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The Other City: Alternative Infrastructures of Care for the Underclass in Japan

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Paying attention to the history of urban governance in postwar Japan, this article discusses how decades of governmental neglect and social exclusion might give rise to alternative practices and technologies of care in marginalized enclaves. In Kotobuki, a former day laborers' district (yoseba) in Yokohama, the single-room occupancies known as doya have become care facilities for the impoverished elderly and people with disabilities, who are being embraced into a nexus of care sustained by local supporters. Two differently marginalized groups appear central to this process: local resident (zainichi) Koreans, and Japanese leftists. The case of Kotobuki exemplifies how the resilient search by these two groups for an alternative future has transformed an underclass enclave into a uniquely protective dwelling place for the marginalized.

Keywords: social exclusion, yoseba, zainichi Koreans, social movement and activism, Japan

Introduction: Abandonment and Care in an Excluded Urban Space

When I started my fieldwork on community welfare activism in an underclass enclave in Yokohama in 2009, one local human rights activist told me that I would be able to learn a lot about Japanese society in the district, as it “showcases all the social problems of discrimination in Japan.” Indeed, in the following years, I came to meet people in the district who had faced discrimination throughout their lives for various reasons – for coming from a certain region or town, for being of foreign descent, homeless, or an orphan, or for having a disability, among other things. Once the nation's third largest

day laborers' quarter (yoseba), Kotobuki district¹ had gone through decline due to the post-industrial transition and the slowing economy. At the time of my fieldwork, Kotobuki had become a place where impoverished elderly men with complicated health conditions lived out their remaining years as welfare recipients. Within its 200 by 300 meter confines, the majority of its 6,500 inhabitants were single elderly men receiving public assistance. Some of them were former day laborers with prior ties to the district, but many of the district's current residents moved in at an advanced age, as they had neither relatives to take care of them nor resources to afford proper care services.

Despite overwhelming conditions of suffering and abandonment, I discovered that the residents also found new possibilities of living in the uniquely protective environment of the district. As Aomori,² a Kotobuki resident in his late fifties said, one word-of-mouth communication shared among the homeless in the surrounding areas was that "it'll all work out if you go to Kotobuki" (Kotobuki ni ikya nantoka naruyo). It was these words that prompted Aomori to walk fifteen kilometers southward to Kotobuki in 2009, after months of being homeless and abused by yakuza gangs in the nearby industrial city of Kawasaki. In Kotobuki, even people who could not possibly live by themselves elsewhere, from terminally ill patients to seniors with dementia, somehow managed to carry on in the single room occupancies that characterized the district. Known as doya in local slang (a word play on yado, lodgings), this cheap accommodation, originally constructed for day laborers, became a nodal point connecting its inhabitants to a nexus of care comprised of activists, volunteers, health practitioners, social workers, and various care providers. In other words, as much as Kotobuki was a place of abandonment, it had also become a place equipped with alternative infrastructures of care.

This article examines this paradoxical phenomenon by drawing attention to two marginalized groups that have played a significant role in turning doya buildings into quintessential care facilities: resident (zainichi) Koreans³ and Japanese leftists.⁴ Both groups moved to Kotobuki in the early decades following the Asia-Pacific War in an attempt to pursue an alternative future, which was deemed illegitimate in mainstream Japanese society. For different reasons, doya appeared central to their endeavors, as they experimented with various practices and technologies of care for residents.

The transformation of Kotobuki's doya, as propelled by these two groups, requires consideration of the implications of spatial and social differentiations in the arts of governing and subjectification. As Foucault formulated, the modern technologies of government effectively incorporate the ethics of self-government into the scientific regulation of populations, a power mechanism he defined as governmentality (Foucault 1991). Many scholars have found Foucault's theorization useful in discussing the discursive power of self-responsibility in neoliberalizing cities, where labor and real estate markets are deregulated and state subsidies and services are withdrawn. With an increasing emphasis on reforming and governing the self, those who do not manage are further pushed into precarious housing situations and states of neglect (Cho 2013; Song 2009). Budget cuts for public hospitals and health care drive impoverished patients into "zones of abandonment" (Biehl 2005), while the increasing reliance in social policy on medical interventions puts the blame on those who cannot comply with guidelines and treatments designed for the middle classes (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009; Carr 2010; Lyon-Callo 2004; Yang 2015). In line with this global trend, the Japanese state has also adopted self-responsibility (jiko sekinin) and self-reliance (jiritsu) as the organizing principles in its social policy and public health since the 2000s (Allison 2013; Ezawa 2016; Goldfarb 2016; Hook and Takeda 2007; Osawa 2011).

This article aims to show how such a neoliberal turn in subject formation in Japan might be refracted by the country's distinctively spatialized urban governance. Although discourses on self-management have brought about changes to policies and social programs for the underclass, as exemplified in the implementation of the Special Measures to Support the Self-reliance of the Homeless (Homeless Law) in 2002, these changes occurred in a terrain fraught with histories of struggle and resistance. In places such as Kotobuki, the normalization of self-care has thus been deflected by the formation of alternative relations of care among local actors who have engaged in long-term struggles for survival. In other words, governmentality not only involves normalization but also the differentiation of subjects (Fassin 2009, 53), which at times may open up "spaces of the otherwise" (Povinelli 2011, 6-11), where new forms of social life emerge and persevere. In what follows, I trace this process in the intricate dynamics between exclusionary spatial governance and resilient struggles for survival.

Urban Spatial Stratification in Japan

Yoseba becomes, on the one hand, a "living hell" (*iki jigoku*) fraught with the harsh violence of capitalism. On the other hand, it also becomes an asylum (*ajiiru*) where the wounded keep their bodies close and console each other (Aoki 2000, 36).

The particular conditions in which residents of yoseba enclaves such as Kotobuki are situated cannot be understood without tracing the histories of urban governance and spatial stratification in Japan. Yoseba enclaves took their current shapes in postwar Japan as the Japanese state endeavored to secure a steady supply of labor to boost economic growth while maintaining social order. From the 1950s to the early 1970s, the central government promoted rural to urban migration by subsidizing a small percentage of rural landowners and urging landless peasants and students to seek jobs in large cities.⁵ Meanwhile, the municipalities of major cities regulated the hazards of

overcrowding and disorder posed by the influx of itinerant workers by concentrating the casual labor markets and lodgings in designated areas, while cracking down on the unregulated and makeshift structures and illegal activities outside their boundaries. In Tokyo and Osaka, day laborers' quarters were formed near the segregated neighborhoods of historically outcast groups,⁶ where casual labor markets and cheap wooden lodgings had flourished before the war (Gill 2001:81-5, 92).

Tokyo's San'ya district, for example, appeared near the eta (lit. great filth, referring to hereditary outcast groups) settlement of Shinchō, the Kozukappara execution grounds, and the famous red light quarter of Yoshiwara from the Edo period (1603-1867). Likewise, Osaka's Kamagasaki district emerged near the hinin (lit. non-human, referring to a range of social dropouts) ghetto of the Edo period where the sprawling rows of kichinyado (cheap wooden lodgings for the lower classes) and the Tobita red light quarter formed one of the largest slums in the nation by the Taisho period (1912-1926). Following a series of day laborers' riots in the 1960s, it became nationwide policy to treat these day laborers' quarters as distinct from ordinary districts, with special countermeasures coordinated by different levels of the municipality and the police. These countermeasures included moving families to public housing outside the quarters and establishing public employment and welfare offices for day laborers within these quarters, thereby, transforming them into enclaves for single underclass men (Watanabe 2008, 39-40; Haraguchi 2003, 34-35).

The stratified spatial governance of enclaves such as the yoseba epitomizes how social boundaries and structures of discrimination were reproduced in postwar Japan, behind the façade of being a homogenous and egalitarian nation-state. As Gill has noted, Japanese authorities have employed a "containment policy" based on "a germ infection metaphor, seeking to seal up the source of the potential social infection by

concentrating or containing supposedly deviant elements inside the yoseba” (Gill 2001, 185, emphasis original).⁷ Such urban governance of yoseba and their constituents offer a good insight into how biopolitics (Foucault 1990 & 2003) in Japan has reinforced spatial boundaries in terms of demarcating populations. Critically examining the development of Foucault’s thoughts on biopolitics, Fassin has pointed out that Foucault’s later work overemphasized the technologies of homogenizing lives without scrutinizing the production of inequality in the process of regulating populations. Racial segregation in South Africa, for instance, was justified in the name of public health concerns, which brought about disproportionately devastating health consequences in black communities, where epidemics prevailed without being accounted for by the state (Fassin 2009, 54).

Similarly, in Japan, while yoseba enclaves sealed up single day laborers, the living conditions in middle-class neighborhoods improved dramatically, with infrastructural developments and neighborhood beautification projects. As self-governing neighborhood associations and voluntary groups further strengthened neighborhood ties to maintain cleanliness and prevent crime, it became even harder for the marginalized to enter or live in “ordinary districts” (ippan chiku) in postwar Japan. Single day laborers had little choice but to endure the poor living conditions of the yoseba and to subject themselves to violence and exploitation by various predatory forces, from petty thieves to yakuza gangs. Furthermore, as the Japanese welfare system relied primarily on the duty of families, companies, and neighborhoods to care for their members (Garon 1997), yoseba day laborers, who were disconnected from these entities, were often left without social protection in times of illness and unemployment. Accordingly, yoseba districts have been plagued by public health issues distinguished from those of the rest of Japan with typically high rates of infectious diseases such as

tuberculosis and hepatitis and shorter life expectancies.⁸ In this sense, the spatial segregation in Japan attests to how biopolitical rationality and interventions actuate value judgments that ultimately determine “who shall live what sort of life for how long,” similar to the case of apartheid in South Africa (Fassin 2009, 53). The Japanese state has incorporated middle-class citizens into programs of life enhancement and reproduction, while treating yoseba day laborers as a potential threat to public security and public health who should be kept apart.

The spatial segregation of yoseba laborers might seem to lend itself to Agamben’s theory of sovereignty, which postulates that the paradigmatic power of the modern state lies in its capacity to create “the state of exception” in which subjects are suspended of their citizens’ rights and reduced to maintaining “bare life,” as exemplified in the concentration camps of the Nazis (Agamben 1998:8-12, 166-180). I argue, however, that a careful look at the daily lives and local practices in excluded spaces such as yoseba reveals how pursuits for an alternative future persist and materialize amidst such intensified politics of life and death. Aligning myself with recent calls in anthropology for “the politics of living” (Feldman 2012, 157) or “the politics of life as such” (Fassin 2009), I seek to take into account the power struggles unfolded in concrete biographies and histories, and not only the power over life in its abstract form. As much as it has been an excluded space, the yoseba of today are built on decades of power struggles waged by various activist groups and self-governing associations against the policies of the authorities (Iwata 2008, 25-6). The government’s suppressive approach to yoseba such as Kotobuki in the postwar growth period created exceptional conditions that those within the yoseba learned to navigate as they struggled for survival. The ambivalence of yoseba as a protective “asylum” as much as a punitive prison, as summarized by yoseba sociologist Aoki, comes from such collective and

cumulative experiences and practices of endurance under extreme conditions of spatial segregation. In the following, I draw on data from my ethnographic fieldwork and local organizational reports and memoirs to delineate the contours of the struggles that prompted the transformation of the built environment of Kotobuki into alternative infrastructures of care.

“The Western Town” of Yokohama⁹

Kotobuki’s formation as a yoseba was closely connected to the modern nation-building and colonial expansion of the Japanese empire. Yokohama, which used to be a cluster of fishing villages along a sandbank south of Tokyo, became an international trading port in 1859, as the Japanese empire’s treaty of commerce with the United States came into effect. In preparation for the opening of the port, massive areas of land were reclaimed around the Yokohama sandbank, and the marshland between the sandbank and the inland area, which included Kotobuki, was reclaimed in 1873 (Yokohama-shi 1972, 15). Surrounded by foreign settlements, Kotobuki came to be inhabited by Japanese commoners engaged in small businesses, retailing, silk manufacturing, export trades, and dock work, among other occupations (Tanaka 2009, 29-30). Along the other side of the Nakamura stream bordering the district appeared a slum with cheap lodgings for the lower class workers seeking jobs in this vibrant new port economy (ibid., 31-32). The lodgings were operated mostly by Koreans, whose number was growing in Japan following the colonization of the Korean peninsula in 1910. These Koreans became the target of massacres instigated by Japanese vigilantes following the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake that devastated the region, and a number of locals’ memoirs vividly recount the Nakamura stream turning crimson as it filled up with the brutally beaten bodies of

Koreans.¹⁰

Most of the Yokohama Port area, including Kotobuki, was turned to rubble during the Yokohama Air Raid of May 29, 1945, and was occupied by the allied forces months later. Yokohama Port became one of the few places in war-torn Japan where labor was in high demand, due to the constant inflow of military supplies, foreign aid, and imports. Seeking work, people gathered there from across the country, but the city lacked accommodation for them. According to a 1953 report by the public employment security office, the area surrounding the office was regularly occupied by more than 1,000 job seekers, and whenever a recruiter needed a worker, he could find one there (Serizawa 1967, 5). Illegal lodgings sprang up throughout the waterfront area, the most notorious among which were wooden barges called “floating hotels” (*suijō hoteru*). Filled with double or triple bunk beds to accommodate 100-250 people, these overcrowded barges were prone to outbreaks of typhus and to capsizing (ibid., 6-10). The city government responded to the rising concerns over safety by cracking down on illegal lodgings throughout the waterfront area and moving the employment security office to Kotobuki district in 1957 (ibid., 13-4), following the return of the requisitioned land from the Allied Forces the previous year (Tanaka 1985, 201).

The return of the land prompted a flock of Koreans to seize the opportunity to build doya in Kotobuki. According to the oral history and archival data I gathered, these Koreans came largely from two groups: shoe and leather shop owners from Asakusa, Tokyo, and flophouse owners from across the Nakamura stream and the waterfront area of Yokohama. Like their fellow 600,000 Koreans who remained in Japan after the war, in 1952 they lost the Japanese nationality that they had once possessed as former colonial subjects. Although they could register as permanent residents, *zainichi* Koreans were excluded from public-sector jobs and faced discrimination by private companies.

The limited job choices left for them included running private credit banks (catering to fellow zainichi Koreans), pachinko (gambling parlors) and Korean restaurants and retail stores, or engaging in casual labor and miscellaneous informal economic activities. In the Kotobuki district, doya management appeared as one of the more promising businesses, which could be combined with other kinds of informal economic activities.

Park, for instance, a zainichi Korean doya owner I met in 2011, told me how his mother had come to build one of the first doya in Kotobuki in 1956. She had a friend who had run a floating hotel on the waterfront of Yokohama and persuaded her that the lodging business would bring her a stable cash income. Since Koreans were likely to be turned away from Japanese banks, those interested in the business formed a co-op to pool resources and arrange private loans. As the business grew, the co-op could also collectively stand as surety for its members to get loans from public banks such as the Shoko Chukin Bank.¹¹ After the first doya was built in 1956, similar structures of two- to four-storey wooden doya filled up the district.

Consequently, Kotobuki became a doya-gai (doya quarter) with a built environment distinguished from ordinary residential districts. Avoided and dreaded by taxi drivers and outsiders, it also came to be known as the “Western Town” (seibu no machi), conjuring up the image of a lawless zone like the Wild West depicted in films. One local resident recalled the landscape at the time as being strewn with wooden doya and food stalls selling dobutoku (unfiltered rice wine) and frequented by drug dealers and pan-pan girls (a derogatory term for street sex workers who served foreign soldiers) (Kotobuki Shiensha Kōryūkai 2002, 48-57). The worsening public order and sanitation in yoseba districts, along with the riots in San’ya and Kamagasaki, led to discussions on slum clearance among local administrators and social work scholars in the early 1960s (Yokohama-shi 1972, 3). In Kotobuki, the Korean doya co-op acted preemptively and

submitted a petition to the Yokohama city government in 1961 suggesting designation as a “self-restrained district” (jishuku kuiki). The petition stipulated that doya owners would collectively work to improve the neighborhood environment, renovate doya that did not comply with the building codes, and restrict the proliferation of doya beyond the designated district (Serizawa 1967, 17-18; Yokohama-shi Suramu Taisaku Kenkyukai 1968, 74-75).

The local authorities acknowledged their request, and in line with the newly implemented nationwide yoseba policy, they established a special bureau for Kotobuki District in 1965, which oversaw a bounded area encompassing the self-restrained district. Ironically, the advisory reports on doya countermeasures reveal that the authorities designated the district so that they could ultimately demolish the doya. Specifying that they should avoid creating a “doya heaven,” the reports listed countermeasures such as moving families and “those with the will to live like humans” into rehabilitative facilities outside of the doya district, while offering counseling and guidance to “the hopeless bottom stratum” for the “recovery of [their] humanity,” so that they could escape from the doya and poverty (Yokohama-shi Suramu Taisaku Kenkyukai 1968, 94).

The comprehensive support system envisioned in the reports was never established, however, and the day laborers left in the district continued to be suppressed and neglected by the authorities. In short, Kotobuki became an excluded zone of underclass men at the intersection of the non-citizen zainichi Koreans’ struggle to carve out a place for their own livelihood and prosperity in Japan and the Japanese government’s regulation of urban space through triaged care for its citizens.

Doya Life as Daily Revolution

As Kotobuki became an underclass enclave, it attracted another marginalized group over the 1960s and 1970s: radical leftists who had grown disillusioned with organized movements and factional politics. These two decades mark the most tumultuous period in postwar Japanese history, with vehement protests triggered by a series of events, from the amendment to the security treaty between Japan and the United States in 1960 and its extension in 1970 (the Anpo struggle) to the Vietnam War (with the Haneda and Sasebo incidents in 1967 and 1968). While the Japan Communist Party, the Japan Socialist Party, and labor unions initially played a role in these struggles, the main stage was taken over by student activists who distanced themselves from the centralized and institutionalized approach of these old leftist organizations. The New Leftists (shinsayoku, or *nyūrefuto*), as they were called, preferred to engage in direct action such as blockades and physical clashes with riot police.¹²

During their peak in 1968, student movements appeared in 80 percent of universities across the nation, and up to seventy universities were barricaded by student activists (Ando 2014, 60). By the early 1970s, however, constant factional infighting and severe police repression had driven the New Left movements to the point of collapse, with dozens of deaths, thousands injured, and mass arrests (Shimbori et al. 1980, 140; Steinhoff 2012, 57-78). It was in the wake of the dismantling of the New Left that yoseba activism emerged, as has been well-captured by the social critic Kohso Sabu: “The activists sought to grasp a new potency in yoseba’s workers – more fluid, omnipresent, and rhizomatic forces, as it were, aside from the fact that they were the victims of social inequality, existing as they were as the hierarchical bottom. This became the starting point or the point of starting over for the activists of the generations that followed” (Kohso 2006, 423).

It is important to note that as much as they were the last bastion of revolution, yoseba were also a refuge for the radical student leftists, many of whom were blacklisted by the police and stigmatized by the public. Sociologist Carl Cassegard incisively encapsulates the long-lasting fallout of the New Left movements as “collective trauma,” “a damage sustained by discursive systems that hold the collective together” (Cassegard 2013, 14). According to Cassegard, the collective trauma not only affected the activists themselves but also the larger public, who were haunted by the violent images of the New Left and in the following decades became distrustful of any kind of radicalism (Cassegard 2013, 17-20, 33-37).¹³ Furthermore, as most normative families of salaried workers came to be protected by lifetime employment and the seniority system, calls for social change came to sound outdated, erratic and even disruptive to the burgeoning Japanese middle class. It was only in marginalized places such as yoseba districts that radical activists could mobilize local insurgencies, as the rest of Japan entered a more economically and socially stable period.

Like in other yoseba districts,¹⁴ a revolutionary moment culminated during the oil shocks of the 1970s in Kotobuki, with hundreds of laborers and activists occupying a municipal building in the district. Facing months of unemployment, laborers demanded that the authorities provide extra-legal measures for shelter and food, unemployment benefits, and public employment, while communally cooking and sleeping in the building they occupied (Nomoto 1977). The occupation led to the formation of the Kotobuki Day Laborers’ Union in 1975,¹⁵ with the following manifesto:

At this critical moment, day laborers for the first time stood at the front line of movements and formed Kotobuki District Winter Struggle Executive Committee to deploy a mass struggle of force (*taishūteki jitsuryoku tōsō*). This tells us that all the power of problem-solving is in the hands of every single day laborer. While the laborers’ movements in Tokyo’s San’ya and Osaka’s Kamagasaki were born in the hot summer of the period of rapid growth, Kotobuki started its struggle as ‘the

Winter Shōgun.’ (Kotobuki Day Laborers’ Union Manifesto in Kotobuki-chiku Jūminkondankai 1984, 20)

During this heyday of yoseba activism, doya became the ultimate symbol of working class life, and activists considered moving into a doya as a pledge of commitment to their cause. For instance, Nomoto Sankichi, a social worker and activist, described his move into a doya in 1972 as follows:

It was on June fifteenth that I started to live in a doya called Maruisō at one corner of Kotobuki... My house moving was conveniently completed in one day with a single backpack, and this three-mat-sized small space became my castle. June fifteenth stirs up swirls of memories in me. The heated memory of the Anpo Struggle a dozen years ago is one of them. Since then, June fifteenth came to have a special meaning to me. I thought that I had to recapture it as my own inner matter. One should engender one’s own June fifteenth within one’s daily life. My June fifteenth was concretized in the form of my house moving alone. (Nomoto 2003, 25)

Nomoto’s statement resonates with the idea of “self-revolution in ‘everydayness’ (*nichijōsei*),” which was a key organizing theme of the Japanese New Left movements (Ando 2013, 1). According to Ando, the New Leftists identified fundamental problems as deriving from “controlled society” (*kanri shakai*), whose invisible power of “alienation” (*sogai*) could be dispelled only by transforming daily consciousness, behavior, and ways of living (Ando 2013, 8). For the leftists in Kotobuki, total identification with the underclass through dwelling in doya was the starting point. The spatial organization and sociality of doya afforded a uniquely defined way of living for the day laborers. Most doya in Kotobuki had tatami rooms, two-mat (1.8m x 1.8m) to three-mat (1.8m x 2.7m) in size, with common toilets and cooking spaces. With thin walls and shared living space, doya defied the divide between private and public.

Figure 1: Inside one of the oldest doya in Kotobuki (photo by author)

Figure 2: A doya room in one of the oldest doya (photo by author)

On the ground floor of the doya were typically the reception desk, restaurants, stores, and bars, most of which were operated by the Korean owners or their relatives, and friends, who also maintained close contact with the day laborers. The fact that Kotobuki's doya were owned by zainichi Koreans further justified the activists' decision to move in based on their sympathy with the victims of Japanese imperialism. This is conveyed in the writings of Tanaka Toshio, another social worker and activist, who also moved into a doya in 1966 (Tanaka 2009, 40). Noting the uniqueness of Kotobuki's doya, such as the predominance of individual rooms over dormitory rooms and the lack of a shoes-off policy and curfews, Tanaka called attention to the subversion of the hierarchy maintained in typical Japanese lodgings between the host as the resident and the guest as the outsider: "zainichi Korean doya owners treat their clients less as 'the guest' but rather as 'the resident'... This seemed to have created a new locality affirming that 'everyone is Kotobuki'" (Tanaka 1985, 209-2011).

The long-term laborers and activists I met shared similar recollections that Kotobuki doya owners were more lenient and sympathetic towards the laborers, more understanding of late payments and visitors, and more open to foreign migrant workers than landlords in other yoseba districts (see also Gill 2001, 66). These factors allowed the doya to become an experimental space where activists could launch community activities, such as communal libraries, after-school care for children, and nightly study groups among activists and social workers. Tanaka and his wife, along with another couple from the Kotobuki Day Laborers' Union, further practiced communal childcare in the occupied building, bringing up their own children along with neglected or orphaned children in the district.

The horizon of fundamental social change nevertheless drifted further away from the grasps of activists in the decades that followed. Not long after the occupation of the municipal building ended in 1980, an incident occurred that shocked the whole nation and left an indelible scar in the history of Kotobuki district. Over a few months in the winter of 1982-1983, a group of teenagers went around assaulting homeless day laborers near Kotobuki, leaving at least three dead and sixteen injured.¹⁶ The incident prompted Kotobuki activists, who had hitherto been focused on labor issues, to consider homelessness itself as a serious concern to be addressed. The incident also drew many Christian volunteers, student activists, and social workers to the district, who took various initiatives to address the welfare needs of people in Kotobuki (Hayashi 2014, 153-171). As increasingly more day laborers became permanently jobless and homeless following the collapse of the financial bubble in the early 1990s, Kotobuki activists could no longer draw on idioms of fraternal solidarity and social subversion, but rather came to embrace a larger pool of supporters to help secure the survival of Kotobuki.

From the Right to Labor to the Right to Survival

Accordingly, the significance of *doya* for the activists changed from that of “daily revolution” to focusing on basic housing for the homeless. During the 1994 negotiations with the municipalities, the Kotobuki Day Laborers’ Union and its supporters demanded that the welfare office allow the homeless to apply for public assistance with a *doya* as their registered address (Gill 2001, 25-26; Hayashi 2014, 181-187). Until then, the homeless had been considered ineligible for public assistance due to their lack of residential registration, and were told to enter shelters, which were often full and only offered temporary stay at best. The success of the 1994 negotiations made Kotobuki one

of the first places in Japan where the homeless could receive social services in a doya room. Yoseba activism came to revolve largely around activities to facilitate people's transition from the street to the doya through nightly visits to the homeless, free consultations, accompaniment to the welfare office, and collective applications for public assistance.

Carolyn Stevens' ethnography (1997) on Kotobuki around that time shows how such an expansion of support activities brought about potential frictions among the various actors involved. Stevens noted, in particular, how non-Christians criticized Christian volunteers (*boranteia*) for being hypocritical and lacking political consciousness to correct economic and social injustice, unlike themselves, identified as activists (*katsudōka*) (Stevens 1997, 110-114). Such hostility against voluntarism, however, was no longer noticeable during the time of my fieldwork. Despite the differences in motives and intentions, a long-term commitment to advocating for the right to survival of the homeless seemed to have led yoseba activists and supporters to work flexibly across ideological divides.¹⁷ In an interview in May 2011, a representative of the Kotobuki Day Laborers' Union told me that "Kotobuki is a place where a wide range of people come together, so it won't work if people are out to promote their own faction or party." Reflecting this philosophy, the weekly open-air soup kitchen that the union organized together with a protestant Christian organization did not allow any sermons, speeches, flags, posters, or flyers.

While the recession following the collapse of the financial bubble gave rise to homeless support activities across the nation, the implementation of the Homeless Law in 2002 further accelerated the concentration of single homeless men in yoseba enclaves, where "homeless self-reliance support centers" were built. In Kotobuki, clients of the homeless center who could not find a job upon their discharge could apply for public

assistance with the help of leftist activists.¹⁸ Since the mid-1990s, the rate of welfare provision has continued to rise in Kotobuki, and as of 2015 more than 80% of its residents were receiving public assistance.¹⁹ In the meantime, the scope of support activities came to extend beyond securing a doya room for the homeless, to offering daily support to doya residents, the majority of whom suffered from multiple physical and mental ailments. Some activists worked with Christian organizations and charity foundations to build facilities for people with disabilities and the elderly, which provided therapeutic gathering places outside of doya rooms for Kotobuki residents. Some activists went on to work part-time in these facilities, while others changed their occupation to provide better care for Kotobuki residents.

Tanaka Toshio, for instance, after years of arranging regular open-air medical consultations and doya patient visits, quit his job as a social worker and obtained a medical degree to open up a mental health clinic in the district. Notably, Kotobuki activists such as Tanaka did not see these transitions as an abandonment of their earlier causes, but rather as a continuation of their lifetime engagement in the district. This is shown by Tanaka's remark celebrating the fifth anniversary of the Kotobuki Communal Clinic that he founded:

For years and years, I have turned the pages of a calendar named Kotobuki every day and did my best to build my relationship with this town. But I can't see what's ahead no matter how far I go, as if I am in a bottomless swamp. I will have to walk forward and forward, although all I can see is what's right before me (Tanaka 2000:1-2).

In other words, leftist activists considered fulfilling welfare needs of Kotobuki residents as an indispensable part of their ongoing struggle of resistance, rather than as a renunciation of their earlier positions. Leftist community organizations continued to

engage in oppositional politics against local authorities to resist cutbacks in welfare provisions and the expulsion and abuse of the homeless, while also coordinating mundane care activities for vulnerable residents in the district.

Towards the Frontline of Welfare

While the leftist activists played a central role in making doya a legitimate residence for welfare recipients, the physical structures of the doya, as a result of innovative initiatives taken by the zainichi Korean landlords, were further enhanced to suit this purpose. Such changes took place, as the zainichi Korean doya owners, just as the leftist activists, had to struggle with the limitations of their own search for an alternative future in recent decades. Despite controlling most of the capital flow in the district, zainichi Koreans were constrained by their citizenship status and had little say in governmental urban redevelopment plans or the distribution of subsidies for neighborhood improvement, unlike homeowners' organizations elsewhere in Japan. At the height of the cold war period, the geopolitical conflicts intensified tensions among Koreans in the district, and the doya owners' co-op broke into two, each supporting one of the two Koreas. The division further delimited their negotiating power and frustrated subsequent attempts to build a Koreatown²⁰ akin to Yokohama's nearby Chinatown.

For zainichi Koreans, the future had lain elsewhere, and doya had been, more than anything else, a temporary means of livelihood and wealth that was otherwise out of their reach in Japan. The pro-North Korean zainichi doya owners in particular had raised their hopes in the prosperity of their aspired "fatherland" to which they dreamed of an ultimate return. Many maintained a strong ethnic identity and network, educating their children in pro-North Korean schools, and sending family members off to North

Korea during the “repatriation movement” organized by the International Committee of the Red Cross from the 1950s to the 1980s.²¹ Accordingly, revenues from the doya were diverted to North Korea in the form of remittances and gifts to family members and friends. Such an investment in an alternative future among pro-North Korea zainichi, however, became increasingly unsustainable in the new millennium.

Take Choi, a second-generation doya owner in his sixties. Choi’s father had worked in the construction industry in Tokyo until he moved to Kotobuki to start a pachinko business. Struggling to raise six children, Choi’s father lamented that Koreans could not get good jobs in Japan. One day, he concluded that “if we are to do manual labor, let’s do it to rebuild our country, not somebody else’s.” After painstaking deliberation, Choi’s parents decided to send their second son to North Korea, who would send them coded letters that would tell them whether it was indeed a “paradise on earth” (jisang ragwon). His letters conveyed that the reality in North Korea was far from what was promised by its propaganda. Regretting their decision, Choi’s parents sent money and goods to their son every year until the last days of their lives, and left as their final wish the request that Choi take care of his brother in the North. In 2004, when Choi visited Pyongyang to see his brother before his sixtieth birthday, his brother was in poor health. Choi found him in a hospital bed with no doctors around but only a nurse giving him an intravenous drip. His brother soon passed away from a heart attack, just a week before his birthday. Recounting the incident to me, Choi surmised that the hospital must have given his brother the wrong medication and neglected him up to his death. Choi changed his nationality to South Korean shortly thereafter.²²

Similarly, Chang, a second-generation doya owner in his sixties told me that his father had been a staunch supporter of North Korea. Once a leather workshop owner in Asakusa, his father had moved to Kotobuki and had sent all his children to pro-North

Korean schools. According to Chang, his father, despite being one of the first to build a doya in Kotobuki, could not construct multiple doya like others, as he sent most of the money he earned to North Korea. Chang's father took great pride in contributing to the development of North Korea, yet he ultimately lost his life in the country to which he had pledged allegiance. During a tourist trip to Mount Kumgang in 2004, the elevator in his hotel broke down, and he fell down the shaft. Despite all of the praise he had received for his patriotism while alive, Chang's father passed away without receiving any compensation or apology from the North Korean authorities.²³

In addition to such experiences of personal tragedy, many also mentioned the 2002 revelation of the abduction of Japanese citizens in Japan by North Korean agents as being a major turning point in their allegiance to North Korea.²⁴ Kaneda, a second-generation doya owner in his fifties mentioned the revelation as a moment of breakdown and disillusionment. Like Choi, Kaneda had gone to pro-North Korean schools and had a brother who had migrated to North Korea. Even though his parents were practical enough to support the rest of the children in receiving college education in prestigious Japanese universities, Kaneda and his siblings faced constant obstacles in finding decent jobs due to their affiliation with North Korea. When North Korea admitted to lying about the abductions, Kaneda started to question everything he had earlier thought to be true. Cross-checking the facts he had learned in his North Korean education with the information he found on the internet and in the media, he decided to terminate his affiliation with North Korea.²⁵ Many zainichi Korean doya owners made a similar move, and according to my informants, there was only one person who still maintained his North Korean passport among the members of the pro-North Korea doya owners' co-op. That person, I was told, had no choice because he still had a brother living in North Korea. The rest all changed their nationality to either Japan or South

Korea. In a monthly gathering of the co-op I attended in the summer of 2011, the members were planning a group tour to South Korea, a trip that would have been impossible for them a decade earlier.

The renunciation of their North Korean affiliation drove many zainichi Korean doya owners to readjust their positions and roles in Japanese society. Delighted to hear that I came from South Korea, Kaneda offered to show me the five doya buildings he owned, each renovated to be barrier-free buildings with handrails, sliding doors, electric hospital beds, and bathtubs for the elderly. Further enumerating the innovations he had introduced, from the hotel-like entrances to the women-only floors, Kaneda proudly said:

Tell people in South Korea that we fellow Koreans (jaeil gyopo) are doing this well, developing a [Japanese] town this much. You don't have those electronic bidets in Korea, right? I was the first one to install them here. South Korea will also have more elderly people, so you have to learn from this. It wasn't the Japanese who did it. We did it... I never leave this district, and study every day to improve each building. There used to be a lot of discrimination against us, but now it's different. We cannot live apart. We should manage to live in amity with the Japanese.²⁶

The pride and entrepreneurial spirit that Kaneda showed would partially explain why the Kotobuki district has witnessed the sudden surge of doya renovations in the past decade, compared to other yoseba districts where doya buildings have tended to be demolished as the first-generation owners retired. While doya can be a lucrative business, it also carries the stigma attached to yoseba districts. The material and affective investments that second-generation zainichi doya owners like Kaneda made in their doya cannot be grasped without considering their marginal status that pressured them into making the best out of what they have inherited from their parents. Unlike their Japanese counterparts, who preferred not to take over the stigma of the business

from their parents, the zainichi Korean doya owners endeavored to reclaim a place in Japanese society by turning doya into a “good business.”

Some zainichi Koreans have gone even further in embracing their caregiving role in the district. This is especially noticeable among zainichi Koreans who work more closely with the residents, such as doya managers or care workers. Minamoto, a Korean-Japanese doya manager, told me that he was motivated to make changes in the district after noticing the prevalence of isolated death (*kodokushi*), i.e. unattended death discovered after a long period. After coming across six isolated deaths in his first six months as a doya manager in 2001,²⁷ Minamoto started working with the doya owner to renovate the building. Most notably, he persuaded the doya owner to install a “nurse-call system” in each room, corridor, and restroom, so that the residents could contact him in case of emergency. In order to make sure that the doya residents had regular visitors, Minamoto helped them to register for the government helper system²⁸ and lunch box (*bentō*) delivery services. Staying 24 hours a day in his office, Minamoto developed a network of contacts with many supporters, from medical professionals to caseworkers, and even shared some of their responsibilities, such as administering daily medications for patients with dementia. Minamoto’s commitment to his doya residents was so well acknowledged in the district that a doctor at Kotobuki Communal Clinic told me that he felt relieved when his patients moved into Minamoto’s doya.

Figure 3: A barrier-free toilet with electronic washlet in Kaneda’s doya (photo by author).

Figure 4: Walking bars on the rooftop of a barrier-free doya (photo by author).

Lee, a middle-aged care worker I met in 2016, sympathized with the Japanese residents in the district. Lee’s workplace was one of the newest among the elderly care

facilities in the district, which have increased following the introduction of the long-term care insurance in 2000. Like other care facilities in the district, his day care center is located on the ground floor of a doya, in the space of a former karaoke bar. Inviting me to walk over with him to pick up a wheelchair-bound Japanese client from Minamoto's doya a few blocks away, Lee started talking to me in Korean. Mentioning that there had been many zainichi Koreans working in doya in the past because of the difficulties in getting proper jobs, Lee told me with humility, "all the Japanese people here also used to work in the past. Although they have weakened with age, they try very hard to rehabilitate even a little bit. I learn a lot here."²⁹ In juxtaposing the past suffering of zainichi Koreans and the Japanese residents in Kotobuki, Lee seemed to make sense of their conjoined lives at the bottom of the Japanese welfare system, on one side as service providers and on the other as welfare recipients.

Lee further emphasized how his care center contributed to the wellbeing of Kotobuki residents through a novel approach focused on rehabilitation beyond basic services such as bathing and meals. Lee's day care center is equipped with walking bars, shoulder pulleys, and exercise bikes, and offers Judo therapy by a licensed practitioner. Looking around the center as half a dozen clients exercised using various equipment with the help of the staff, I noticed that the music playing in the background was an orchestral arrangement of popular Korean children's songs. Lee proudly commented that they also paid attention to the music to create a therapeutic ambience.

The mixture of Korean pride with commitment to the advancement of welfare in Japan demonstrated by these zainichi Koreans encapsulates their hard-won place in Japanese society today. While their hopeful narratives may seem to exemplify immigrant success stories, it is undeniable that doya are still considered an illegitimate business in Japan and any association with yoseba enclaves is likely to be frowned upon.

Choi, who had also renovated his two doya with Kaneda's help, told me that the city government still considered their co-op as being pro-North Korea and tended to suppress them. According to Choi, during Abe Shinzo's first term as prime minister in 2006-2007, the co-op members were subject to intensive tax investigations and were charged heavy duties. Noting the high rate of public assistance provision in Kotobuki, Choi remarked how the Japanese state had used their tax money for welfare, covering housing and medical expenses as well as providing livelihood assistance for the residents of Kotobuki. With a hint of irony, Choi asked, "isn't this a paradise on earth?" Choi thus displayed the difficult position that zainichi Koreans occupy in Japan, as people whose contribution has been required, yet has gone unacknowledged.

The ventures of zainichi Koreans, in this sense, should be considered in light of their marginalized status, which circumscribes their possibilities within the means available to them in a stigmatized enclave. We might say that zainichi Koreans' rapprochement with the Kotobuki district and with Japanese society as a whole inadvertently converged with the leftist activists' ongoing pursuit of an alternative world. Their respective endeavors for a different future merged to make a dwelling place for impoverished elderly singles and people with severe disabilities and illness to live out their remaining years embraced in a nexus of care coordinated around them.

These endeavors would not have materialized without the tolerance and perseverance on the part of residents seeking possibilities of life with the activists and various caregivers in Kotobuki. Consider Suzuki, for instance, a sixty-four-year-old man I met during the monthly free open-air medical consultation in the summer of 2016. Nurse-activist Kumagai brought me along to visit Suzuki in his doya room. Once a manual laborer, Suzuki had done miscellaneous work from welding to construction before becoming immobilized after a stroke and the subsequent amputation of his leg.

He lived in a doya owned by the same landlord as Minamoto's doya, which was also constructed to be barrier-free. On the sliding door to his room was a typed note from his doctor at Kotobuki Communal Clinic: "Dear Mr. Suzuki's friends, Mr. Suzuki's life will be shortened if he drinks alcohol, so please bring juice or tea when you visit." When we knocked at the door, Suzuki greeted us from his bed with his eyes fixed to the LCD television screen broadcasting a high school baseball match. Next to his electric hospital bed were plastic water bottles, a urinal bottle, a portable toilet, and an air purifier that made Suzuki's room look like a private hospital ward. Kumagai went to check the calendar where the medicine packets of the day were hung to see if Suzuki had taken his daily medication for high blood pressure. The walls were covered with pictures of outings with friends from his alcoholics anonymous group, a handwritten note listing Suzuki's family members and their birthdays, and a daily log that Kumagai and other helpers and nurses communally kept to share crucial information about Suzuki's health, from grocery lists to medication.

Figure 5: Suzuki's room (photo by author)

Although Suzuki's health insurance only covered three days of nurse visits a week, Kumagai made sure to visit him every weekday, and even on Sundays when free medical consultations were held. After filling up water bottles and throwing out the garbage, Kumagai helped Suzuki get into his wheelchair. The three of us left his doya and chatted over sports drinks near to where the free consultations were being held. Kumagai and Suzuki discussed how things would change with the long-term care insurance that Suzuki would be entitled to next year as he turned sixty-five. Mentioning that Suzuki could have saved his leg had he completed his rehabilitation treatment after the stroke, Kumagai said that she hoped Suzuki would attend a day care center offering

services for physical rehabilitation. Suzuki nodded reluctantly. When I asked whether he regretted not completing his rehabilitation treatment, he answered “No, I have no regrets. It’s not in me to do things like rehabilitation.” “Are you content with your life now?” “Yes, all is fine.” Kumagai jumped in to speak for Suzuki – “It would be nice to be able to go out more, right?” – and explained that there were lots of constraints with the existing guide-helper system, which required reservations far in advance for a service limited to one hour. On our way back to his doya, we stopped at a vending machine on the ground floor where Suzuki got a packet of cigarettes, the only habit he could keep after giving up alcohol and gambling.³⁰

Leaving Suzuki’s doya, I contemplated what he meant by having no regrets. It must not be easy to live alone in frail health with limited mobility, and he must experience a great deal of frustration in having to rely on others’ help. Imagining what his life would have been elsewhere, however, I sensed that he had come to terms with his current life in Kotobuki over years of struggle in the interstices of control and abandonment. At least here, he could count on the care work coordinated around him without being placed under strict surveillance nor being totally neglected, while enjoying a smoke and occasional visits from his friends.

For Yoshida, who was twenty years younger and in better health than Suzuki, Kotobuki afforded other possibilities. Instead of receiving help in his doya, Yoshida continually sought social and therapeutic activities outside. Suffering from a congenital spinal deformity, Yoshida moved into Kotobuki after he became wheelchair-bound in his thirties. In his first years in Kotobuki, he was hospitalized multiple times for alcohol addiction; he eventually quit drinking after attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings in the district. When I met Yoshida in 2009, he had been living in Minamoto’s doya for five years. He had a helper coming to clean his room twice a week, but other than that,

he mostly managed by himself. He cooked and bathed by himself in the barrier-free kitchen and bathroom of his doya. For regular check-ups and wheelchair repairs, he went to the Kotobuki Communal Clinic right across the street.

Over the years, I often spotted Yoshida hanging out at the *bentō* delivery service near his doya. Later, I came to learn that Yoshida's childhood dream was to become a cook, which he once fulfilled during his stints at a *bentō* store and an Italian restaurant in his early twenties. "Those were the happiest days of my life," he reminisced. "Is that why you like to frequent the *bentō* store?" "Yeah, I guess."³¹ Yoshida told me that he had also attempted to cook in various welfare facilities in Kotobuki where he joined as a member, from a sheltered workshop for people with mental illness to a day care center for the patients of the Kotobuki Communal Clinic. Before I left Kotobuki in September 2016, Yoshida told me with delight that he was once again accepted to join another sheltered workshop for people with mental disabilities, a few blocks away from the district. I wondered if he would be cooking for the members of the workshop by my next visit to Kotobuki. While flexibly attuning himself to the care activities organized around his doya, the clinic, and the various workshops, Yoshida was also persevering with being a cook, the alternative self he wanted to be.³²

Conclusion

Tracing the engagements of leftist activists and zainichi Koreans in Kotobuki, this article has discussed its conditions of social and spatial exclusion, and considered the persistent efforts made by these marginalized groups against such forces. Kotobuki's transformation from a "wild west town" to a "welfare town" draws our attention to the resilience of alternative social projects (Povinelli 2011) against the biopolitics of spatial

governance. The two differently marginalized groups' relentless search for a different future in this enclave converged to transform the once bare lodgings for day laborers into care facilities for the impoverished elderly and people with disabilities.

Accordingly, it has become possible for many Kotobuki residents today to live alone while attuning themselves to the care activities coordinated by various parties in the district. The case of Kotobuki demonstrates how local histories of differentiation and marginalization may deflect neoliberal governmentality, giving rise to different kinds of subjects committed to caring and receiving care beyond the bounds of normativity. As technologies of the self are entangled with triaged governance that differentiates between those who deserve care and those who do not, alternative subjectivities may arise along social and spatial boundaries shaped by histories of colonialism, political repression, economic stratification, and social stigma.

In portraying the alternative technologies and practices of care in Kotobuki's doya today, I do not intend to idealize the district as a utopia. What lies ahead for Kotobuki remains uncertain. Currently, the district stands at a transient confluence between the long-term commitment of aging leftist activists who are increasingly burdened by the influx of elderly welfare recipients, and the entrepreneurial initiatives of *zainichi* Koreans, who are increasingly adopting neoliberal discourses. Meanwhile, there has been a steady increase in new organizations in the district, which might compromise the negotiating power that long-term activists have held vis-à-vis the authorities. Most notably, much media attention and governmental support have been given to a social enterprise running a youth hostel business in refurbished doya buildings, and a group organizing an artist-in-residence program, both of which might further alienate doya residents. Furthermore, in the conservative political climate under the Abe administration, the rise of public assistance has sparked political backlashes, as

epitomized by the phased cutbacks in assistance benefits since 2013. The activists I talked with were not sure if the *zainichi* Korean *doya* owners would lower their rents to match the curtailed housing assistance limit or would simply cater to those who could afford to pay the extra fees. Clearly, the sustaining of Kotobuki as a “space of otherwise” will rely on the ongoing pursuit of alternative relations of care, as well as the continuing conditions of exclusion faced by different actors in the district, all in the context of a changing Japanese political and social world.

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1 Kotobuki has appeared in two ethnographies focusing on the early 1990s. Tom Gill’s ethnography provides a vivid account of day laborers’ lives and social organizations (Gill 2001), while Carolyn Stevens’ ethnography elegantly portrays the social relationships

among volunteers, activists, and residents (Stevens 1997). Gill has also recently published a biography of a Kotobuki day laborer, Nishikawa Kimitsu, in Japanese and English (Gill 2013, 2015).

- ² All names of informants are pseudonyms, unless they have published under their real names. For Koreans, I used either Korean or Japanese last names as pseudonyms, depending on how they introduced themselves to me. All Japanese names follow the order of last name, first name. Interviews and conversations were held in Japanese and/or Korean, depending on the preference of my informants.
- ³ Zainichi (lit. residing in Japan) Koreans typically refer to descendants of Koreans who emigrated or were forcibly relocated to Japan during the Japanese occupation of Korea (1910-1945).
- ⁴ As the main aim of this article is to discuss the spatial transformation of Kotobuki district, I intentionally focus on these two groups who have played a major role in changing doya into care facilities, instead of the day laborers, the homeless, or other doya residents and groups. I have used zainichi Koreans who had affiliations with North Korea as my informants, as they were more willing to talk to me than those affiliated with South Korea.
- ⁵ Prime Minister Ikeda Hayato's Income Doubling Plan (*shotoku baizō keikaku* 1961-1970) was aimed at reducing the rural population by two-thirds in a decade in order to accelerate urbanization and economic growth. For more on the structural factors and policies that shaped the postwar yoseba districts see Matsuzawa 1988: 157-161.
- ⁶ Several groups have been classed as outcasts (hinin/eta) in the status hierarchy designated by the Tokugawa shogunate (1603-1868). The hinin encompassed a range of social dropouts including penurious vagrants, itinerant entertainers, the physically disabled, and criminals among others, while the eta referred to hereditary groups who specialized in tasks deemed as symbolically polluting such as slaughtering, leather-making, and executions (Groemer 2001). The descendants of hinin/eta and people whose residence and occupation are associated with them are known today as burakumin.
- ⁷ Tom Gill has contrasted Japan's approach to the "dispersal policy" employed in the United States (Gill 2001:185). According to Gill, the American approach was based on "a cancerous growth metaphor, seeking to break up the skid row and disperse its inhabitants, seeing the threat to society lessened when spread more thinly."
- ⁸ Although it is hard to find official health statistics of yoseba districts, memoirs and reports written by doctors, public health practitioners, and activists give us a glimpse of the patterns of disease and mortality shared by these districts over the past decades (Fujii 1990; Honda 1966; Koyanagi 1990; Saeki 1982; Takayanagi 1987; Watanabe 1977)

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- 9 For more on the history of Kotobuki, see Gill (2001:47-9) and Stevens (1997:22-50).
- 10 For instance, see Kantō daishinsai ni okeru Chōsenjin gyakusatsu no jijitsu o kyūmei suru Yokohama no kai 2016 and Yamamoto 2014.
- 11 Interview with Park on June 7, 2011 and with Choi on June 17, 2011.
- ¹² For an overview of the New Left movements in Japan, see Ando 2014.
- 13 Even in post-3/11 Japan, where massive anti-nuclear protests have reappeared in public space, the emphasis on the “ordinariness” (*futsū*) of these protests by the mass media and the participants reveals the lingering stigma attached to dedicated activism (Slater et al. 2015:12).
- ¹⁴ Matsuzawa Tessei (1988: 160-163) provides a succinct overview of the power struggles waged by yoseba laborers and activists from the first San’ya riots in 1959 to the activities of the National Council of Day Laborers’ Union in the 1980s.
- 15 The beginning of the occupation is well recorded in the documentary made by Ogawa Productions, “Yo-ho! Men’s Ballad: Kotobuki, the Free Laborers’ Town” (*Dokkoi Ningenbushi: Kotobuki, jiyū rōdōsha no machi*) (1975). The screening of the film in Kotobuki itself became part of the occupation movement bringing in more laborers and sympathizers to support the Kotobuki Day Laborers’ Union.
- ¹⁶ See Aoki (1984) for a more detailed account of the incidents. Kitamura (1997) offers a comprehensive report on the attacks against the homeless by children and young adults that occurred across the nation over the past decades in Japan.
- 17 For the expansion of advocates in Kotobuki over the 1990s to 2000s, see Hayashi 2014:190-197. Hayashi notes how some local activists endeavored to broaden the base of support for people in Kotobuki by allowing for young people to take part in the movement without necessarily having to assume an activist (*katsudōka*) identity.
- 18 It is still extremely difficult for people under the age of sixty-five or without illness to apply for public assistance, as the welfare offices customarily turn them away. Nevertheless, the strong advocacy of local activists in Kotobuki tends to preclude the welfare office from rejecting applicants without due cause.
- ¹⁹ According to the city’s 2015 statistics, of the total doya residents of 6,150 in Kotobuki, 88 per cent were recipients of public assistance, and 68 per cent were over 60 years of age (Yokohama-shi Kenkōfukushi-kyoku Kotobuki Chiku Taisaku Tantō 2016).
- 20 According to Tom Gill, a blueprint of Koreatown was drawn up by a Yokohama architect’s office, as commissioned by some doya owners in 1992 (Gill 1996:477). The ambitious plan, part of which was also reported in a local newspaper in 1994, envisioned dividing the district into five zones, including a zone of a Korean-themed shopping mall (Ibid. 477-

481; ‘Kotobuki chiku o Korea taun ni’, Kanagawa shimbun, 10 October, 1994). The zainichi Korean doya owners I talked to, who were mostly second and third generations, did not have good recollections of the plan.

21 For more on the “repatriation movement,” see Bell 2016

22 Conversation on June 17, 2011.

23 Conversation on June 17, 2011.

24 While the Japanese government had long pointed the finger at North Korea over the disappearance of Japanese citizens in the 1970s and 1980s, North Korea had strongly denied the allegations and criticized Japan for false propaganda. However, in the summit meeting between the late North Korean leader Kim Jong Il and the Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro in September 2002, Kim admitted that North Korean secret agents had abducted thirteen Japanese civilians. The revelation severely damaged the standing of pro-North Korea zainichi Koreans in Japan, and many renounced their affiliation thereafter. For more on the repercussions of the 2002 revelation for pro-North Korea zainichi Korean communities, see Ha 2017.

25 Conversation on May 25 and 27, 2012.

26 Conversation on May 25, 2012.

27 Interview on November 15, 2011.

28 The home-help system became affordable for households with senior citizens over 65 with the implementation in 2000 of long-term care insurance in Japan. While Kotobuki used to be avoided by home-help companies, their number has recently increased and as of 2014 there were six helper stations within and around the district.

29 Conversation on September 14, 2016.

³⁰ Field notes from August 21, 2016.

³¹ Conversation on July 18, 2016.

³² For comparison, see Tom Gill’s biography of Nishikawa Kimitsu, which provides a detailed account of how a former day laborer has spent his final years in Kotobuki (2015:99-116). It should be noted that neither Suzuki nor Yoshida represents the whole spectrum of the current residents of Kotobuki, whose life trajectories widely vary.

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