

What's the Meaning of Meeting up with Homeless People on the Street? ---Regarding on the Roles of Street Magazines in the Society

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1. Preface

It was about fifteen years ago when I “met” a homeless man in Osaka, Japan for the first time. The guy was standing on a street in front of a hub station of JR Osaka with a magazine called *The Big Issue Japan*.

Since having just read an article on the magazine, I got closer to the man and purchased an issue. It was my first “encounter” with a homeless man. At that time, I even did not know that I would begin working with the vendors as an editor of the magazine.

Working there was such an eye-opener experience to me. It would not be so surprising, because I knew about homeless people only by seeing them sleeping on a bench at a park in daytime or reading some articles on homeless attacks beforehand. It means that I never “encountered” nor “communicated” with homeless people.

On the first day of working at The Big Issue Japan, I just greeted with them. On the second day, I called them by their own name, such as Hamada-san, Inoue-san, Sakata-san... In keeping having conversation with them, I gradually noticed that they had their own life paths to come to this place, like you and me. They were not born to be homeless. Because of the jobless, less family and friend ties, and lack of education opportunity, they fell into the state of homelessness.

If you turn your eyes to the society, in the midst of Lehman Shock, the image toward homeless people seemed drastically changed here in Japan. Before the Shock, there prevailed so-called *Jiko Sekinin ron*, which is self-responsibility theory. Furthermore, it is used to be said that their laziness made them homeless.

The economic crisis in 2008 brought the nightmare of laid-off. The situation made people more sympathetic toward homeless people. The word “poverty,” which once vanished from Japanese society, resurrected around that time. *Toshikoshi Haken Mura* (Tent City for Jobless) opened up at the end of the year by some NPOs at Hibiya park, Tokyo. The image of lines of jobless people seeking some space to sleep and a soup was enough astonishing for Japanese to imagine that this was not the fire on the opposite shore.

At the office of The Big Issue Japan, I also witnessed the drastic change, because the average age

of the vendors became ten years younger than the starter. Most of them were experiencing *Haken-giri*, downsizing by laying off part-time and temporary workers. It was the moment that I realized that “homeless” were produced by the social drastic change.

In 2011, I had an opportunity to visit sister magazines of The Big Issue Japan in Asia and Europe. It was a three-month journey in 21 cities, in 18 countries. I wanted to grasp even a glimpse of the reason why people fall into homelessness and how people tackle with the situation. For the purpose, I had dialogues with about 20 homeless people and 20 staffs during the trip. Through those conversations, I realized that the profile of homeless people reflected the social issues their country struggled with.

The Big Issue Korea, for example, had many jobless mid-aged male vendors. Since Asian financial crisis in 1997, it was not easy for them to retrieve a job, once losing it.

Almost ninety percent of the vendors of *Oslo*, had been struggling with drug addicts. The Norwegian street magazine had offered job opportunities and rehab programs at the same time.

At the office of *Gazeta Uliczna* sold in Poznan, Poland, I heard that the reason of the homelessness there was drastic social change after the end of Cold War. Because housing had become privatizing all of a sudden, some got kicked out of their own houses due to the sky-rocketing rent.

As these examples show, each country had each reason why people had fallen into homelessness. The fact I found through the conversations with vendors and staffs of the street magazines during the trip was a refutation to self-responsibility theory.

Living as a homeless is such a terrible experience. Not only physically, but also psychologically. A vendor once told me that he was an invisible man before selling the street magazine. Nobody paid attention to his existence.

That is why every time I spotted a vendor and a citizen customer chatting on a street, I couldn't help realizing it was an intriguing sight. In Japan, most of the homeless people life is segregated by the daily lives of ordinary citizens. Most of them are taken into shelters or some kind of institutions, or even if he or she walks on the street, as I said earlier, passengers treat them as invisible persons, as if it is a courtesy as city residents. Furthermore, all those gated communities made it difficult to encounter others, whether one likes it or not.

So, what is going to happen if you encounter others, say homeless vendors on a street? Besides, how does the encounter influence your perspective toward your own lives and society?

In this paper, firstly, I explain the overview of homelessness here in Japan. Secondly, summarizing the theory of social inclusion/exclusion and intermediate spheres. Thirdly, analyzing the contents of The Big Issue Japan, and concluding the role of the magazine in Japanese society.

I hope the reader to “encounter” with homeless people through this paper and obtain some insight.

2. Overview of Homelessness in Japan

Firstly, I point out the difference of the definition of “homeless” in Japan and in EU. In Japan, the word, homeless, just indicates the rough sleepers. On the other hand, the definition of EU includes not only rough sleepers, but also those who stay at friends’ and relatives’ house, at hostels and at welfare institutions. It means the definition of EU covers all people who are on the verge of losing right of residence.

For the reason, the homeless study in Japan has been just focusing on rough sleepers living at slum areas and public spaces, such as park, subway station etc. for a long time.

Through 1990s, the homelessness remained a serious social issue in cities in Japan. Finally, in 2002, the government launched the Act on Special Measures concerning Assistance in Self-Support of Homeless. The act distinguishes the homeless people into three types: those who are eager to work but jobless, who need medical and welfare supports, and who run away from the ordinary society. A sociologist, Satomi Maruyama pointed out that those who do not follow the path the government offered for social inclusion are put to the third category and stigmatized (丸山: 2013).

The profile of Japanese homeless drastically changed at the dawn of Lehman Shock in 2008. Beforehand, most of them were single men in their 50s (岩田: 2008). The Big Issue Japan found out that the average age of vendors got 10 years younger than before at the year, because many younger people visited the office to eager to sell the magazine. *White Paper of Young Homeless* (ビッグイシュー基金: 2010) , published by The Big Issue Foundation reveals the background. The white paper interviewed 50 young homeless people below 40 years old, and reported that their less human relationship, lack of education opportunity, gamble addiction, and laid-off eventually brought them to losing their home.

In parallel, a word “net-café refugee” was coined in TV program aired January 28th, 2007 to refer to those who do not have a stable housing and stay at net cafés. A survey by Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare in 2007 reported that there were 5,400 net-café refugees in Japan (厚生労働省:2007). For the first time in 40 years, Japanese people got familiar with a word “poverty” in newspapers and other media.

If you look at the figures by the government, the number of homeless people here in Japan has been declining these days. It was 25,296 people in 2003, but reduced to 4,977 in 2018. However, if you consider not only rough sleepers, but also those who are on the verge of homelessness, you can say the issue is not disappearing but becoming just invisible.

What is the meaning of meeting up with homeless people on the street, in those days? I will analyze the roles of street magazines in the society through the contents of The Big Issue Japan, with the help of the theory of social inclusion/exclusion and intermediate spheres.

3. The Theory

3-1. Social Inclusion/Exclusion

In 1980s, there was a plight of jobless young people in Europe, where the concept of social inclusion/exclusion became a key in the field of social policy (中村 2002).

A.S. Bhalla and F. Lapeyre explained that “poverty” is just related to the lack of income, but “social exclusion” focuses on “deprivation” and “disconnection of social ties.” The piles-up of “deprivation” and “disconnection of social ties” eventually brings people into social exclusion. You could say that social exclusion is a process and a state caused by many factors (Bhalla, A.S., Lapeyre, F., 2004).

On the other hand, Nakamura pointed out that the concept of social exclusion used at EU committee was limited to “the exclusion from the ordinary labor market.” It means that the pair concept “social inclusion” also tends to reduce to mean “the inclusion from the ordinary labor market.” It loses the plurality which the concept originally has. (福原 2007).

Political Scientist, Taro Miyamoto also pointed out that the discussion at the welfare arena of Japan was also prone to be limited to workfare (宮本 2004).

When it comes to *The Big Issue Japan*, the magazine also was trying to include the homeless people by job at first. Their motto is “self-help,” retrieving self-respect through working. First, the vendors gain some income and place to sleep through selling the magazine, and eventually aim to get the “ordinary” job. Only ten percent of the vendors, however, set off the path. Some vendors come back on and off to the organization, even after getting the “ordinary” job. It forced the street magazine to change their policy and identity. What are the roles of street magazines in the society, then? I examine it through analyzing the contents of the magazine in section 4.

3-2. Intermediate Spheres

Since the street magazine is organized by an NPO and a limited company, I will apply the theory of intermediate spheres, too.

A Sociologist, Koichi Hasegawa says that comparing to law and economics, the *raison d'etre* of sociology has been relying on intermediate spheres (佐々木 2002). Hasegawa also explained the reason why NPO is needed in terms of “market failure,” “government failure,” and “family and community failure” of Swedish Pestoff (佐々木 2002).

A Sociologist, Yoshiyuki Sato also mentions that associations would be one of the alternatives. Sato defines an association as “a non-profit and non-governmental network of activity where people have a tie freely, equally, and voluntarily” (佐藤 2002).

If considering the theory of social inclusion/exclusion, you could easily find that the venue of street magazine deserves to be examined as a new example of social inclusion, intermediate spheres and association.

In the next section, I will analyze it through the contents of *The Big Issue Japan*.

4. Analyzing the Contents of The Big Issue Japan

4-1. Vendor's Story

There exist over 100 street magazines, in 40 countries currently. Some, especially European ones, enrich the entertainment articles, while others, especially North-Americans, focus on the social issues.

In those various street magazines, one column is essential: vendor's story. All the customers of street magazines encounter not only with vendors on the street, but also vendors' voices in the magazine.

The Big Issue Japan started this series in the second issue (published in November 2003), and since then, it has depicted how the vendors fell into the state of homelessness. Laid-off, gamble addicts, losing family ties and home---all those elements kicked them out of ordinary lives. Through their own voices, the readers got to know that they themselves were at a loss to the current situation of homelessness.

#37 (2005.10.15) ---Yoshiyuki Koshizawa (50) was born as a fourth child of government employee and house wife. He lost his health when working as security guard.

“When watching TV, showing the scene of soup kitchen, I felt so sorry. Never expecting that I would be one of them.”

#322 (2017.11.1) ---Toshio Hane (43) was employed and lived with parents, six months before he became homeless. However, he could not get along with parents any more nor stand with the monotony work of security guard. Gamble addiction eventually brought him into the state of rough sleeping.

“When being employed, I thought homeless people were hoppy-go-round. After falling into the state, however, I noticed the situation was far from what I was expecting. Every day is a serious battle.”

Those are clear-cut protest for people's saying that homelessness is the way of happy-go-round living.

#3 (2003.12.4) ---Tokuyoshi Kawai lost his job, because of his illness. Since then, he has been sleeping in a slum and benches of parks.

“What I am dreaming of is not a luxurious way of living. I just want to get back to ‘normal life’ where I can have chit-chat with the neighbors.”

#6 (2004.3.4) ---Choshiro Mahara took off debts of his friend, and it eventually brought him to rough sleeping.

“I am craving for an address, place to sleep, and furthermore ‘normal job’.”

The two quotes above show that homelessness put you outside of ‘normal life.’ We took a look that the concept of social exclusion was prone to be limited to the exclusion from labor market. The

mind-set, however, reduces the plurality of social inclusion/exclusion.

What kind of plurality does the theory of social inclusion/exclusion have then? You could easily imagine that people will need food, money/income, and roof urgently in the state of homelessness. If the state of homelessness gets long-term, however, the vendor story says that “comfort zone and role” is a key to survive through homelessness.

#2 (2003.11.6) ---Hamada lost his job as a librarian.

“I did not have any food and was very hungry. Besides nothings to do.....I never knew a day was so long.”

#6 (2004.3.4) ---Choshiro Mahara said, “You cannot just sleep for a day. You cannot kill the time whole day.”

Mid-aged men tend to lose their comfort zone and role in the society at the same time, in being jobless.

#277 (2015.12.15) ---N (36) said, “In selling the magazine, a female student was talking on the phone, ‘I am waiting for you in front of a man with a red cap.’ I was delighted to help out people even as a landmark.”

#209 (2013.2.15) ---Mitsuo Ide (37) began working after graduating from junior high. Because of his illness, he could not stay at parents’ house any more, and it eventually brought him to rough sleeping.

“Customers say to me like, ‘You work so hard!’ and ‘You encouraged me a lot!’ It really gives me the motivation to keep going and so grateful that I could play some roles in this society.”

Through those remarks, you could know that The Big Issue Japan offers some kind of “comfort zone and role” to the homeless people.

At first, the aim of The Big Issue Japan was “helping homeless help themselves.” Firstly, through the organization, homeless people get income and place to sleep. Secondly, after working certain time, they will save some amount of money to get the place to live. Thirdly, they will get ‘normal job’ and be included into the society. It was a blueprint of the starter.

After 15 years, however, the organization was forced to rethink the blueprint, because of the situation. Only ten percent of the vendors fulfilled the blueprint, but some vendors keep coming and going, and some just stayed The Big Issue Japan for a long time, against the expectations.

#326 (2018.1.1) ---Koichi Shimura (57) had been working at a moving company in Sapporo for 20 years, but the debts by gambling made him fall into homelessness. He “graduated” from The Big Issue once, but eventually came back to re-register as a vendor.

“Being terrified in returning to the office, because I failed to get back to the normal society. That is why, I got so relieved when they said that you could try once again.”

Several vendors who join The Big Issue Japan on and off often appear the corner of vendor’s story. Their ways of living seem to transform the identity of the organization. Once the aim of the

organization was self-help, but it has changed to be a comfort zone and role to anyone. Some may graduate The Big Issue Japan earlier to get the job, some may stay there longer. The decision is not by organization, but by the homeless people themselves. It would be a huge difference between the plans by government and the ones by associations.

#329 (2018.2.15) ---Hiroyuki Imamura (36) graduated from a special support school and kept changing jobs. Falling into the state of homelessness in the early 20s, and he registered as a vendor of The Big Issue Japan. Since then, he comes and goes to the organization.

“Staffs might be thinking ‘Again!’ but the existence of The Big Issue Japan, a place to get back whatever happens, gives me a sense of security.”

4-2. People Who Met Homeless---Your Issue

How did encountering homeless people on the street and reading vendor’s story in the magazine affect “readers’ image toward homeless,” “view of life” and “view of society?”

In the readers’ column of *The Big Issue Japan*, “Your Issue”, the stories of encounters are often told.

#168(2011.6.1) ---Tsukino Tomoaki/ 22/ college student/ Shiga pref.

“On the way to job interviews, I bought one. In reply to the question, ‘Are you going to office?’ I answered “No. I am on my way to a job interview” ...The vendor told me, ‘Good luck!’ with a smile.”

The articles and/or reports on homeless people by mass media have a tendency to depict them as victim of attacks or the needy lining up for a soup. The story above, on the contrary, describes the encounter of two persons in their daily lives.

On the other hand, a reader shows some hesitation to buy the magazine on the street.

#126(2009.9.1) ---Takkun/ 19/ college student/ Hyogo pref.

“An essay of my favorite author let me know about *The Big Issue*.” Though he spotted a vendor on the street, he could not purchase one. “I passed in front of him, pretending not to notice his existence, like other passers-by. I felt that it might be embarrassing to walk to the vendor and be witnessed the scene by someone.”

His remarks reflect his conflict to behave against the courtesy of the city: you should not walk and talk someone you do not know.

On the other hand, if you encounter a vendor and purchase a street magazine successively, what would happen?

#14(2004.10.1) ---K.M/ 41/ Osaka pref.

“I purchased the magazine from Akama-san, since the first issue. When I could not find him on the spot, I was worrying about him.”

A customer does not call a vendor 'a homeless guy' any more. Through the encounter, a vendor gets his own name 'Akama' back.

In usual media reports, we seldom know what kind of path the homeless people have been taken. Through purchasing the street magazine, however, a vendor retrieves his/her own name, and a customer gets to know that there are always reasons that people fall into the state of homelessness.

Some regularly purchase the magazines and keep the dialogues with vendors.

#183(2012.1.15) ---Hiroko Nakaniwa/ 37/ office worker/Tokyo

"I witnessed two vendors of Koenji 'graduated' from The Big Issue Japan and got back to the society. At the Great East Japan earthquake of 3-11, 2011, a former vendor emailed me if I was doing okay. I was so grateful for it."

In the former context, homeless people almost always are described as those who need to be included. Besides, the inclusion was always conditional: if the homeless people can follow some norms.

Via the street magazine, the flow is in opposite direction; citizens approach to homeless vendors and pile up the dialogues and conversations in purchasing the magazines.

Furthermore, since Lehman shock of 2008, Great East Japan earthquake of 2011, and the word "poverty" flooded in the mass media in Japan, readers' letters have been filled with their own plights and suggested to help each other.

#316(2017.8.1) ---Takahiro Fujita/ 36/ jobless, under treatment/Tokyo

"I used to be homeless. Currently, I resident at group home, struggling with depression. I often think of comfort zone these days. If you think of home as comfort zone, many people even with house might be homeless. "

#326(2018.1.1) ---E.H. / part-timer/ Tokyo

"I am not a homeless, but manage a life as a single mother, with little income and allowance. In reading the articles, I think that I am not the only one who is struggling and encouraged by the fact."

#331(2018.3.15) ---Yuki / 40s/ Tokyo

"For six or seven years, I have purchased *The Big Issue Japan*. In purchasing an issue one day, I told the vendor it was my birthday. What a surprise! The vendor sang 'Happy Birthday' on the spot. I was so delighted, because I had to spend the day by myself."

#342(2018.9.1) ---Kareshina / 20s/ university student/ Tokyo

"I had been eager to be a doctor and studying so hard. Though I managed to pass the test, my parents confessed that we were not afford for the tuition and needed to give up the dream. In facing it, I just realized that poverty is anybody's issue."

In his book, a sociologist, Mitsunori Ishida (石田 2011) described the current situation of Japanese society, quoting Kazuhiro Shima. "Kazuhiro Shima (森田 2009) pointed out that there was difference between the past and the current homeless issue, which is all about the differentiation of

border. In the high growth period in Japan, homeless people were the outsider of the society. It was a rare case to be a homeless in the rich society of Japan. That's the reason why homeless is 'dangerous class' in 'particular space'."

"The explosive increase of flexible labor force, however, brought the situation that all society got into like slum. That means everyone is facing the risk of being homeless. In the meantime, the differentiation of border became very vague.socially excluded people are not someone in a 'dangerous class,' on the other side of other Japanese, but standing on the same side with the ordinary."

5. The Role of the Street Magazine in Japanese Society

The Big Issue Japan was trying to include the homeless people through selling the magazine on the street. By analyzing the contents of the magazine, especially vendors' stories and readers' letters, I have found out that is just one of the aspects of the arena of the magazine.

I examine the three phases of the inclusion by the street magazine. Firstly, a homeless vendor and a customer citizen encounter on the street of a city through a purchase of a street magazine. Usually, the life of homeless people is cleverly concealed from citizens. They are taken into shelters, hostels at slum, etc. Even if you happen to bump into homeless people in public space, it is a city courtesy to treat them as invisible persons.

If you encounter a homeless person, through purchasing the street magazine, what would happen? A homeless person retrieves his/her own name, and a customer citizen get to know his/her path to fall into homelessness. Through piling up dialogues and conversations, there occurs a conversion of perspective. The homeless vendor is not just to be included into the society, but also his/her experience of homelessness influences the perspective of customers toward homeless people, society, and even life itself. Through this, homeless vendors will retrieve self-esteem. The conversion of perspective would be the second phase.

Thirdly, the homeless vendors and citizen customers are building up a certain type of venue. We could call it a public sphere in a way.

A sociologist, Masayo Arisono, who has been researching on sanatorium for sufferers of Hansen's disease, depicts the issue of asylum and asyl (有藪: 2017).

While "asylum" has been used to point out the total institution since the publication of *Asylum* by Goffman, the word "asyl" means a space and time where and when a person can be inviolability (Henssler 1954). A Historian, Yoshihiko Amino also used the word "asyl" to describe a time and space with autonomy from power, and comprised by the principle of freedom and peace (網野 1996).

Homeless people are prone to be taken into shelters, which you could call an asylum. Then the street magazine arena could possibly be an asyl, through the three phases of encounter, conversion of

perspective, and building up public sphere. In the venue, the communication and inclusion has been interactive, and some exceptional behaviors by vendors even have modified the identity of the sphere.

The change might be slow and the influence on the society might be small. However, as a vendor, Hiroyuki Imamura mentioned, the existence of The Big Issue Japan, a place to get back whatever happens, definitely gives certain people a sense of security, which Japanese society has been failing to offer these days.

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