About the Kamagasaki Fieldwork: A brief overview

Why we go to Kamagasaki
• Kamagasaki represents the down side of the ‘miracle’ of Japanese economic development.
• The Japanese ‘lifelong’ system of employment has always been dependent on an ‘expendable’ work force to pick up the slack when work is scarce and to help out when there is too much demand.
• Kamagasaki shows a part of Japanese society that exists everywhere, but is harder to see in other cities.
• Organizations working in Kamagasaki are doing very interesting work and are willing to share their knowledge and experience. We can learn from them, and they might find it interesting to know about the situation in other countries, too.
• It gives us a different perspective on Japan, and allows us to think about various forms of violence both in Japan and in other countries.

Why we do fieldwork for IPD1 in Kamagasaki
• To see firsthand and think about an example of violence from Japan. Do you think it is violence? Is it structural or cultural violence? Direct violence? Something else?
• To focus our attention on how parts of society are made invisible, and to discover how we ourselves are part of that process.
• To think about how the ‘real world’ is connected to the issues of gender, peace and development that we study in the classroom.
• To have an opportunity to engage in socially responsible field research.

What is Kamagasaki?
• Kamagasaki is a section of Osaka (Nishinari Ward) also known as Airin Chiku. It is about 20 hectares in area, and many of the people who live there currently work, or formerly worked, as day laborers as well as other jobs. Most of them are men.
• It was created at the end of the 19th century to provide very cheap housing for workers and continues to be a ‘slum’ area.
• A main attraction for those looking for work is the yoseba, a place where employers come to find workers, primarily for construction jobs. They work on a daily basis, or sometimes on a contract for a set period of time.
• People wanting jobs go very early in the morning to the yoseba. If they are unsuccessful, they spend that day without work or pay. If you are young and strong there is work; otherwise there is not.
• Some unemployment insurance is available, but in order to qualify for it, people have to work a minimum of a certain number of days/month. Many people cannot find enough work to meet the minimum requirements, and this system has broken down.
• Kamagasaki grew up around the yoseba, as workers both need to be there early in the morning and those who cannot find work have nowhere else to go.
• Most large cities have yoseba, but the one in Osaka is the largest and has services for workers and others who cannot find work. As a result, it draws people from around Japan who are looking for work. Some have lost their jobs, and others have left homes and families for other reasons. There are also people there who want to ‘disappear.’

• People leave home for many reasons. The most common are bad loans that they cannot repay and lost jobs. Some men leave because they cannot support their families – it might be a combination of pride and believing the family will be better off without them.

• When the construction industry was profitable and jobs were numerous, workers had money, and Kamagasaki was prosperous. Now that there is very little work, there is very little money.

• Illegal activities such as gambling and drug dealing also go on in Kamagasaki, but in the 1960’s, the workers organized and ousted organized crime from the area. Since that time, there has been relatively little such activity, as compared with other similar areas.

• There are many former day laborers living in Kamagasaki who can no longer get work because of their age. The city of Osaka has a special work program for them where they can earn 30,000 yen/month doing different cleaning and other jobs around Kamagasaki.

Who Lives in Kamagasaki?

• According to the government, Japan has about 7,508 ‘homeless’ people (e.g. people who are living on the street). Of those, more than half live in or around Kamagasaki. This does not include people who do not live on the street but instead live in internet cafes and other temporary places. The reason that the number has fallen is that many more people are now getting government assistance and are living in very small, cheap apartments.

(Graph, information from: http://www.homedoor.org/problem#q4 Accessed 2015.7.2)

• Most are male and middle-aged with few or no family connections.

• It is virtually impossible to live and work in Japan in a permanent job without a permanent address, and virtually impossible to get a permanent address without a job and valid identity.

• Since the bursting of the bubble (2000) and the financial crisis (2008), former day laborers have been joined by people who have been laid off and, more recently, young people who may have worked in temporary jobs and can no longer support themselves.

• Most collect aluminum cans or cardboard cartons. It is very hard work, made more difficult by fluctuating prices, new recycling laws and the increase in hot beverage machines using steel cans. They might work as many as 10 hours/day and earn less than 1000 yen.

• Aluminum: 120 yen/kg (2015.7; down from 160/kg in 2014.6 and up from 107 yen/kg, 3 yen/can in 2012.3. http://www.ohata.org/scrap_ubic.html last access 2016.6.10. Aluminum cans weigh about 15g, so you need about 66.6 cans for 1kg meaning ¥1.8/can). You can also check aluminum prices at: http://www.metalprices.com/p/ScrapAluminumFreeChart?weight=KG&size=3
Why do people wind up in the street in Kamagasaki?
• Many fewer jobs available in construction
• Unemployment, layoffs/restructuring (according to the government statistics bureau, the number of unemployed persons in March 2009 was 3.35 million, an increase of 670 thousand or 25.0% from the previous year. The unemployment rate, seasonally adjusted, was 4.8%).
• The unemployment rate in Japan was at 3.60% in April 2014. It averaged 2.70% from 1953 until 2014, reaching an all-time high of 5.60% in July of 2009 and a record low of 1% in November of 1968. “In April 2016, the number of unemployed persons were 2.24 million, a decrease of 100 thousand (-4.3 percent) from a year earlier…The labour force rate grew 0.7 percent from a year earlier to 66.21 million and population aged 15 and over was flat at 110.74 million.” (http://www.tradingeconomics.com/japan/unemployment-rate) accessed 2016.6.10.
• Aging and no longer able to find work, or physically unable to work
• Restructuring of economy, made worse by the current financial crisis
• Unable to repay loans or debts
• In financial or other trouble with no support from friends or family
• Exhausted possibilities for government support
• Mental illness, substance abuse, addiction
• Do not (cannot, will not) comply with the requirements of conformist Japanese society
• Criminal record

What is it like on the street?
• Minimal services provided by local or national government, but most are temporary measures
• NGOs and other organizations provide services but it is not enough
• Osaka City is making it harder and harder to find places to sleep. People are being forced out of parks and other public areas.
• Many people have been attacked, set on fire and even killed. Often these attacks are committed by children and/or students

This shows an average day for a homeless person. Get up at 4:00; collect aluminum cans. Exchange the cans for cash at 12:00, eat lunch (¥200 bento), nap. 16:00 Line up for an outdoor kitchen meal. 19:30 Check where cans have been thrown away, walk around to stay warm. 22:00 light sleep (always have to aware of being attacked, so can’t sleep soundly).

From: http://www.homedoor.org/problem#q4 (Homedoor, accessed 2015.7.2)
• About 200 people die on the street/year from hunger, cold, illness and violence. Most of those deaths could have been prevented with simple measures.
• Once a person is on the street, it is very difficult to go back to his/her former life.

**Differing attitudes**
• Some people think that homeless people have the same rights as others and deserve assistance and services. We will meet some people who have this view.
• Many people in Japan say that people in Kamagasaki are there due to their own ‘fault’ or ‘irresponsibility’. They believe that people there do not want to help themselves and don’t want to work.
• People who take this position say that it is not necessary to provide services with public money, since it is their own fault and they should help themselves
• Some also say that it is easy to be homeless and live on the street
• Some people believe that providing temporary shelters for ‘homeless people’ (rough sleepers) makes the problem worse.

**Tobita Shinchi: A ‘traditional’ sex work district**

**Why we visit Tobita Shinchi**
• Tobita Shinchi provides another, and related, example of structural/cultural violence. It helps us to focus on the gendered aspects of some kinds of poverty.
• It also gives another view of Japan and of Kamagasaki.

**Brief historical overview (pre-World War II)**
• 1612 (Edo period): First ‘Yuukaku’ (brothel) established in Tokyo (Nihonbashi Ningyo-cho) called Yoshiwara. It was destroyed in a fire in 1657, and rebuilt in different location. At first, it had only high class customers but by the mid-Edo period, most customers were commoners
• 1872 The Meiji Government began regulation of brothels, but in fact no change occurred, although many brothels changed location to the outskirts of cities
• Tobita Shinchi was established in 1915. During the Taisho period it was the country’s largest *yuukaku*. By 1918 it had more than 100 restaurants, and by the late 1920’s more than 200. At the center was a ‘restaurant’ call *Taiyoshi Hyakuban* (鯛よし百番) (right). It was the only ‘restaurant’ to survive WWII and still exists as a restaurant, and in 2000 was registered as an Important Cultural Property. (photo: Wikipedia commons)

**Post-WWII**
• In 1946, the GHQ outlaws prostitution. As a result, brothels (*Yuukaku*) changed their names to ‘restaurant’, ‘café’, etc, and continued work
• 1956 Prostitution Prohibition Law (went into effect 3/31 1958) marked the end of the ‘Yuukaku’ era. In Tobita Shinchi, the shops formed a ‘Restaurant Union’ and continued to operate as ‘restaurants.’

• The assumption is that any relationship established between the ‘restaurant’ staff and customers is their personal affair.

• Notice that negotiations still take place within the ‘private’ confines of the restaurant; not in ‘public’ on the street

Tobita Shinchi Today
• Today: about 100 ‘restaurants’ where customers negotiate the fee with the mama-san
• If no young woman is sitting in the entry, it means all the women there are busy
• When one woman goes upstairs with a customer, another takes her place
• Upstairs: generally a 4.5 tatami mat room, no shower
• Fee (example): 15-20 min.: ¥11,000-16,000; 30 min=¥21,000; 40 min: ¥31,000
• Hours: 13:00-0:00
• One shop’s system:
  15 min. ¥11000→5500; 20 min. ¥16000→8000; 30 min. ¥21000→10500: 60 min. ¥41000→20500
• Workers: Nearby housing provided (for a fee) by employer. Also loans, etc.

Some questions to think about
• What do you see as examples structural, cultural and direct violence in Kamagasaki and Tobita?
• Is the concept of structural violence useful to explain power relations in Kamagasaki? What other theories of violence can you use?
• What do you see as being important gendered aspects of the situation in Kamagasaki and Tobita?
• What, if anything, do you think can or should be done to improve the situation? Do you feel in any way responsible for the creation, continuation and/or solution to situations such as homelessness and/or sex work?
• Do you think there should be programs to help homeless people? Why or why not? How about sex workers?
• Who should be responsible for those programs (funding, workers, etc.) and what should they entail? Do people have a right to be homeless or to engage in sex work?
• How is the situation in Kamagasaki and/or Tobita similar to, and different from, the situation in your country or your home town in Japan? How is it different from Kobe?
• What did you learn from the field work? What questions has it left you with?
• Has this field work changed your view of Japan? In what ways?
• Has this field work changed the way you think about homelessness and/or sex work? Will it make a difference in how you behave in the future toward street people or sex workers?