitting for a church service and soup line, “These men should all be working, especially the younger ones. It’s disgraceful.”

For many men, like Tomita-san, growing up in poor or working class families, they learned to value work. Many of the men ended their formal education after completing junior high school, so they often worked physical and skilled labor jobs (Iwata 2003) Shokunin-san illustrates their values, because he always stressed that he worked as a tradesman for years. Then he would add that he worked a dangerous job as an electrician, which required him to work with six thousand volts of electricity. He told me how a colleague’s mistake cost him his life.

Beyond values, the pay helps them, but the amount is beyond their control. For the men who work at the centers, the government decides their salary, but the health of the economy determines the number of days they work per month. First, when the economy is doing well less housed people register for the workfare jobs and homeless men worked more often and make more money. More money does not mean living well. During the best of times, the men made ¥13,000 (\$126) a week if their number came up twice in a week. Second, in a poor economy the government has less money to support the jobs programs. Finally, the men who got jobs from the centers did not organize to demand more opportunities to work or a higher salary. Many men wanted to work more often than the center provided, so they looked with mixed success for other jobs. Most homeless men embraced work, but the rewards for their values consisted of little pay and no benefits, except privacy. They continued to work hard, despite the meager rewards, lamented their victimization due to the bad economy, and blamed the poor U.S. economy for their plight.

Stretching a Dollar, Betting a Dollar

While money management practices among the men varied according to the amount of money they made, a few patterns emerged regarding how they spent it. Men managed their money in two ways. The more common approach, spending all of their money and not saving much, if any, had its roots in their short-term outlook developed when they worked as day laborers. The expression cited earlier, that three days of rain would kill a day laborer, applies to many homeless men, because after three days of rain, homeless men, like day laborers, will be out of money. A few men followed another approach, carefully planning and saving their money.

Comparing these approaches with characters from Aesop's story, "The Ant and the Grasshopper," the first approach would be the ant and the second would be the grasshopper. Many of the men spent time "playing" before becoming homeless. While playing *pachinko* (Japanese pinball), placing bets on horse races, and drinking with friends, they could not save much money and any money they did save they later spent.

While the data and argument shows drinking and gambling depleted their savings and caused their homelessness, these are in fact, secondary causes. Many of the men drank and gambled all their adult life. Only after losing their job did they face the difficulties of shrinking savings without quickly finding another job as they had in the past. If they had found another job, they would be housed, regardless of how they spent their disposable income.

Many homeless men chose not to save, and for many years spent their money gambling and numerous men continue to gamble. Considering the nature of qualitative research, it was difficult to quantify the number of men gambling and spending their savings. Gambling in Japan takes many forms including *pachinko*, horse races, boat races, bicycle races, and other races. Ishi-san exemplified an extreme, but not rare approach to gambling when he said, "I would bet on anything," and listed every form of gambling in Japan. He added that gambling runs in the family, as his father was a well-known and avid gambler, especially *kotei* (boat races). The exception to gambling is the few men who have quit. For example, Matsuo-san, described in chapter two, quit gambling and Daiku-san, a homeless man living in the park, confessed "*ashi aratan*." (Literally, I washed my feet. I quit gambling. I stopped cold turkey). Since many men spent their money gambling, they lacked savings to help them avoid becoming homeless.

Gambling continued to be an addictive habit for many homeless men. Even men receiving welfare gambled, although according to social workers and welfare recipients, welfare

regulations prohibit gambling. The rules did not stop men like Nishi-san and Takao-san from gambling. This was Nishi-san's last chance to receive welfare as he had burned bridges at welfare offices in and around Tokyo. Each ward in Tokyo has its own welfare office, and he has received welfare at several and later violated the rules, so he can no longer receive welfare in these wards and cities. Nevertheless, both of them travel to another part of Tokyo or Yokohama to avoid welfare officials catching them, because they were convinced that the welfare office has surveillance cameras in *pachinko* parlors and at betting centers around Tokyo. To avoid them, Takao-san travels by train for an hour to another part of Tokyo and Ishi-san travels from Yokohama to Tokyo to gamble.

In addition to welfare recipients, countless homeless men who earn money continue to place bets. *Pachinko* and horse races constitute the two most popular forms of gambling among the men, and some men do both, although most men have a preference. While some men occasionally bet on big races, other men went to WINS, the local off track betting facility each week. Typically, they placed small bets, around one hundred yen (ninety-seven cents), the smallest bet allowed. Some men spend all day Sundays in the Asakusa WINS. While spending one thousand yen (\$10) a week gambling on horse races is not a lot of money, with a weekly income of ¥10,000 (\$97) it is 10 percent of their income.

Even some of the men who sold only a few kilos managed to bet on horse races, especially the big ones like the Japan Derby. They earned very little, yet managed to place bets. Most of the men who bet occasionally or only on big races lived in the park, because they left their families after a disagreement over their gambling habits and debts. Since they spent their money gambling, they did not have the savings to set-up another household. Spending the day at WINS or another gambling center provides a comfortable entertaining shelter. For example,

Takayama-san, accompanied Yamada-san to WINS, and when I asked if he placed any bets, he laughed and said, “I only enjoyed the air conditioning.”

Compared to those who bet on horses, the men who played *pachinko* (Japanese pinball) spent money quickly. Several men who earn money selling aluminum cans or working at the center spend all day on Saturdays, the last payday until Tuesday, in the *pachinko* parlor. While both *pachinko* players and horseracing gamblers gamble on weekends, men can play *pachinko* any day. Another difference between *pachinko* and gambling on the races is that pachinko requires more money. Many men said it cost at least ten thousand yen (\$97) to play pachinko, but they quickly added that one can play with as little as one thousand yen (\$10) if the *pachinko* machine gives out money. In other words, if they win in the beginning, they can keep playing, but if not, their one thousand yen, (\$10) will be gone quickly.

A final difference, the social atmosphere, shows two very different approaches to gambling. Plotz (2011) describes playing pachinko as a solidarity experience, and calls the experience of playing pachinko “extraordinarily unsociable activity. No one looks around. No one talks.” (2011). Conversely, gambling at WINS, while not particularly social, has a collective element. For example, when the televisions displayed the races, almost everyone watched and collectively sighed when his horse lost, although interestingly no one celebrated a win. The exciting and challenging decision of which horse to place their bet creates many hours of conversation. Yamada-san and Nishi-san often laughed, argued, and talked about the various races on the Friday and Saturday preceding the race and for a couple days after the race. On a hot Sunday in early August, Yamada-san moped back to the park. He explained, “I had fun in the morning at WINS when I won ¥2,000, but the afternoon was not so good.” He lost most of the money but he did set aside some safe money. While horse races generate conversation before and

after the races as men read and discuss the sports newspaper's predictions, pachinko has no such information and continues to be lonely activity. Fukuda-san described pachinko when he loses as, "expensive air conditioning." In sum, playing *pachinko* and placing bets at WINS provide a fun escape from reality.

A gambling addiction leads some men to homelessness, keeps other men homeless, and provides others some relief from the boredom and difficulties of being homeless. Yamada-san argued that he bets money on horse races as a way to save money, but after several months of placing bets, his plan was failing. Spending several hours the day before the race obsessing about which horses to bet on and then spending Sunday at WINS for several hours helps him pass the time in an enjoyable activity that he has done for years. He also talks and argues for hours about the races with his friends for a day or two before the race and talks about his losses on Monday. When asked what they would do if they win a big race, most men responded that they would let the bet ride. Yamada-san probably did not seriously gamble to save money and move off the streets, but rather to enjoy himself for a few hours on Sunday afternoons and forget his troubles, much like many other people at WINS.

Where the Money Goes

While a few men saved cash in their carts and stretched their money, most did not. With little income and spending part of it playing pachinko and betting on horse races, the men survived by being frugal. Many men learn to live cheaply, and they often know the places with the best prices. The most expensive items the men buy regularly are food, alcohol, and cigarettes. For homeless men, clothing and food make up their largest expenses, but several churches and

nonprofits give them away, which helps reduce their expenses. Since they are homeless, they do not pay for many large budget items like rent, utilities, transportation, and healthcare. The park and ward offices do not ask for money, so they have no housing cost. Their utilities cost little, because the men use several water faucets throughout the park for washing clothing and themselves, but they do have to buy gas if they want to cook. Since most men own a one-burner gas stove, they use it to save money by cooking ramen noodles and boiling water for tea and cooking vegetables. The gas canisters for the stove cost about 300 yen (\$3) for a pack of four. Their limited expenses help explain how they can live comfortably during decent economic conditions.

The three most common stores where they shop reflect their frugality and spending habits. The most popular store for work supplies, some food, and household items is the 100-yen store, the Japanese equivalent of the dollar store. One man, An-chan, who has been homeless for decades, stressed that Silk, the name of the 100-yen store next to the park, has made a big difference, improving their lives considerably thanks to the cheap goods produced in China. Almost everyone uses the red and blue striped plastic bags sold at Silk for storing their stuff or more visibly, carrying aluminum cans.

Men also shop at Takeya, a large discount store about ten minutes from the park. Like other people in the area, including homemakers and retirees, men like Takeya because of their low prices. Some men buy inexpensive groceries including eggs, *natto* (fermented soybeans that are highly nutritious), instant ramen noodles, and fish. While these foods are popular in Japan, the men buy and eat an unusually large amount of these cheap foods. One homeless couple buys cheap *bentō* boxes for two hundred fifty yen (\$2.40) almost every day for lunch. Before the economy entered a recession, this price was exceptionally cheap, but during the recession,

consumers demanded better deals, so this price became more common. Finally, if men buy clothing, they buy it at UenoClothing, which sells second-hand clothing, and clothing that failed manufacturing standards. They sell the cheapest clothing in the area.

By spending little money on clothing and household goods by receiving these items, they can stretch their money. *Sogidan*, the day laborer's union in Sanya, gave away clothing once a month. Some of the churches that have soup lines give away clothing; and Sanya Workers Association, a nonprofit agency, distributes clothing including shoes, blankets, and occasionally sleeping bags twice a week. In addition to not paying for clothing, homeless men often eat free food. Several churches in Tokyo and nonprofit agencies come to the park and hand out food or hold soup lines. Churches from the suburbs and more distant prefectures come occasionally. The information about the soup lines is important for the men. For example, while Yamada-san laughed when he found a paper with the soup line schedule for each day of the week that a homeless man left behind, he also studied it for a minute.

Looking at a couple of examples will show in detail how men manage their money. Otani-san explained his budget in detail. He stressed many times that he can survive with any amount of money. He never said this until after the economy went into a recession. He explained that he spends less than one thousand yen (\$10) a day on food, alcohol, and cigarettes. This includes three hundred yen (\$3) for one small six-ounce glass bottle of sake. Cigarettes cost him two hundred fifty to three hundred yen (\$2-\$3) per day. He stretches his money by knowing when to shop to get *bentō* boxes and other ready-made food at half off before the convenience stores throw them away. On his way to Asakusa to collect cans, he frequently shops at the Ninety-Nine-yen store. He explained that he does not go to soup lines because he can afford his own food. Referring to the Thursday church's soup line, he pointed out that attending is the same

as buying your own kimchee and rice, the food they serve. Otani-san spends little money on entertainment. His most expensive purchases are cigarettes 300 yen, (\$3) and a small cup of *sake* 200 yen, \$1.80 that he drinks in the morning after a long night collecting cans and a few hours of sleep.

Matsuo-san offers another approach to managing money. He earns several hundred dollars selling during the Cherry Blossom viewing season, but because he does not work for months afterwards, he strictly budgets his money. Since he saved his money, he even loaned some to his friend Ishida-san, who earns around \$310 a week selling aluminum cans, but had spent his earnings playing *pachinko*. Matsuo-san had few expenses, because he ate the food from Kyosanto, a nonprofit agency, and did not gamble, but he had six or seven pet cats. Their food, which he bought at Takeya, he claimed, constituted his biggest expense, and he bought it at Takeya. A few cat lovers in the neighborhood brought cat food for his cats and other stray cats in the park and they had a veterinarian come to the park and exam them. Matsuo-san has eaten at soup lines, but since he receives food from Kyosanto, he does not go. Both Otani-san and Matsuo-san's approach demonstrate that the men can survive for a long time without earning much money.

Since almost everyone had few expenses, working one day and earning ten thousand yen (\$87), provided a significant source of income, which could last for a week or more. Food constituted their main expense. For many men, especially those in Tent Village, their food costs were quite low. Attending a soup line that gives out canned goods and perishables, getting food from Kyosanto, and receiving food from a restaurant late at night after they closed or an *oba-san* (middle-aged woman) on her way to work all kept food cost low. Matsuo-san had such low expenses that he said he spent ¥6,000 (\$58) on cat food and ¥4,000 (\$39) on himself per month.

Besides food, a few men bought prepaid cell phones. They use their phones to get jobs and call friends about work, but charging the phone was a problem, since most slept in the park. One man said they charge their phones at the cell phone store or they use the electrical outlet in the restroom for the handicapped. One problem they learned is if they remain in the restroom for more than the thirty minutes, the alarm rings. Another man charged his phone at Sanya Workers Association.

The high price of cans during the spring and summer and the frequent work at the workfare centers meant they did not have to do *waruimono* (bad things) to survive. *Waruimono* in this case refers to stealing or concocting frauds to get money. In the fall with the economy tanking, the men talked more about how to save money by shoplifting or taking advantage of drunken businessmen on their way home. When describing how homeless men take cash from wallets, Ta-chan described the process as “snatching.” Many men often used this word, including Ishida-san described earlier. During one conversation, some men talked about an incredibly cheap supermarket where they could save money and Nishi-san said he would “snatch” the food, when the middle-aged woman is not looking if he did not have money. While some men said they would not do *waruimono*, the conversation showed their desperation had increased when the price of cans dropped and work opportunities decreased. While some men were reluctant to say they would steal, several men said that if they saw a wallet on the street, they would take the cash and any train passes. Nishi-san said that other homeless men including him would steal food if necessary.

Conclusion

This chapter explored work as a survival strategy. It asked what jobs the men do and how do they manage their income from these jobs. Two types of jobs, government jobs and jobs from friends provided most of their income. This chapter asked how men spent their money and how did they budget and save with such little resources? Additionally, it sought to understand their values regarding work and money.

Many men in Ueno Park who have even a few hundred yen will spend it on horse races and if they have enough they will spend it on pachinko. Some men worked hard gathering and selling aluminum cans only to spend most of the money in an afternoon playing pachinko or betting on a few horse races. *Pachinko* provides a mind numbing experience that releases them from the mental pressure of their life on the street. When they are absorbed playing *pachinko*, watching a horse race, or discussing a race, they are released from the burden of worrying about their next meal, the weather, or trouble with their neighbor. Their gambling is not unusual as it is quite common and a large industry in Japan. While their unemployment led to them becoming homeless, it is the gambling habit, if not addiction, that depleted their savings. Men who liked to gamble did not want to share the details of their gambling history so determining the number of men who gamble and the amount of gambling is difficult.

Not surprisingly, some men defended gambling and pachinko as hobbies. They explained that spending money on *pachinko* or horse races costs the same as taking a family to Ueno Zoo for the day. They added that when they were working they spent the money they had set aside for leisure playing *pachinko* or gambling. A young Korean homeless man emphasized that “Everyone who is working bets on the big races.” The key point in their argument is that

they were working. Their job loss coupled with their little savings pushed them into homelessness and severely curtailed their money for gambling.

Almost all the men had some history of gambling. For some, they had stopped but others continued to gamble even if meant spending their savings. Liebow's research helps explain why they spent their savings. He documented that "the streetcorner man is obliged to expend all his resources on maintaining himself from moment to moment" (1967, 65). He shows how streetcorner men cannot delay satisfying their hunger and other simple comforts (Liebow 1967). Men in Liebow's study, like the men in Ueno Park, have an orientation to the future that presumes negative consequences (1967). They live on the brink of spending all their money. Because they do not see a bright future or even a future outside of their present lives on the street, there is no incentive to save money and not to spend it on cigarettes, alcohol, *pachinko*, or horse races.

Many men in Tokyo know the bleakness of their future lives. It will not improve and will continue to worsen. Liebow explains why men spend their money. A man "does so precisely because he is aware of the future and the hopelessness of it all" (1967, 66). More recent research, such as MacLeod's work, shows how awareness of a future without hope affects high school students (1995). Knowing the bleakness of their futures, many men do not focus on time management or planning. Days tend to pass fast when they are busy, but their abundant free time passes excruciatingly slow. Unlike someone in prison with a release date, these men spend time without end waiting to be old enough for welfare or to die.

CHAPTER 6

FOLLOW THE LAW: WELFARE AND SOUPLINES

Iwamoto-san

Iwamoto-san does not have a relationship with his children, a twenty-three year-old son and a twenty-one year old daughter, whom he has not seen in twelve years. He would not mind seeing them, but he has not contacted them since moving to Tokyo from the Tohoku region. His relationship with ex-wife is a different story. Iwamoto-san told me, in front of others, that he is *batsu-ichi* (divorced once), and later stressed regarding seeing his wife, “*zetai yada*” (No way do I want to see her). When a television crew recorded footage of homeless men for a program about nonprofit agencies and homelessness in Tokyo, Iwamoto-san moved out of the picture. In an interview, he explained that he is convinced his wife’s family has seen him on television or in Tokyo. In a city with millions of people, I questioned his logic, and although he had no proof, he was adamant that they had seen him. His view reflected strongly his feelings towards his former wife and his thinking regarding his wife’s family seeing him in Tokyo.

He works hard five days a week at a delivery company in Akihabara, a short train ride from his income-supplemented apartment in Sanya, where he lives alone. He works twice a day, from six to seven-thirty in the morning and from five-thirty to nine at night. His job involves lifting heavy boxes in a space without air conditioning, so in the summer the work challenges his stamina. Working the evening hours creates a problem for him because his apartment only has a communal bath, which closes before he returns home from work, so he sometimes pays ¥400 (\$3.50) to use the public bath.

He does not work Mondays evenings, so he volunteers at Sanya Workers Association in the afternoons. The volunteers use bread delivered by Taito Ward Food Pantry to make bags of

bread including donuts, bagels, croissants, and jam sandwiches. Usually, Sanya Workers Association gives away canned fruit or fresh fruit from Taito Ward Food Pantry. He helped make the sandwiches and assemble the bags from the many boxes of breads. On the way to the river Iwamoto-san often pointed out that, the men on welfare spent their money, so at the end of the month they line up for food. He strongly believed that number of men increased at the end of the month, and the numbers showed he was correct.

Like many men volunteering at Sanya Workers Association, he spent time living on the streets. He lived in the corridors of the underground shopping mall surrounding Tokyo station. He successfully navigated his path off the streets with the help of an undergraduate social work student, Aoyama-san, and a lawyer, Yasuda-san. Both were instrumental in helping him. While living in and around Tokyo station, he met Aoyama-san and he asked Aoyama-san to help his friends who lived a harsher life than him, including a man who had trouble walking. The student introduced Iwamoto-san to the lawyer, who followed him from the streets to a shelter to a hospital, and finally a successful welfare application. Iwamoto-san had outstanding loans from a consumer loan company that charges high interest rates. He had borrowed money to help a friend who needed it for daily expenses, but Yasuda-san, his lawyer, completed the paperwork to get Iwamoto-san out of bankruptcy. Welfare regulations prevent men with debts from receiving assistance and debt free.

It took some time for Iwamoto-san to receive welfare. Because his health had become quite poor, he spent over two months at a transitional shelter recuperating from his time on the streets. While some health issues like numerous tick bites and infections healed easily, he had more serious health issues that required several exams and an operation. Iwamoto-san did not

elaborate on the operation, but luckily, the ward welfare office paid for his health costs. He spent from October to the end of March at shelters or in the hospital recovering from his operation.

Without Sanya Workers Association's help and the subsequent introduction to the lawyer and her hard work, he would still be on the streets or possibly dead. He expressed his gratitude to the lawyer and Sanya Workers Association several times. Since he had worked for the government as a chef in an office cafeteria, he may be eligible to receive a pension, but he worries it will not cover his healthcare. About a year and a half ago, he threw up some black phlegm and the doctors hospitalized him for two weeks. They instructed him not to smoke or drink, but he continues to smoke and protests that smoking and drinking go together. He complained that he has no fun things left to do since he cannot drink and should not smoke. He lamented, "It is a lonely life living in a *doya* (flophouse)."

A typhoon coming through Tokyo also illustrates some of the issues this chapter raises. On a warm muggy Tuesday afternoon in August 2008, a typhoon moved across Tokyo. Few people were in Ueno Park, mostly homeless men, park guards, museum staff, shop and restaurant workers, and people walking through the park. Light rain sporadically sprayed the few people in the park and the wind gusted occasionally. In this atmosphere, one group, a Korean church, worked hard to set up an outdoor church service. Sustained winds blew and heavy rain pounded the park making everyone, including those watching the outdoor service, soaked, chilled, and miserable. The service began a little earlier than usual, but lasted a full hour during the peak of the typhoon. The congregation consisted of mostly homeless men, who sat on old pieces of cardboard and newspaper on the ground and held umbrellas to stay dry. Most men admitted reluctantly that they do not believe the church's message and that they attend for the food. The reward for their effort of waiting for several hours and getting soaking wet and cold from a

dreadful typhoon was a bowl of rice with kimchee and a banana. Most men had no place to wash or dry after the service. This and the other soup lines were the safety net for some homeless men, men who chose not to apply for welfare, or return to their sibling's or parent's home.

The chapter explores the multi-layered safety net that homeless men rely on when their survival strategies fail. The first layer is turning to other men for help. Then or simultaneously they may turn to a soup line, a church, or a nonprofit agency for assistance, and almost everyone goes to soup lines before and for some, after receiving welfare. Staff at the nonprofit agencies may suggest that they apply for welfare, which for some men moves them out of homelessness, but not out of poverty. While many homeless men apply for welfare, it requires an application and interview and not everyone completes the process. For all homeless men, the safety net of welfare and soup lines provides some security when they cannot find work or make enough money selling recyclables. For men who do not work, soup lines constitute a survival strategy and the last and only layer of their safety net.

Since some men are escaping or hiding from something or someone, perhaps a loan or their family, they often refuse to sign up for government workfare programs. Given their concern with hiding, knowing exact figures on who or what they are hiding from is impossible. Applying for welfare risks a much stronger connection to the bureaucracy and a fear that their family or the groups they are avoiding will find them. They fear that if they enter the welfare system, their family members will find them via the national family registry system. For those who apply, welfare becomes another survival strategy similar to collecting recyclables or working at workfare jobs.

Men often change strategies. Some men do nothing except attend soup lines. Then when a desire for money to buy cigarettes, food, or to place bets or play pachinko becomes strong they

start gathering aluminum cans or selling newspapers. The last choice is especially prevalent among men who value their privacy and who do not want to be found. Finally when they become seriously sick or exhausted from working they apply for welfare. Men tend to choose gathering aluminum cans when they do not trust the government. They apply to day laborer jobs when they are less concerned about family members, loan sharks, or *yakuza* (organized crime) finding them.

Critical Issues

The history and procedures of welfare and poverty in Japan provide the context for understanding the safety net. Poverty is not new in Japan. However, many Japanese people thought their country lacked poverty, so when the government released the country's 1996 poverty rate for the first time in 2009, the rate of 15.7 percent people living in poverty surprised them (The Asahi Shinbun 2009). In a *New York Times* article describing growing poverty awareness in Japan, the author points out that the government admitted in autumn 2009 that, "it had been keeping poverty statistics secretly since 1998 while denying there was a problem" (Fackler 2010). A leading poverty activist explains the unusual situation as "The government knew about the poverty problem, but was hiding it. It was afraid to face reality" (Fackler 2010).

The exclusion of single homeless men from welfare largely results from bias, and this bias against homeless men has been well documented (Gill 2005b; Kitagawa 2008; Margolis 2002; Kennett and Iwata 2003). The prejudice includes the period immediately following World War II when almost everyone in Japan was poor (Allison 2004; Milly 1999). Gill found the 1946 version of the welfare law, "excluded applicants deemed able but not willing to work, those who had people (e.g. spouse, parents) responsible for their welfare, etc" (2005b, 209). These

prejudices take the form of several bureaucratic predicaments, including Japan's national registration system, which works against un-housed people who want to apply for assistance.

Kitagawa describes the quandary of those without fixed addresses: "no matter how bad the plight they are in, if they are found capable of being able to work, will not be given much assistance (other than medical care) on the grounds that it is difficult to assess their material possessions due to their lack of a fixed address" (2008, 211). Caseworkers reason that men capable of working could be day laborers and therefore deny them benefits (Kitagawa 2008). The combination of actual bias by bureaucrats and caseworkers and the beliefs among the men about welfare create a situation where many men need courage and luck to apply successfully. Iwata notes that while local governments have an obligation to help everyone who is poor in their city, "they have been reluctant to help people without a fixed abode" (2008, 154). Not surprising, bureaucratic prejudice creates a discrepancy between the actual law and how bureaucrats implement them. Because of this discrepancy, the welfare law "is applied only to those who are over the age of 65, those who have severe disease or handicap, women or single mothers, because they 'can't work'" (Iwata 2008, 154).

While prejudice prevents some homeless men from receiving welfare, the political economy in Japan works against all homeless men. Schaede argues that the "main reasons for the government's tendency to introduce protective measures to counterbalance the effects of market reforms are an insufficient welfare system and Japan's existing social contract, which does not tolerate uncertainty and social suffering" (2003, 2). While arguing that the inadequate welfare system keeps Japan from undertaking major economic reforms, Schaede succinctly describes the issue facing some homeless men: "...there is a huge welfare gap for the long-term unemployed. Thus, if somebody were to be laid-off in his early fifties, he would have to rely on his savings

until he qualifies for a pension, however meager, at age 65” (2003, 2). Structural causes further undermine the welfare gap and insufficient welfare system. Looking at the structural causes of homelessness in the 1990s, Hasegawa found three: “(a) a shift from a manufacturing to a service economy, (b) urban redevelopment and gentrification, and (c) government policy shifts toward deregulation and privatization, including privatization of welfare” (2005, 990). Economic problems and an inefficient government welfare system present structural challenges that poor homeless men must overcome to receive welfare.

The political-economic influences affect the construction industry, unemployment policies, and welfare system. Kitagawa documented the political influence by showing the government’s approach to welfare for healthy single men who are not elderly. He found that the *yoseba* (day laboring district) serves as a, “shock absorber” for the homeless and poor single men, so the construction industry and areas like Sanya function as a zone to absorb labor and prevent unemployed men from applying for welfare (2008, 224). Schoppa explains the political economy behind the construction industry in Japan, “Construction was another ‘labor sponger’ sector that enjoyed protection from market competition under government policy. The Japanese government directed very large sums of public revenue toward public works” (2006, 56).

While the money for public works does not constitute a welfare or jobs program, the money helps the industry provide jobs, which keep men off the streets. When these programs fail, the men may turn to welfare, but they “have in reality been excluded from the *Seikatsu hogo* system which guarantees all people a basic minimum standard of living” (Schoppa 2006, 224). Schoppa describes the situation as officials choosing to provide welfare to families with children and not to single men (2006, 224). In practice, discrimination is gendered. Finally, Kitagawa sees the system as a process of multiple exclusions of homeless men not belonging to “a corporation,

a local community or family, and consequently not even considered to be citizens of our society,” because they do not belong to a group (2008, 225). Kitagawa’s view that welfare bureaucrats ask men to “fit into a certain self-reliant model (with inadequate assistance)” depicts accurately the view of many homeless men that want to be self-reliant (2008, 225).

A Takidashi (Soup Line), a Church Service,
and a Patrol

In English *takidashi* might translate as soup line, but the literal translation means to boil and distribute rice. Homeless men in my study and the organizations that run the *takidashi* use different terms. For the men, the food is the significant aspect of the soup lines and the food at the *takidashis* varies widely. The most popular *takidashi* on Monday afternoons in Ueno serves fresh fruit, large portions of rice and meat, and vegetables to almost one thousand people each week. More importantly, they distribute many canned goods and perishable foods. Their relatively tasty food and *omiyage* (literally souvenirs, the canned goods) attracts the largest crowd to a *takidashi*. The least popular *takidashi* limits the number of people who attend to three hundred and gives them a banana, a small rice ball, and a butter roll.

Chiyoda church, about a fifteen-minute walk from the Ameiyoko shopping district and about three blocks from the southwest corner of the park, runs the most popular *takidashi*. They hold a soup kitchen every Sunday inside the church with an outdoor service in a small neighborhood park for people who cannot fit inside the church. On Mondays in Ueno Park behind the large water fountain, they hold a service followed by a soup line, which includes giving away canned goods, clothing, and offering haircuts. Their church is on the third floor of a small, narrow building, where they store canned food.

Various other church groups administer most of the *takidashi*, but two nonprofit agencies also run *takidashis*. Each of these groups had their own term for *takidashi*. Sanya Workers Association, a non-profit agency founded by Christian volunteers, has two *takidashis* a week, and Taito Ward Food Pantry has a weekly *takidashi*. Many of the churches are Korean, since most Japanese are not Christian. The churches refer to their *takidashi* as *reihai* (church services). The volunteers and staff of Sanya Workers Association refer to the *takidashi* as a patrol, because in addition to having a large distribution of food like the churches, the volunteers and staff walk along the river distributing food and checking on the men who live in tents or sleep on benches. They may avoid the word *takidashi*, because many of the volunteers are welfare recipients and former or currently homeless men who previously attended *takidashi*. Several volunteers take leftover *bentō* boxes or other food home after the patrol. The other non-profit agency, Taito Ward Food Pantry, refers to their *takidashi* as a soup kitchen, reflecting, their British roots⁷. Taito Ward Food Pantry had many westerners among their volunteers, which led some homeless men to refer to them incorrectly as a U.S. Army group. No matter who the volunteers were many men defined all soup lines as a *takidashi* regardless of how they are run, therefore, throughout this chapter, I use the word *takidashi*.

The gender of the people attending, volunteering, and running the *takidashi*, shows the status and beliefs of these groups. Out of the hundreds of people attending the daily soup lines, almost all of them are men. Five women at most attend or receive food from a group. This stark breakdown mirrors the government support to prevent poor women, especially single mothers, from becoming homeless and the significant neglect of men, particularly men judged capable of working. Although each volunteer group has its own gender dynamics, a few patterns emerged. Church groups had a mix of women and men, but Sanya Workers Association had mostly men,

⁷ Their founder is British.

except on Mondays when a couple men led university students, scout groups, homemakers, and nuns on their patrol of the park near the river.

While much diversity exists within the variety of *takidashi*, several core components happen at all *takidashi*. First with one exception, they generally take place outside in a park, on the street, or along the Sumida River. Second, while none of the groups requires homeless men to wait, homeless men usually begin waiting outside several hours before the *takidashi* begins. Third, with the exception of a few loners, many men see *takidashi* as social events, where they can meet old friends and network to find employment. Finally, they all look very similar with men either standing and eating or waiting to eat. Once the *takidashi* has finished, the men scatter and walk back to their homes.

Each *takidashi* manifests these similarities differently and some of the key differences change depending if a church or nonprofit agency holds the *takidashi*. Generally, churches take more time because they spend sixty to ninety minutes preaching, singing, and worshipping, so the people in line wait longer to receive food. Most homeless men do not participate in the service, except when necessary. For example, a few men will sing when requested, but most sleep or zone out. The churches hold services every week, even on their major holidays like Christmas, unless the park management prohibits it. While the volunteers and staff at the nonprofit agencies care deeply and are dedicated to helping the poor, they take holidays around New Year's, Cherry Blossom viewing season, and the summer *Obon* holiday season.

Wait, Pray, Eat, Repeat

While much diversity exists among the various soup lines run by nonprofit agencies and churches, one universal attribute, the waiting time, usually lasts several hours before the soup line or church service begins. The churches and nonprofit agencies start on time, are well organized, and do not ask the men to line up early. They prefer the men to line-up just before the starting time, and while the starting time for the soup lines varies in most cases homeless men begin waiting several hours before it starts. For example, on Mondays Chiyoda Church begins their service at two, but some homeless men begin arriving as early as nine in the morning. Considering that the men usually wake with the sun, around five, and that the church's meal may be their first and only substantial meal of the day, it is not surprising that men arrive early. Regardless of the weather, by two in the afternoon, over five hundred men have lined up and are waiting for the Chiyoda Church service to begin. They stand in a long line snaking around the back end of the park and along the main road outside the park. Some men read a newspaper or thick comic book that they will later use as a seat cushion and others hold a piece of cardboard to use as a cushion. Other men pass the time talking to their friends in line or listening to small pocket radios.

In most cases, the men line up by themselves, but usually they make a mad dash for a spot and then wait patiently. I asked why they line up so early. One man explained that they have free time so they line up and a more common response was eating first gives the men a better chance to get in line again for more food. Those men at the back of the line will not receive seconds. The men in the beginning of the line can usually receive seconds.

The long waiting time causes some problems for the groups administering the *takidashi* (soup lines) and for the men. Two examples demonstrate the problem. First, the men attending the Sanya Workers Association *takidashi* on Fridays lined up in a park near the river, and the spacious and convenient location worked well for the homeless who came regularly and Sanya Workers Association. The presence of several nearby schools created a problem because the PTA may have complained to the ward office. During the second Friday *takidashi* in November, a couple of government workers spoke to the social worker on duty at Sanya Workers Association, and asked him to stop or move the *takidashi*. The social worker told them they pick up any trash, and the men do not line up until ten minutes before it starts. He explained that two volunteers ride their bicycles from Sanya Workers Association to the riverbank and ask the men not to line up until one-fifty. Still several hundred men hang out in the area waiting to line up. After the *takidashi*, the social worker said the government workers have come five times this year and have taken pictures of the *takidashi* so Sanya Workers Association cannot ignore them. When reporting the contents of his discussion with them, the clearly distraught social worker worried about the consequences for Sanya Workers Association and homeless men. He asked if anyone has a good idea to call him anytime, and joked that even a 2:00 a.m. call is fine, but after much brainstorming and several months, no one had a winning idea. Even though Sanya Workers Association pressed their case in both the Japanese and English media, the government did not change its position. After more meetings with the government workers in the following weeks and months, they agreed to move the *takidashi* at the end of March, when the Japanese school year ends. Many homeless men, volunteers, and staff thought the bureaucrats pressed Sanya Workers Association to move the *takidashi* because the local Parent Teacher Association

and Neighborhood Association complained about the presence of many homeless men in the park.

A second example, the Wednesday day *takidashi* run by a church, also shows the consequences of the men's lining up early. The church holds a service every Wednesday in the back of the park where there are about five park benches and a large open space. They bring folding chairs, song sheets for the congregation of mostly homeless men, boxes of food, an audio system for the preacher, and sometimes a youth group from Korea to sing, dance, or perform a short play. If it is raining, they bring a tent to cover the minister, audio equipment, and food. The service, followed by lunch, does not begin until around one-fifteen or one-thirty.

When I began my fieldwork in April, men lined up at ten forty-five for the Wednesday *takidashi* (soup line), but the time got progressively earlier. One day the men lined up at ten-twenty, and Saito-san, who does not attend this *takidashi*, but lives in the back of the park where the service takes place, harshly criticized the men for lining up so early and called them “*bakarashi*” (absurd and stupid) for lining up so early when they will not receive food until two-thirty. His friend Yamaguchi-san agreed with him. However, for hungry men dependent on soup lines, being first in line means eating sooner, and Saito-san and Yamaguchi-san already had eaten a good breakfast. One man in line said they line up early because this church offers seconds and thirds, so the people in the front have a better chance of getting seconds and thirds before the food runs out. The line moves at a steady pace and many men eat rapidly. For those in the front of the line can finish eating before the church members have served everyone is a realistic goal.

The park guards monitor the various *takidashi* including the long waiting time. The Wednesday church had problems when the men began waiting at nine in the morning, because

the guards, who patrol the park, noticed the men sitting in three rows of twenty-five around nine thirty. The guards talked to a couple of volunteers, who were other homeless men who help the church, and then the volunteers asked the men to leave and come back at twelve-thirty. The guards also keep track of how many men attend each *takidashi*. They ask the groups how many men attend and the groups count the number of attendees. For example, on Sundays the Taito Ward Food Pantry volunteer calls the senior guard and tells him how many men attended the *takidashi*.

While this section's heading, "Wait, Pray, Eat, Repeat," describes most *takidashis*, it neglects the important latent function of many soup lines for homeless men,—they are social events. Men greet and talk to each other at the soup lines. Even working homeless men who do not line up come to socialize. Prior to the economic crisis, working homeless men proudly said they do not attend soup lines because they can buy their food, but they sometimes come to talk to friends or network for jobs. The larger and more generous *takidashis* tended to have more socializing afterwards. Homeless men who moved out of Ueno Park and into government-supported housing in Sanya, returned to Ueno Park on big *takidashi* days. Susume-san, for example, spent most of the summer months sleeping, drinking, and socializing on the wood planks behind the baseball field and next to the bathrooms. He disappeared in September, but in late November, I saw him in the park and we talked. He had successfully applied for welfare with the help of Sogidan, the Day Laborer's Union, and moved to an income-supplemented dorm in Kita-Senju, a ten-minute train ride from Ueno. He said he came looking for work, and in the few minutes that I saw him, he talked to two friends about finding work.

While socializing occurred frequently at Sogidan's Sunday evening *takidashi*, their *takidashi* differed from the others because they held it in the evening. The union advocates on

behalf of the homeless, serves a hot dinner on Sunday evenings in Ueno Park, and then serves the same meal in the underground passageway between Ueno train station and the subway. Their *takidashi* differs from many other soup lines in three ways: First, the men must help prepare the meal, which means that the union brings vegetables to chop and a gas burner to cook the meal. Second, like Taito Ward Food Pantry and Sanya Workers Association, they do not preach and the meal ends quickly. Instead of preaching, the organizer of the union, a longtime activist, gives a short speech. Third, they distribute the center's work schedule for the coming week and information about the union's upcoming activities.

Regardless of who runs the *takidashi*, homeless men usually walk great distances to and from the soup line, and once there eat extremely fast. While an hour walk was typical, some men walk much longer. One man walked from Shinjuku to Ueno for the Saturday *takidashi*, which he said took over two hours and according to Google Maps, it is five and a half miles one way. Walking the five miles back to Shinjuku, he will burn off many of the calories he consumes at the *takidashi*. Yamada-san and Takayama-san hiked several times to Ikebukuro, a little closer than Shinjuku. They took the train back to Ueno, but this was before they collected aluminum cans, so they paid for the train with a train pass they found in the park.

Most men ate fast, because they treated eating as a race for seconds. The speed at which they ate surprised and annoyed a staff member at a soup kitchen in Asakusa, who worked hard cooking the lunch. He complained, "They eat so fast they won't even taste it." While the bowl of rice stew was hot, some men ate it in two minutes. I asked Tomita-san why men ate so fast at a soup kitchen held inside a mission building in Asakusa. He explained for his generation to get work one had to eat fast. He did not add that at the soup kitchen once a man finishes he can go outside and get in line for seconds.

Sanya Workers Association

Many men I knew respected Sanya Workers Association because it treated them with dignity and offered many services including a daily hot dinner for thirty people, health care referrals, clothing distribution, monthly lawyer consultations, and daily consultations with social workers who helped men navigate the welfare system. Several men defended Sanya Workers Association's reputation. For example, following an incident involving Oba-san, several men said that they trust Sanya Workers Association. After I gave rice balls from Sanya Workers Association to Yamada-san, he distributed them to the four other men in his area, including Oba-san, who saved his for later. The next day he complained that he found a tooth in his rice ball, showed me the tooth, and demanded compensation from Sanya Workers Association. He threatened to go to the authorities who could penalize Sanya Workers Association. Oba-san went to Sanya Workers Association and they talked and gave him some free medicines, clothing, and food. Oba-san thought he had done well, as if he had pulled a scam.

While Oba-san had a legitimate complaint and the tooth looked real, Saito-san and the others individually told me they would not complain about a free rice ball. Saito-san added that Sanya Workers Association is one of three groups working for the homeless that he respects. The men who volunteer there feel they conduct their lives properly. Takahashi-san, a longtime volunteer, who briefly became a staff member before returning to the streets near the end of my fieldwork, commented when the new staff of the local ward welfare office visited Sanya Workers Association, they "see men living a proper life and doing the right thing, not like the lazy men at the center."

The volunteers at Sanya Workers Association include homeless men and formerly homeless men now receiving welfare. They perform such tasks as organizing the clothing donations that arrive daily, assisting with the Monday and Friday *takidashi*, helping run the free medical consultations by distributing tissues, hot tea, and hand warmers, and making *bentō* boxes for the Friday *takidashi*. While four or five men regularly volunteer, about ten to fifteen men spend the day sitting in the first floor waiting area of Sanya Workers Association, where men wait to see a doctor, acupuncturist, lawyer, or social worker, and other men regularly wait for dinner. Hogo-san ate at Sanya Workers Association occasionally, and said, “Sanya Workers Association’s dinner is good, because everything is hot, including the miso soup.” This compares with many of the *takidashi* that serve food that is not hot or cools down during the church service.

The camaraderie at Sanya Workers Association makes it a haven from the distress of everyday life, a relief from worries, and a place to belong. At Sanya Workers Association, men can be themselves, relax, and enjoy the next joke. Often the staff members joke and tease the men who come for a place to unwind, rest, drink tea, or see a friend. Many of the men who come to Sanya Workers Association often openly said they come because of the social worker, and they saw him as someone who cares about them. When I visited Sanya Workers Association in late May, three months after my fieldwork had ended, Yama-chan, a short, thin, elderly homeless volunteer was not at his usual post watching for traffic and greeting visitors with a nod and a wave. I asked Takahashi-san where he was and he said the doctors hospitalized him during Golden Week, the first week of May. He stressed that the social worker must miss him.

While the fellowship gives the men a place to relax, the health clinic provides a vital resource. Demographically, over 70 percent of homeless men are over fifty, so many of them

need medication for high blood pressure and other ailments, which clinics give them (Kitagawa 2008, 216). The clinic indirectly helps sick men receive welfare. The social workers and homeless men know that if a homeless man arrives at a hospital in an ambulance he has a much better chance of receiving welfare. During the cold damp winter months and the brutal summer heat, an ambulance arrived several times a week to take a homeless man to the hospital. When an ambulance comes, men always worried that their friend is sick. Hara-san, as he fought back tears, told his good friend and neighbor, Yoshida-san, to “get a good rest in the hospital, and come back soon.” Hara’s reaction to the emergency medical technicians carrying Yoshida-san out of the clinic on a stretcher shows not only that the poor healthcare and living conditions shorten the life span of friendships, but also the importance of the friendships and warmth at Sanya Workers Association.

Kyosanto

Kyosanto (Japanese Communist Party) helped many men in Tent Village. The men in Tent Village called Yamazaki-san, a Japanese man in his early sixties with puffy white hair, *Kyosanto*, because they thought he worked for the Japanese Communist Party. A few men thought he did not, but most men said he did. Although I asked him, Yamazaki-san did not clarify his connection. He belongs to a social welfare group and their information hinted at a relationship with *Kyosanto*. For example, they used the color red and their group’s name had the word red, which this usage in Japanese implies *Kyosanto*. Some men thought the man who came before him was a member of *Kyosanto* and the nickname transferred to Yamazaki-san. He occasionally asked the public for donations and often passionately ranted about how politicians

neglect the poor and homeless. Yamazaki-san brought newspaper articles reflecting his view to show the men, especially when the article thanked or mentioned his group but the men did not seem to care and just listened. He gave the residents of Tent Village food, medicine, and occasionally had referrals for one-day jobs for them. In exchange, they helped him maintain the flower gardens around the park.

Although Yamazaki-san had a passion for helping the men, they did not like him and some men even despised him. Several men in Tent Village expressed anger and hostility towards him for the hypocrisy between *Kyosanto's* party beliefs and the way he treated them. Yamazaki-san did not distribute food to everyone, but only to those who met his requirements of working hard, keeping the park clean, and living a proper life, as he defines it. Excluding some men from receiving food infuriated the residents of Tent Village, especially when he did not give any food to An-chan, a seventy-seven year-old *kawai sō* (a sad case) man in Tent Village. The men remedied this injustice by giving An-chan food after Yamazaki-san left. Many men said Yamazaki-san does not follow *Kyosanto's* vision and the contradiction between the vision and his behavior aggravated them. A few men refused to receive food from him, because they had an argument or falling out with him in the past, and still others do not know why they did not receive food.

Some men had another problem with Yamazaki-san, although it was not his fault. They did not like receiving food. Okamoto-san described their feelings "We all have our pride, so no one likes receiving these *bentō* boxes. It would be better if we did not eat them. The food is bad. It's not for people." Okamoto-san has a point as many of the breads and *bentō* boxes had passed their sell by date. He added that Yamazaki-san should emulate socialism and give food to everyone. Although he gives food away, the men do not see him as a *takidashi*. When I asked

Oba-san the difference between *Kyosanto* and a *takidashi*, he said, “They are very different. Anyone can go to a *takidashi*. Not everyone gets food from *Kyosanto*.” For him, this was an important distinction because attending a *takidashi* is shameful but receiving food from *Kyosanto* is not. He felt *Kyosanto* gives food to men who work hard and help maintain the park so he did not feel ashamed receiving it.

Yamazaki-san gave the men a variety of food and occasionally asked for some help in return. He asked the men to work with him weeding and watering some of the flowerbeds in the park, saving plastic bottle caps, and in the fall collecting ginkgo nuts. They referred to this work as volunteering but an exchange better describes it. They thought he gave the nuts to his donors, which Yamazaki-san confirmed. He said he came every day and the men in Tent Village confirmed that he even came on major holidays like New Year’s Day. He rides an old bicycle with signs on both sides of his basket that say, “Do not feed the pigeons,” in English and Japanese. On the back he had a cardboard box with food. He arrives early every morning, usually around eight, but always before nine. He starts in the back of the park and distributes some food, and then goes to Tent Village and other places in the park giving away food.

Sometimes Yamazaki-san’s food surprised me. When he directed a car into the park and unloaded several large watermelons in the summer, I was astonished, because watermelon that size costs over twenty-five dollars. His delivery of *oseichi ryori* (traditional New Year’s foods) to the park during New Year’s was quite unexpected because New Year’s foods cost over fifty dollars. The food clearly made the men’s lives easier and they knew they should eat it quickly since it is not fresh. Matsuo-san sometimes cooks the contents of *bentō* boxes by boiling them to kill any germs since it is a day old. Some men ate the bread in the morning but others ate it later.

Welfare

Paths out of homelessness are limited. Finding a job that leads to someone leaving the streets rarely occurred during my fieldwork, because men seldom secured jobs that pay a living wage because of age discrimination. Other than death, welfare may be the only way for many men to leave homelessness, and while some men have homes, they cannot return home because of a family conflict. For many men without other options, welfare provides the only path out of homelessness. Men often spoke highly of their caseworkers.

Unfortunately, Osamu-san's example, described earlier, is rare. The welfare system was not designed to help homeless men. Caseworkers often used a loophole to exclude homeless men. Since welfare regulations require them to confirm that the applicant has spent all their income, caseworkers argue that it is impossible to do as homeless men have no fixed address and could be employed tomorrow as a day laborer (Kitagawa 2008). Kitagawa found, "those who are living on the streets have been excluded from *Seikatsu hogo* protection scheme, unless they are considered to be too sick or too disabled to carry out light work, or are elderly" (2008, 212). Because research showed that most local governments used extralegal programs to help the homeless and not *Seikatsu hogo*, the Ministry issued a notice that stated, "Homelessness, or the ability to work alone, does not make one excluded from protection" (Kitagawa 2008, 212). Kitagawa argues that because the Ministry had to issue a statement to local governments shows "that there was a tendency for them to apply different criteria to homeless people from 'ordinary' households (2008, 212).

These extralegal programs include numerous programs run by local governments, which work as an alternative to the traditional welfare system (Kitagawa 2008). The program in Tokyo is designed to catch the group of men who were too young for welfare and not sick (Kitagawa 2008). Homeless men who need assistance must go to the welfare office, apply, and have a brief interview (Kitagawa 2008). Once approved, their caseworker sends them to the Emergency Temporary Protection Center, which required men to leave behind their material possessions and cut their relationships with other homeless men (Kitagawa 2008). Marr documents several paths out of homelessness including using the self-sufficiency center, the next step after the Emergency Temporary Protection Center (2007), but some homeless men I knew did not use them. Marr points out that before men can stay at the self-sufficiency center they must stay at the emergency temporary relief center for one to two months (Marr 2007, 134).⁸ Lawyers who worked with the homeless explained a similar process where men spend several weeks at one center and then spend time at another all while looking for work. Iwamoto-san, described earlier, probably stayed at two of these centers.

The rules prohibit men at this center from applying for work, so they wait for their meeting with a caseworker and must follow strict rules including no alcohol. Because of these rules, about ten percent voluntarily leave the Emergency Temporary Protection Center (Kitagawa 2008). Caseworkers decide some men cannot become self-reliant and refer them to the regular *Seikatsu hogo* program (Kitagawa 2008). After leaving the Emergency Temporary Protection Center, most men move to the Center to Assist Self-Reliance, the self-sufficiency center (Kitagawa 2008). One problem with the program is the Center to Assist Self-Reliance only offers two months of support, which is not enough time to save the necessary money to move into an apartment so that many men take jobs that offer housing (Iwata 2008). Not surprisingly, “many

⁸ For more information on the centers or paths out of homelessness, see Marr 2007.

people end up on the street again after losing work” and the housing their company provided (Iwata 2008, 158).

Although welfare is the main way off the streets, some men refused to sign-up or even discuss applying for welfare, but others applied at the welfare office after they could no longer tolerate life in the park. They knew applying meant a caseworker might contact their family. Because of the sensitive nature of applying for welfare, it is difficult to know the exact number of men who applied. Many men had several beliefs about the welfare system that influenced their willingness to apply. Most importantly, they believed that when applying for welfare, caseworkers contact family members and ask them if they can support or help their relative. Their strong desire for privacy reflects this belief. For many men, the thought of having their siblings, whom they may have alienated, contacted by a social worker overwhelmed them. Saito-san refused to go to Shinjuku, an area similar to Times Square with hundreds of thousands of people passing through each day, because he feared that his brother or a member of his brother’s family would see him because they live in Shinjuku. His shame of being homeless prevented him from going there, and although the chances of seeing his brother were tiny, he adamantly refused to go. He called the very idea of a homeless man contacting his siblings unheard of and unbelievable. He continues to live on the street, but he applied he would likely receive welfare, because he walks with a limp from a work injury.

The men receiving welfare challenged the belief that the caseworkers contact family members. Some men said they do not have family or do not care if their caseworker contacts them. For example, I saw Yamaguchi-san at a soup line in Sanya, and I asked him if the caseworker called his sister. He said, “*kankei nai*” (It does not matter), and added that all his siblings are younger and have trouble making ends meet. Hogo-san’s case, described earlier

challenges their belief about caseworkers contacting their relatives. He has been receiving welfare for several years, but when he visited his family, they said they did not know what happened to him. His story shows that caseworkers do not always contact family members, and if they do, the consequences are not severe. In practice, caseworkers generally contact family members. In Hogo-san's case, the strained relationship with his family reduced or eliminated any sense of shame, so he applied and received welfare.

In addition to the problem of caseworkers contacting their families, the range of practices in the different ward and city welfare offices makes applying for welfare complicated. Homeless men, advocates for the homeless, and social workers know that caseworkers in each ward and city apply the regulations differently. On the east side of Tokyo near Ueno, men distinguish between three wards. Throughout Tokyo, Shinjuku ward deserves its reputation for being the strictest.

A rare lawsuit filed by an advocacy group on behalf of a homeless man, Yokoyama-san, illustrates the problems with applying for welfare. Yokoyama-san attended a free legal consultation on a damp rainy Saturday in June after receiving a flier the previous evening. The following Monday, along with a few other homeless men, he met the lawyers at the welfare office, and when the caseworker called him, one of the lawyers stood behind Yokoyama-san and helped him. The welfare office resembled a bank, with tellers being caseworkers sitting at a table and chairs for applicants. It was impossible not to overhear conversations and privacy did not seem to be a concern. However, when the caseworker refused to accept his application, the lawyer applied a variety of previously successful tactics that worked with other caseworkers the same day. These tactics included recording the conversation, pleading with them to follow the law, and showing them a copy of the regulation that requires them to accept applications for

welfare. In Yokoyama-san's case, the caseworker steadfastly refused to accept the application, although several lawyers tried to convince him to accept it. His refusal to accept the application was unprecedented and made national news.

In Shinjuku ward, the normal process, as one of the lawyers explained, does not necessarily lead to an applicant's receiving welfare. While staying at the shelter, the men wait to receive welfare and look for work. If they have not become "self-sufficient," they receive welfare. After a caseworker accepts a homeless man's application, he then takes a shuttle bus to a shelter for the night. Since a homeless man stays there for up to two and a half months looking for work, it is not surprising that Kitagawa found almost 10 percent of the men leave the shelter voluntarily or for violation of the rules (2008). Then, if he has not found work, he begins receiving welfare and the caseworker places him in an income-supplemented apartment, but the process has many delays. The welfare system makes receiving welfare difficult.

Considering that shelters are tough places to live and that many of the men are transitory, men sometimes leave the shelter. They grew tired of waiting. Kobayashi-san, who has been homeless for several years, exemplifies one opinion on shelter life and the sacrifices, especially sacrificing the freedom that it requires. I asked if he is going to the special New Year's shelter provided by the city where they do not ask questions and accept anyone. He said, "If I want three meals and a bed, I will do something bad and go to the police. Then, I can go to prison." He laughed at his idea, but he had made his point. Besides the unappealing nature of the shelter, contacting homeless men can be difficult. Most men do not have cell phones or addresses, so lawyers, caseworkers, and other advocates lose contact with them and cannot continue their application. The final barrier for welfare, a limit of one application per person in each city or ward, prevents some men from receiving welfare. This regulation is not unique to

Shinjuku ward, as men believed that Taito ward, which includes Ueno and Sanya, discourages its caseworkers from giving people welfare a second time. Yama-chan, a fragile elderly man who regularly helped pour tea at Sanya Workers Association, did not apply again because he had previously received welfare.

Yokoyama's story reflects a common belief among the men. Both homeless men and men receiving welfare believe applying with a lawyer greatly increases the chances of success. Social workers and other homeless men confirmed the accuracy of this belief. While in theory anyone could walk into the welfare office, apply, and receive it, sometimes government officials often do not allow applicants to apply. According to Iwata, the *Seikatsu hogo* Act (Livelihood Protection Law) "was intended to apply universally and equally" (2008, 157). However, *The Asahi Shinbun*, one of Japan's largest newspapers, found that only about 45 percent of people who talked with a caseworker could apply for welfare (Nagata, Kiyokawa, and Iwata 2008). A government official argued the rate results from their "emphasis on guiding residents toward seeking help from relatives and other measures besides social welfare" (Nagata, Kiyokawa, and Iwata 2008). However, it violates the Public Assistance Law to refuse an application (Nagata, Kiyokawa, and Iwata 2008).

The lawyers use their knowledge of this law to advocate for the homeless and ensure that caseworkers accept applications. With the exception of Yokoyama-san's story, the men correctly assume that their chances of success are much higher if they have a lawyer or other advocate with them when they apply. Several groups including Sanya Workers Association and Sogidan provided free consultations with lawyers who advocate on behalf of homeless men. An established anti-poverty network composed of many lawyers meets regularly to coordinate activities including outreach days when they welcome homeless men with legal problems for

free consultations. Rarely did a homeless man apply for welfare without the presence of a lawyer and many men gratefully acknowledged the efforts of the lawyer or advocate who went with them to apply. Often men reported that their lawyer and the welfare bureaucrat had an argument, and the lawyer won because they now receive assistance.

Their belief that caseworkers only help men who are ill, significantly injured, or very old prevents men from applying for welfare. This belief has consequences. First, many homeless men are in their fifties and early sixties, and they do not feel they are old enough to apply successfully. When they consider the risk that the caseworker may contact their family and they will learn that they are homeless, they do not bother applying. While many men have minor health issues, they do not feel their poor health meets caseworkers' standards. Second, underlying illnesses go undetected, and even if a homeless man has a terrible illness, unless his symptoms become severe, he will not know about it, since he does not get a yearly medical exam. For example, before Ishi-san died he suffered from dizziness and diarrhea. However, only after he felt sick and could not stand up all morning and well into the afternoon, did his friends contact the park guards and management. Doctors determined he had diabetes, and the ward office covered his medical costs until he died a few months later. No doubt, he ignored his symptoms, considered them part of life in the park, and attributed them to lack of proper diet, drinking too much, the hot summer weather, and not resting enough because of where he sleeps. If he had applied for welfare, he would have had a medical exam and he may still be alive.

The freedom of living on the street and in the park, especially the freedom to smoke and drink, creates a final hurdle to applying for welfare. Men often said they did not want to ask for help when they can live independently, so their independent spirit contributes to their not wanting to apply. Their belief that welfare regulations prohibited drinking, smoking, and

gambling discouraged many men from applying, particularly men who smoked and drank heavily. Their belief is correct. According to Kitagawa, homeless men are directed to Emergency Temporary Protection Centers where, “various strict rules are imposed, such as a ban on alcohol and a curfew” (2008, 219).

Others worry that their gambling debts will lead to a caseworker rejecting their application. If they have been enjoying freedom from their debts while on the street, they think receiving welfare means dealing with their debt. They fear that after applying for welfare their creditors will find them and they will have to pay back their loans. According to a lawyer working with the homeless, debts do not prevent them from receiving welfare. Ironically, some men receiving welfare borrow money from the *yakuza* (organized crime) to gamble and line up to pay their debts on the first of the month. Takahashi-san explained that the men line up in front of the *yakuza* office building on the first of the month to repay their gambling debts. He recounted with scorn a welfare recipient who spent all his money playing *pachinko* and had no money left for food, so he went to soup lines every day.

Once men receive welfare they have much more time and money compared to their homeless friends, so they assist each other. In Sanya, around the first of the month men always have more money and often pay a past debt or help a friend. For example, on a Thursday morning early in the month, Osamu-san slyly gave money to Takahashi-san and others. His behavior reflected someone who had come into money and was rewarding his friends. This honorable behavior occurred frequently and I often saw men helping an older or injured men. Yamaguchi-san and Kobayashi-san exemplify the kindness of men, especially when they had money and time. Yamaguchi-san showed thoughtfulness when he went to a *takidashi* to get a *bentō* box for an elderly man who could not come and Kobayashi-san demonstrated compassion

when he bought gauze, burn cream, and bandages for Fukuda-san who had burned his foot with boiling water.

Conclusion

This chapter asked several questions about the safety net for the men. The questions included what is their safety net? How do the men use it? What are the various *takidashi* and how do the men view them? It explained how three groups help the homeless Sanya Workers Association, the churches, and Kyosanto. Finally, it asked why many men do not apply for welfare and sought to understand the welfare system and its implications for homeless men.

The safety net for homeless men—soup kitchens, nonprofit agencies, and welfare—has many gaps and the various groups have different philosophies about helping the homeless. First, these three groups, churches, nonprofit agencies, and the government, have different beliefs about helping the homeless. The nonprofit agencies, Sanya Workers Association and Taito Ward Food Pantry, passionately help the poor without any overt religious preaching, although not all homeless men recognize these agencies as secular. Sometimes homeless men called Taito Ward Food Pantry a church, even though they had posted fliers and articles on a sandwich board explaining their history, philosophy, and mission. The staff and volunteers at Sanya Workers Association show they care about homeless men by getting to know them and taking pride in their work. For example, when Morioka-san overheard a homeless man complain about the *bentō* boxes that volunteers had made, he became livid. He yelled at the man that everyone tries their best and he works with the volunteers daily. Morioka-san continued his tirade in front of other men, shouting that the man should leave and go home. The man did not leave, apologized several

times, and after a few minutes, Morioka-san calmed down. The volunteers, formerly homeless men receiving welfare, constitute a tight knit group for whom Sanya Workers Association is their family. Morioka-san felt offended and had to defend the work of fellow volunteers.

The second group in the safety net, churches, approached their mission from a variety of perspectives. Some church volunteers explained that they have a *reihai* (church service) in the park to serve food to hungry homeless men, and others commented that they have a church service in the park because the men who attend need to know about Jesus. Some church members insisted that people besides homeless men attend their *reihai* (church service), but I saw few if anyone besides homeless men attend the soup kitchens. Chiyoda church had pride in their congregation of homeless men. A male church member boasted, “Half of the men at our services believe in Jesus and the other half are just here for the food,” and he bragged that three men went to school to become ministers. Offering a different view, a woman volunteer explained, “The Bible says to help the poor and praise God, so we preach to the poor and homeless and then give them food. Some believe in the message and some do not. They have freedom for that.” A volunteer from a different church said they have the weekly church service so that the men become Christians, but it does not happen much. He admitted, “Maybe ten men read the Bible. They mostly come for the food,” and then he sighed and smiled.

The third part of the safety net, the government, has a different philosophy than either churches or nonprofit agencies. Their philosophy is not altruistic like the nonprofit agencies nor is it religious like the churches. The bureaucrats do not usually want to help poor single men, especially healthy men. Given the ballooning cost of government sponsored pension payments and medical care for the rapidly aging society, the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare faces intense pressure to keep costs low so they avoid helping homeless men. Their behavior became

clear when homeless men reported that welfare officials prevented them from applying for welfare. For example, during a free legal consultation in September, one slightly overweight man with major heart problems that required a stent recounted how bureaucrats rejected his requests for help a few years ago. He does receive *iryohoken* (free government health insurance), but the couple of times he went to a welfare center the staff did not help him. As he told his story, the lawyer reacted with disgust at each instance of the staff refusing to help him, but given that he appears able to work, the reaction of the staff is not surprising.

While soup lines function as a stopgap before receiving welfare or finding work, numerous welfare recipients attend soup lines, especially towards the end of the month when they have spent most or all of their welfare money. Many homeless men, welfare recipients, and volunteers, describe a pattern of fewer men attending soup lines after the government deposits welfare checks on the first of the month and the number of men increasing as the month progresses. The Monday and Friday soup line leaders and volunteers at Sanya Workers Association, for example, judge the number of *bentō* boxes to prepare based on the week of the month, the weather, and previous week's attendance. The last week of the month always has the most men, including welfare recipients. Homeless men and men receiving welfare suggest that welfare recipients line up because they spent their money gambling or playing *pachinko*. On rainy and snowy days, significantly fewer men attend soup lines.

Matsuo-san, a strong defender of *takidashi* argued that, "They're important. We'd be in trouble without them." He recalled how when he first became homeless the soup lines helped him survive until he learned the ropes and made money selling aluminum cans. Most men agreed that they could not criticize the food or the group holding the *takidashi* because they help them survive, and they do not attend *takidashi* for the taste of the food or the experience.

Homeless men did not view all *takidashi* favorably. Men criticized Jesus Our Savior Church. This church limits their *takidashi* to three hundred men, so some men may have been bitter because church volunteers turned them away. Among men who have been homeless for a long time there were rumors that the church's leader or former leaders were *yakuza* members. The men also complained about the food they served, one banana, a small butter roll, and a crumbly rice ball, and it paled in comparison to others and was by far the worst for both quality and quantity.

These issues annoyed the men, and they spoke even more passionately when complaining about the minister. Several men said their minister said things that he should not (*ienai koto*) like telling the men to get jobs and not drink alcohol. Takayama-san described his feelings on the church, "I hate them. The preacher constantly says 'get a job, get a job.' No one likes them. They set their limit at three hundred people, but still not even three hundred people go." Other men were less harsh. One man wished they would not single out the homeless, and preferred the preacher to say everyone should work. Homeless men said this church discriminates (*sabetsu*) against them and says bad things about them (*waruiguchi*).

Jesus Our Savior Church was not the only group men did not like. A variety of people criticized Homeless Support Network, HSN, a subcontracted agency that provides lodging and meals to men receiving welfare. One social worker described them as a business that cheats homeless people out of their money. Two homeless men complained that if they miss dinner, they have to buy it before returning home, although HSN takes most of their welfare money to provide meals and a dorm room. A social worker said the welfare office conveniently passes the responsibility for administering the shelter to the questionable subcontractor, which many homeless men said the *yakuza* runs.

The *Asahi Shinbun* newspaper documented a case where a lodging facility charged men 124,000 yen (\$1200), which was about 95 percent of the income from welfare (Miyazaki and Muroya 2009). The room was four square meters and the meals were pathetic. They included microwavable meals for dinner and white rice, soup, and Japanese pickles for breakfast (Miyazaki and Muroya 2009, 26).

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

First, I will discuss the causes of homelessness and the central argument, namely that homeless men should be viewed as a group who in the fifties could not find work. Then they used human agency via variety of survival strategies to make it on the streets and that larger structures limit the number of strategies they could choose. Then, I make policy recommendation that, if implemented, would improve their lives and the lives of other homeless men. Finally, I make suggestions for future research.

Becoming Homelessness and Surviving

An underlying issue throughout the dissertation is how and why these men become homeless. One cannot read about their lives and not think about the causes of homelessness, especially for men in Tokyo. An efficient way to understand how these men become homeless is to examine them as a cohort. While many of the stories included personal tragedies and individual problems, the common themes running throughout show how becoming homeless is not a personal failing but reflects the economics and social conditions these men faced. The economic conditions include a significant decrease in affordable housing and the few jobs available for men at their age with their skill set.

First, the economy, namely the lack of jobs, causes the men to become homeless. If they could find jobs, day laboring jobs, factory jobs, long shore jobs, any job, they could at least maintain a small cheap loading in Sanya. Having a job would maintain their pride and allow them to better take care of themselves outside the scrutiny of the public and park officials. Better

jobs would allow them to live better lives and keep in contact with their family and friends. In short, having jobs would prevent homelessness.

Along with the inability to find jobs, larger forces constrain their lives in important and significant ways. These larger structures and forces begin with the history of poverty in Japan. Similar to Kusmer's well-documented research showing the history of homelessness in America (2002), Gill illustrates the long history of discrimination and exploitation faced by poor laborers in Japan (2001). While Kusmer's research demonstrates that, the homeless throughout history have been average Americans and not a subgroup of misfits (2002), in Japan the explanation in the literature until recently showed a long history of most of the country being poor farmers until after World War II (Allison 2004). Society saw homelessness as a temporary state and no different from the many people living in poverty. However, Gill did find that day laborers faced discrimination and extreme difficulty on the job (2001). As the majority of the country changed from farming to an industrial economy and then to a service economy, Gill found poor laborers faced the challenge of exploitation (2001). While the homeless continued to reflect the poverty in rural areas as single men came to Tokyo in search of work, the *yoseba* (day laboring districts) functioned as containment zones (Gill 2001). Recently, the demographics have changed as Ezawa argues that the middle class has joined the laboring classes in becoming homeless (2002).

Regardless of how limiting the job opportunities are and how history has shown that employers exploit day laborers and wage laborers, once they become homeless, they advocate for one thing, jobs. Their singular demand for jobs and not housing in both demonstrations and individual conversations shows that they are confident that they can find housing if they are employed. For some men, housing is a flophouse and for others it is an apartment. Their demands differ from the advocates in the U.S. Hopper and Baumohl recommend that advocates

“shift from a posture of passive resettlement (‘more housing’) to one of active reengagement (‘give us jobs—and, oh yes, we’ll want a place to live as well’)” (1994, 543). Hopper and Baumohl make a strong argument that society should not view the homeless as a subclass of the poor (1994). To support this argument they show how large shelters have “a long-standing social function of containment” (Hopper and Baumohl 1994, 542). Northeast Tokyo functions as an area of containment with Ueno Park, Sanya, and the park along the Sumida River serving as the containment zone.

The containment of homeless Japanese men in one area of Tokyo raises the question of why few women become homeless. While many women face the challenge of poverty, the welfare system design works to prevent them from becoming homeless (Kitagawa 2008). Since almost everyone living on the streets is male, one might incorrectly assume women avoid poverty in Japan (Kitagawa 2008). Kitagawa explains why few women end up on the street “the welfare systems have more options available for women in dire poverty, such as protection through the Anti-Prostitution Act and the Child Protection Scheme” (2008, 213). Kawahara found that women dealing with poverty often successfully conceal it, so the government makes no welfare provisions for them (2008). However, their poverty becomes apparent when a relationship breaks down and they can no longer find a place to live or live-in work. There are several specific programs aimed at helping women in poverty including pension for the bereaved, childcare allowance for single mothers with low income, childcare policies, child-rearing support, and others (Kawahara. 2008). Kawahara succinctly explains why there are few homeless women in Tokyo “when [female] poverty surfaces it attracts a response” (2008, 192). She points out that the numerous programs for helping women facing homelessness show that various policy makers

agree, “that provision of some kind of assistance at a welfare facility is required” for women facing homelessness (2008, 193).

Beyond these political and economic forces restricting men’s lives, the social and individual conditions that attribute to homelessness are much less important than the lack of jobs. A job makes these social issues irrelevant. For example, many men expressed embarrassment and shame once they are homeless because their status as unemployed homeless men has damaged their pride as proud blue-collar workers. These feelings of shame, failure, and embarrassment prevent them from applying for welfare or asking for help from members of their social network. If they could find jobs, these feelings and their implications would not matter. The issue of shame became clear when Yusuke, who I mentioned in chapter two, explained he cannot go home and risk being judged a failure, because his siblings all had homes and jobs. Other homeless men echoed his concerns about society or their family members judging them as failures for being unemployed and homeless. Saito-san expressed concern about his brother seeing him and always hid his face from tourists’ cameras. Their feelings of shame are real and without them men could ask for help from their network of friends and family members before they become homeless, and for support and assistance to find housing once homeless. When they know that their family is struggling financially, without their feelings of shame they would be free to ask the state for assistance,

Another social issue, the financial situation of their families, shows that the men uphold a key Japanese value, not causing others trouble. While not wanting to impose on their families is admirable, it raises questions about their family life. For example, some men knew their family could not help them so they apply for welfare. Others probably knew their families faced difficult financial situation, even before the economy entered a severe recession after the Lehman

Brothers collapse. Hara-san, for example, could no longer tolerate the responsibility of being the man of the house at a young age after his father passed away, so he left his mother's home. Since he knew society expects him to provide for his mother and siblings, going back unemployed and homeless would be too shameful. He could not ask for their help. Nishi-san provides another example of how some men interacted with their families. He had regular contact with his brother and even occasionally spent the night at his brother's home but he could not live there. He explained that when he applied for welfare the caseworker sent a postcard to his brother asking if he could support Nishi-san. Nishi-san clearly knew his brother's ability and willingness to help him. He had much experience with the welfare system from applying and receiving it in several cities.

Nishi-san demonstrates a fourth issue facing many men, gambling. Nishi-san spent much of his life having fun gambling. He borrowed tens of thousands of dollars from small companies that charge extremely high interest rates. Nishi-san lied to the caseworker when he said he used the loans for everyday expenses. He feared that if he told the truth he would not receive welfare. Even now while receiving welfare, he continues to place bets. Gambling for many homeless men represents several things, an addiction, an enjoyable escape from their harsh reality, and a connection to their past. Some men saw gambling as a way to get money to make their life better. Still, other men saw it as the reason they are estranged from their family and cannot return home. These men understand it as one of the main reasons they are homeless and these men rarely gamble. Although he still places bets occasionally, Okamoto-san lamented, "I have lost a lot of money at the horse track." When I asked why his neighbors continue to place bets, he explained, "It is a kind of illness and they cannot stop."

While it may be tempting to see gambling as a personal failing, the reader should understand the causes of homelessness by seeing these men as a group and not as individuals, and not focus not on their individual stories. Many men in Japan gamble at pachinko parlors and various other gambling establishments including horse tracks, bicycle races, and speedboat races, but few of them become homeless. It is better to see homeless men as a group and age set that could not find work. Their collective unemployment is why they are homeless. Quantitative studies have shown that many men have low education and come from working class or poor backgrounds Iwata (2007). Considering their working class background, it is not surprising that many men know they cannot go home because their families are struggling. Maybe the men reflecting on the sentiment in Robert Frost's well-known poem, "Home is the place where, when you have to go there, They have to take you in" did not want to put additional financial pressure on their siblings or embarrass their parents or themselves. Their pride prevents them from asking their siblings or parents for help and applying for welfare.

On the other hand, it was not just their pride, but their feelings of shame and failure that kept them homeless. The severe conditions they face once homeless and their refusal to apply for welfare or ask family for help demonstrates the level of shame they face. While only the second chapter discusses their path to homelessness, the remaining chapters demonstrate the harshness of their lives and the hard work they do to survive. These chapters and the dissertation itself show the men's capacity to survive while being limited by social and economic forces that clearly limit their options. Most of the men had higher ambitions than collecting cans or working at the welfare center, but opportunities for full-time or at least steady part-time work did not exist. They simply wanted to survive without causing trouble or bringing shame to their families or themselves.

Policy Recommendations

I propose several small ways to alleviate the hardships many homeless men face. While a large-scale solution would be ideal, it is not realistic and is unlikely that the Japanese government would invest in it. First, a simple way to improve their lives, extending their stay at the winter shelter, would be popular among the men. Many men who normally do not go to shelters stay at the special winter shelter for a week during the New Year holiday. For example, Yamada-san has stayed at the shelter every year, but he would not consider any activity that infringes on his privacy. Rather than being open for about a week around January 1, if the shelter stayed open for two or even three weeks some men would stay longer and avoid the cold winter days in January. Additionally, if the government opened a similar shelter during other major holidays including Golden Week in May and *Obon* in August, men could get more respites from life on the streets, especially the most fragile men. While opening substantial year round shelters would be ideal, it is unlikely that the Japanese government would do so. Piecemeal steps that create nine weeks with an open shelter for anyone with no questions asked would be a good first step.

Second, providing substantial government funding to groups like Sanya Workers Association, Sogidan, Taito Ward Food Pantry, and other nonprofit agencies, would enable these successful groups to expand their services to homeless men. While providing government funding to these groups risks the charge of managing homelessness rather than ending it (Hopper and Baumohl 1994; Hopper 2003) currently the government and nonprofit agencies do not spend enough time and money helping the homeless. They have not yet reached the point of managing

homelessness. The homeless respect these groups and go to them for help, because they avoid the government and guard their privacy. These groups could increase their services and offer new ones with better funding. For example, ward offices provide free health care, but homeless men prefer to go to Sanya Workers Association. Their hours are limited and if they had better funding, they could secure better resources and facilities.

Third, an umbrella group that monitors the various *takidashi* to ensure that a church or nonprofit agency offers a hot meal daily should be created. When Yamada-san found a small piece of paper with the *takidashi* schedule written on it, he laughed but also seriously read it. Sogidan publishes a similar schedule and Sanya Workers Association keeps one posted on their bulletin board. I never saw a schedule that listed a Monday *takidashi* except for a couple months in the winter when the Salvation Army holds a *takidashi* of curry and rice. Several days during the week have two *takidashi*, so it is not surprising that many men complained that Monday is the worst day for them because there is no *takidashi*. So without one some men do not eat or eat very little. Monday is also the day before payday for men who collect aluminum cans, so they may be out of cash if they spent their money from selling cans on Saturday playing *pachinko* or buying food. If a coordinating agency worked with the various nonprofit agencies and churches to ensure that gaps did not occur, the homeless would eat better.

Such an agency could also ensure that the men have better nutrition. They could coordinate volunteers or social workers to distribute bread or rice balls to the few homeless in the park who do not receive food from *Kyosanto*. This would cover a gap in the nongovernment safety net. Since the men have poor nutrition, the agency could help distribute bread with a highly nutritional spread like those used to fight malnutrition in third world countries (Rice 2010). Ideally, the spread would be adapted to Japanese taste.

While some of these recommendations may be useful for the homeless, they often wanted two things to improve their lives: a job and some money. With some creativity, the government could address both of these requests relatively easily and save money. First, the government should give them cash. No doubt this idea would be controversial, especially when men who appear able to work but can't find jobs receive money, but the constitution and the *seikatsu hogo ho* (welfare law) guarantee everyone in Japan a "minimum standard of civilized living" (Gill 2005b, 192). Clearly, in the case of homeless men, the government has failed to meet this requirement. Giving men cash may save the government money, because the government often pays their medical fees, including hospitalization. With more money, they would eat better and maintain better health. Finally, for men who refuse to go to the government for help because they are suffering from poor mental health, are scared of the *yakuza* (organized crime), or are afraid their family will find them, providing cash handouts helps them live more equitable lives. This modest simple policy would eliminate Japan's shame of having older men digging through ashtrays for used cigarettes or digging through the trash for food. It would also restore some dignity to the men.

Unlike the simplicity of cash handouts, providing more jobs would be complicated. The government should make the workfare programs more effective. The men in these programs sometimes do little more than pose for a photo, which, while relaxing, humiliates once proud blue-collar workers. For men who refuse to participate in government sponsored workfare program, the welfare minister should contract a private company to hire men to work and pay them. A landscaping or construction company that hired men without asking them questions would increase employment. Another idea to help them work is to prevent the small companies where they worked from going bankrupt. The government could do more to help them.

Work opportunities would increase if the government subsidized the price of recyclables. For example, if the price of cardboard, newspaper, or aluminum fell below a set price, the government could pay companies to continue to buy it from scavengers at that price. It would function as a minimum wage for these men. Additionally, the government should find other work for scavengers besides collecting recyclables. This other work should pay cash and meet their need for anonymity. Given the high demand for home health aides, healthy and relatively young homeless men could run errands, clean homes, or other odd jobs. Otani-san, for example, helped a woman clean her shed and she paid him in cash.

While these ideas will alleviate most of the challenges facing men in Tokyo, some men with mental illness have such difficulty returning to life outside of the streets that they consistently return. While a small group, social workers sometimes repeatedly help the same men who return to the streets. Abe-san, a social worker, pointed out some men have received welfare and moved off the streets only to return later. He said this happens repeatedly. The government cannot house mentally ill men who do not want to live in apartments, but the government should do more to help them by increasing the levels of outreach including providing consistent meals, medication, and medical checks to improve their lives. This group should be the priority for the cash handouts.

These policy changes have focused on their daily lives, but larger macro-level government policies that create jobs, offer affordable housing, and expand welfare would help the homeless. Policy changes that increase work opportunities, especially for men over fifty in the construction industry or similar fields would help keep men employed. A provision in government contracts requiring a small percent of workers in construction be over fifty could increase employment during the gap years between being too old to be hired by employers in

construction and too young to collect a pension or social security. Alternatively, the government could offer retraining for men over fifty. However, the government must connect these policies with an increase in affordable housing, especially single room occupancy, so employed men can afford a home.

While policy changes that increase work opportunities and affordable housing will reduce homelessness, welfare officials must accept and process the applications of those who become homeless. Caseworkers must not reject applications, regardless if a lawyer or other advocate is present. A serious issue is the zero tolerance policy for violating the rules. The ministry should eliminate it, because it leads men to the *yakuza* for loans to gamble. Regarding the application process, caseworkers must stop the process that causes men to leave the centers. Instead, the shelter staff should rewrite the rules to be more welcoming. These men, proud *shokunin* (craftsman) and construction workers, find asking for help especially difficult so fewer barriers to applying are better. Caseworkers should not reject applicants because it is their second time to apply, and the administrators must streamline the process to eliminate the several months it takes to receive welfare. Accepting more applications would move men out of parks and into better housing, and this change would encourage more men to apply.

The welfare ministry can improve its services by providing mental health care and community outreach. Men receiving welfare need support to fight loneliness, because they often complained of being lonely and both homeless men and those receiving welfare related stories of men dying alone in their small apartments. Many men told me sad stories of a neighbor or property owner finding a welfare recipient dead in his apartment. They feared that it could be them and worried about the shame they would feel if they died in a similar manner. While Sanya Workers Association provides a small community and some men on the streets and in the park

form families, once men receive welfare, they sometimes leave their friends. Maintaining their relationship with their friends is important. Men admitted they came to a *takidashi*, Sanya Workers Association, or the park to see friends because their small one-room apartment bores them and creates loneliness. The ministry should increase the social bonds among the men so more men might apply for welfare. If the ministry hired a few homeless men to be community leaders, they could create and expand social networks among the homeless, which could increase the number of men applying for welfare. The challenge will be the men who became homeless because they do not get along with people and have remained loners. However, because the ministry has a poor attitude towards homeless men, it is unlikely they would try to help men apply for welfare.

For the men who refuse to apply for welfare and prefer to stay in Ueno Park, the park administration and the city should make several changes. First, eliminate *yamagari*, especially for when dignitaries come to the park. It humiliates the men and takes their time. It is doubtful the Emperor or other dignitaries can see the men when their motorcade drives through the park and if they can, what is the harm? This policy shows that the park management views the sight of homeless men as something disgraceful that should be hidden from view, especially from dignitaries. The park guards already monitor the men and their belongings. The park manager could still take a monthly inventory of each man and his belongings, and the park guards could warn men whose carts or tents become too large. The same ideas apply for men who live along the Sumida River and have a process similar to *yamagari*.

A small tax on *pachinko* could provide the funds needed for these new programs and the substantial increase in men applying for welfare. Because the pachinko industry is “bigger than the Japanese auto industry” (Plotz 2011), even a one-yen tax would be enough to pay for these

programs. These facilities, especially the ones in and around Ueno Park, benefit from the men who frequently play pachinko. While the *pachinko* parlor around the corner from Sanya Workers Association helped many of its poor customers by giving out soup with pork once a month, they were the exception, as most pachinko parlors did not help their customers.

The funds could help men communicate with their families. The ministry should print and give homeless men post cards with stamps to send to their families. With assurances that the post cards will not reveal their location, the men could inform their parents and siblings that they are alive and well. For their elderly parents, receiving a post card would bring much relief.

In addition to my policy suggestions, some of the authors cited earlier make recommendations that should be considered. Dordick ends her book by arguing, “I write, however, with the conviction that those who make policy need to understand as best they can the people at whom their programs direct” (1997, 201). Policy makers at several levels, from the bureaucrats who reject welfare applications to the city council and mayor need to better understand the lives of homeless men.

While not a policy recommendation, Gill correctly predicted that, “traditional day laboring lifestyle is on the wane,” and “the phenomena of insecure labor is getting steadily more prevalent” (2001, 192). Fowler makes a similar point when describing changes in Sanya. He points out “The inevitable counterpoint to the decreasing demand for day laborers is a rapid increase in homelessness” (Fowler 1996, 227). More recently, Assmann and Maslow addressed the issue of insecure labor and the tent village that emerged during the New Year’s holiday (2010). They also call for further acceptance to welfare. They argue that future steps must “assure access to state support for those affected by sudden job loss” (2010, 10). In light of my research, I concur with their recommendations.

Finally, Iwata has written extensively on homelessness and conducted quantitative surveys. She recommends housing support, a move away from employability as a concern for admission to the various Self-Support centers, and calls for a “homelessness policy redirected from its independence-centred approach.” (2007, 162). Specifically, she recommends that welfare bureaucrats accept more middle-aged men for welfare. This would support the independence through work approach (2007, 163). Finally, she proposes a “housing allowance system” (2007, 163). These policy recommends could help many men move out of the park and more importantly prevent more men from becoming homeless.

Areas for Further Research

My study raises several questions for future research. The voices of the family members of homeless men are missing from this dissertation. Given more time, I could have spoken to a few families, but I found only ten men who had some information about their family and they rarely contacted them. For example, Okamoto-san may have introduced me to his family, but he only sees them twice a year and he has not told them that he lives in the park. If I could speak with them, I could not ask about their thoughts on Okamoto-san being homeless, since they did not know. This would severely limit my questions. The larger problem with interviewing family members is how to build rapport with them. Scholars could approach families of men on welfare to avoid the stigma of homelessness for the lesser shame of welfare. A project that sought them out and asked them about their relationship with their homeless relative could be incredibly insightful. Although finding family members would be difficult and finding family members

willing to talk about their homeless relative would be even more challenging, it would be fascinating to learn their views of homelessness and their relationship with their relative.

Besides families, the other important people in the lives of homeless men are caseworkers and bureaucrats. Scholars should examine the perspective of the caseworkers and bureaucrats helping poor men. This project would offer a more complete picture of the welfare system and could show how the welfare ministry makes policy decisions that affect the homeless. Additionally, it could offer suggestions for improving the bureaucracy.

Beyond the people in their lives, several issues emerged throughout much of the dissertation affecting many of the men as individuals. These problems included privacy, difficulties with loans and the *yakuza*, gambling, and problems getting along with family members, coworkers, bosses, and friends. While these issues represent the major individual problems, the men are not homeless because of these problems. They are homeless because they cannot find a job, because their families and society have neglected them, and because they refuse to ask their families or the government for help.

Regardless of their individual problems, the macro forces of poverty and a recessing economy made their situation much worse. Without the recessing economy, the price of aluminum would have stayed high and their lives would have remained bearable. Similarly, with high employment, their jobs would have been stable or a strong government-retraining program would have given them another job. Moving beyond the national government, the global economy influence on their lives needs to be further examined. For example, the Japanese government pays huge amounts of money to maintain U.S. military bases. If the government rerouted a small part of the money paid to the extended U.S. military empire in Japan to help the poor, it could have significant impact on the 30,000 homeless in and around Japan.

Larger systemic causes need to be documented and used to demonstrate to Japanese society that homelessness is not a choice, lifestyle, or individual failing. Quantitative and qualitative studies linking the macro causes such as the change to a service economy, the decrease in construction jobs, and the age issue of when men become too old for day laboring jobs but not old enough for welfare or a pension. One study, for example, could examine the extreme *ningen kankei* (getting along with others) problems among the men. One can safely assume that in a country of 127 million, (World Bank 2011) more than 25,000 (Hasegawa 2005) would have had a falling out with a relative, but many of them do not become homeless. Another quantitative study that shows that an increase in poverty and homelessness corresponds with economic changes such as a recession would be a good first step. Additionally a quantitative study showing how a certain sector of the economy such as construction and a particular demographic group is influenced by economic changes would greatly benefit the design of new government welfare programs to help specific groups.

A final issue for many homeless men, gambling, offers a similar question for future research. What separates the men who gambled prior to becoming homeless and other men who continue to gamble but do not become homeless? Is it simply the loss of a job coupled with their lack of savings that pushes men into the streets? The gambling aspect and lack of savings constitute an important part of the equation because Japan has a high savings rate compared to the U.S, so for men to end up broke without a job having spent their savings gambling would be highly unusual. The lack of women in their lives could explain the problem, because they usually manage the family budget in Japan (Iwao 1993). Since a large percentage of homeless men never married or are divorced, no one is watching their spending habits.

What's Next?

The underlying issues for many men are money and pride, which leads to a Catch-22: they do not have enough money to live on their own and too much pride to ask for help. This leads to an inertia where they are stuck and do not ask for help. Similar to the frog in the pot while the scientist slowly turns up the heat, homeless men live harsh lives struggling against the heat. Their health and old age slowly overtake their ability to live a physically demanding life with few, if any, respites from the weather, work, and uncertainty. This leads to them sacrificing the twilight of their lives. They sacrifice for their families and their country, causing trouble for either only in death or illness. In turn, Japan sacrifices poor, old men by not supporting them. While some men give their retirement money to their wives, a noble gesture, others live in fear of someone finding them. Their country's insistence in supporting only sick and elderly men leads to a sad disjuncture. The situation shows the consequences when stubborn or determined individuals and an equally stubborn state refuse to change.

While enjoying my fieldwork, I remember feeling surprised when a colleague who had conducted similar research emailed saying she missed it tremendously. At the time, mosquitoes were biting me, my feet were exhausted from walking, and the summer heat and humidity were making me miserable. Now, I feel the same way as my colleague. However, this dissertation was not about me. It focused on the lives and stories of homeless men in Ueno Park. I often think about the men I knew and the hardships they endured. The juxtaposition of writing about poverty and hunger while experiencing my toddler son's joy at life struck me as both unfair and

worrisome, because some of the men I knew had children, raised them or left their families, and now live a lonely, harsh existence.

How different are these men from the rest of society? What have they done to deserve such an unfair and punitive experience at the end of life? With few exceptions, most men treated me well. They worked hard, welcomed me, shared food with me, opened their lives, and gave generously of their time and space. In some respects, men often treated me like a grandson or son and I was honored to know them and sad that some of them have passed away or drifted away. They shared with me their values of hard work and living a proper life with good manners. While the men had several common characteristics, being single, out of money and separated from their families, the most important was their poverty.

Japanese society can and should provide the men with their simple request for jobs. Society should work to make the differences between being homeless and housed less pronounced. The men often described being homeless as a “different world,” which emphasizes the differences between their life on the street and their lives before they lost their jobs and housing. Their materially poor lives stand in stark contrast to much of the comfort and ease that others in Japan enjoy. Providing jobs, housing, and welfare for them would cost other Japanese. However, those Japanese not in poverty try to falsely justify the miserable lives of many homeless men but believing media reports that the men have homes and they prefer living in the park and on the street. Only by sacrificing a little of their comforts can the rest of Japanese society feel they have helped fellow members of society who are suffering.

Japanese society and humanity should see a homeless man not as someone who is strange and different but rather as a lost family member who needs help. Homelessness must be more humane and the government has to provide more work opportunities. It is a disgrace that

the government pushes the burden of caring for them back on their families and hides them when dignitaries come to the park.

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