

A Tokyo Story: The Family Volume

Akiyuki Nosaka

A private railway ran west of Shibuya¹ here in this area, which opened during early Showa². The neighborhood was most likely a suburb during those times. The roads and plots were spacious. Perhaps the land was once full of fields but today it's made up of trees overflowing with thick branches. One would not see many people or much sun if he were to walk a little ways from the station.

I moved to the outskirts of this city thirteen years ago. The layout of its neighborhoods was something in which I had no knowledge or interest. As I walked around, however, it was odd to see the homeowners outside their houses, furnished with Western bay windows that imitated a Japanese style. There were also rose hedges, brick chimneys, and old green houses that had been dutifully cared for every summer and winter.

Rarely have I ever seen an older person, mostly likely cared for by a daughter-in-law, as he admired his gardener's finished handiwork. His clothes were surprisingly fashionable. I suppose he went to a family get-together where men and women, young and old, gathered around each other while old married couples took pictures.

When I looked up the nameplates of the houses in the directory, I came across the names of parliament members, Olympic horse riders, and famous newspaper reporters from back then. There were also chamberlains, born sometime around the end of the last century.

Of course, funerals were a normal occurrence. Streetlights shone on the streets, lined with vinyl wreaths and lanterns bearing a certain person's name. A procession of cars was filled with anxious guests who came to express their condolences. My strolls were often met with these regular types of gatherings.

The old nameplates were left for about a year, and by the time they were taken down, oftentimes the house would have been rebuilt. The powers that be, perhaps on a basis related to property inheritance, reached a decision to divide the land. In the center there was a modern detached house with an empty lot facing the street. White and brown Western style row houses, so-called "villas," were built on that vacant lot. The homes were narrow but together they took up as much space as a semi-basement parking lot.

Including the houses where the funeral took place, wooden homes must have been past their prime. The new homes that spread like wildfire were depreciating the value of the old houses. The old ones were destroyed and in their place, construction tarps revealed nothing more

than prefabricated homes. And then, once those were built, I couldn't remember how everything looked before. This is how I pass the time. Rather, this is my own way of understanding things. I just didn't want to be at home. I felt uneasy as I wondered what I had been seeing until now. There was no rhyme or reason to my walking around.

On my stroll, which was less than ten minutes from the station, I saw the same old empty lots and construction sites. If I compared the way this neighborhood looked now to the way it did when I first moved here, I'd say that its appearance has changed significantly. I didn't have any particularly strong feelings about suddenly getting used to this.

The city must have put so much care into the three playgrounds that it opened. Playing fetch with dogs wasn't allowed. The playgrounds were on a scale different from that of the narrow inner city. All three parks were equipped with sandboxes, park benches, trash receptacles, and public restrooms. In the open space, a young mother let her child run around and play. Zelkova trees, ginkgos, sakuras, and chinquapins faced the street. Other than the people using the park as a shortcut, the place was empty and deserted.

I normally don't walk exhausting distances but I do rest on benches from time to time. As usual, I had my beer from the vending machine in hand. I made sure to place enough distance between myself and the mother and her little boy. These shrine compounds and parks were built without much thought. The cabbage patches, potatoes, and onions were grown that way too. The fields had been carelessly constructed and then abandoned. If a case of molestation were to happen in a place like this, word would get around often in the ward.

Certainly a mother would despise the sight of me drinking midday. Before I realized it, a woman sat on the bench with me, or rather, one seat over. Perhaps she was in her mid forties. She wore heavy make-up. Her gray suit was an odd choice for the early autumn weather.

"Do you know why I'm here?"

Depending on how one would interpret her question, it may have sounded eerie.

"You're probably not going to believe this but the little boy in the hat that's playing over there—he's my son."

When I looked up, there were three mothers playing with three children.

"Something happened and I had to give him up so I just wanted to see how he was doing," she said indifferently.

Pressed for a response, I barely nodded. She smiled at me and moved closer to my side of the bench.

“He’s turning three and starting kindergarten next year, looks like he’s being raised well.”

There were traces of discoloration in her hair. Her possessions included a green handbag and a brown paper bag. Her way of speaking was over familiar, as if she was soliciting insurance or preaching something. Maybe she was slightly manic and didn’t realize that her own story made no sense.

“I have bad luck with husbands and I’m on my third one, you see, I grew up in a strict household, and while I was in an all-girls school my parents made arrangements for me to marry a man five years my senior and he worked at a firm and I married him as soon as I graduated so my best friends enjoyed their youth while I lived as a housewife.”

I thought that my cold expression was plain for her to see but the woman didn’t take notice. She continued to dive deeper into her life story.

She took out a cigarette from a plastic case, which was a rare sight considering the times.

“Did you know that this year marks nineteen years since my first husband’s death? He died in Argentina, where he relocated for work; it was a car accident, a head-on collision and three Japanese people and four locals died and it was in the papers too.”

As she talked, her eyes followed the child in the hat.

“Have some if you'd like,” the woman placed a potato chip bag between us. She then took out her wine. I recognized the bag; she’d made a purchase from the store in front of the station.

Even though it was an early afternoon in autumn, sun rays were heavily beating down on us. Calm and collected, I also drank my beer. This was my third one. I bought two but that wasn’t enough so I had bought two more.

I can’t explain why we were turning into a couple of drunks. Misery loves company, so I took pity on her and tuned in to her story.

The woman took on caring for her late husband's orphan, a three year old girl. She said that she had not wanted to throw her life away for the daughter.

“I had just turned twenty-six years old. And there were still people from my class who hadn’t even married yet. My husband's family business—Did you know? It’s an old shop in Shiba³ that handles safes. My father-in-law was also healthy but my brother-in-law inherited the business. Nowadays safes are a little out-dated but they’re in high demand. They're like the family altars that you keep at home.”

“My husband was from Yoyogi⁴. We lived in a house with a garden so spacious you could look at the cherry-blossoms in the spring. We lived in a large condo in Daikanyama⁵.

I obtained that property after my husband passed. My brother-in-law adopted the child. He had two sons. He said that he had wanted a little girl. Thanks to him, she’s being cared for. She’s really good at science even for a girl.”

It seems like the daughter went to a well-known women's college and got hired by a major computer company.

“A four year marriage isn’t that long but I’ll never forget the memories and we went to the United States for our honeymoon and my husband graduated from the Chicago School of Business and after New York we visited his alma mater’s campus and that was around the end of the summer. Manhattan’s heat was unbelievable and the winds from Lake Michigan were refreshing.”

The woman didn’t talk about anything recent. She sipped her afternoon wine in the park while gazing with hesitation at her flesh and blood from a distance. She described the tragic drama that was her past with very little to no emotion. At the end of their first year of marriage, there were signs of conception. Her husband, who prepared everything for living in the United States, negotiated with his company and refused to go on long business trips.

Not only that but, “It was the start of the Lamaze technique⁶— did you know? We took a birthing class together at I Hospital and I swam with a pregnant belly, attended dance parties, and went to concerts. For about five days before and after childbirth my husband would commute to work from the hospital and he and my mother were able to stay overnight with me there.”

Even after her little girl was born, her husband would only leave home to go to work. Afterwards, he’d quickly come back home without going out drinking with his co-workers.

The woman worried about this behavior affecting his chances of getting promoted.

But her husband told her that all the money in the world meant nothing compared to the baby.

He repeatedly thanked his wife for giving birth to their child.

“But as a married couple we needed quality time together and one of our parents would watch after our daughter while we made the most of our free time together traveling and when I was a little girl there was this popular song called *Hello Little Baby* and there’s a part that goes, *Please give mama and papa a quiet night so we can be alone together*, right? And when I remember the lyrics I feel joy but I had let someone else look after my child.”

“That may be true but for your daughter’s sake, it was probably for the best,” I tried to add my input to show that I was listening.

When I finally formed the words, however, the woman suddenly leaned her body forward and looked off in the other direction. I followed her line of sight to the boy in the hat and the mother. The pair was headed home.

"I’ve said too much." The woman chugged the rest of her drink. Neither of us had touched the bag of chips. She left the chips and walked away.

Despite her story being a bit weird, nothing from it really caught my attention. The little boy's father seemed to be the woman's third husband. There should be a child in her household but with her giving up her first daughter, there might have been a gap between the first born and the youngest. If that was true, then she had bad luck with children. I wanted to understand the history behind that.

Her polite tone of voice contradicted her appearance. Furthermore, her day drinking made me think that she wasn't very fortunate. I stayed on the bench for a while to sober up before going home to my wife. On my way back home, I saw that the mother had gone outside again. She was holding the child’s hand as usual. She really had the expression of a carefree mother. It was peculiar how young she looked. I wasn’t sure whether she or her husband was unable to have children.

Deeming the couple infertile would have been too hasty of a judgment to make.

Afterwards, when I passed by the other side of the park, I noticed a park bench and a sandpit near a thick grove of trees. If I saw the woman from before, my laziness would have gotten the better of me and I wouldn’t have bothered talking to her. Without a doubt, she was peculiar.

Two months later, I visited one of the five temples alongside an old road about five minutes away from my house. I had no intention of being a tombstone tourist yet I went around converting Japanese era years on the surface of weathered grave posts into western calendar years.

There were countless marked tombstones engraved with a death anniversary from the tenth of March, Showa year twenty-four⁷. Each grave brought up memories.

I weaved my way between the labyrinth-like graves, reconstructed in facade-like fashion. When I exited the temple gates—and this might have all been in my head but I saw that woman, standing out amongst the other people walking by, walking towards me.

“Hello,” I greeted her reflexively. Although expressionless, she acknowledged me with some nervousness.

“Thank you for the other day,” I couldn’t say anything else given how awkward I also felt.

“The weather has cooled down a lot,” she closely watched me while speaking.

“My house is close by,”

“Is that right?”

“How about tea? Are you in a hurry?”

“Oh, if it’s not much trouble.”

I hesitated because my words could have been interpreted as an invitation to my home but I took the initiative and opened the door to a coffee shop between two of the temples.

“This floor is just like the one in my kitchen,” she whispered.

“I’ll have a beer but would you like some rice wine?”

“I’ll have the same as you.”

I still couldn’t wrap my head around her motive for striking up a conversation with me. She had a purple lamé fabric turtleneck sweater, a brown skirt, and a rather large red bag. She held the bottom of the glass with her left hand and took two gulps of her beer. “We’re moving to a new place.”

She then said, as if she was enthusiastic about having gained an audience, “I’m reluctant to move because the shopping mall is so close to where we live now and since we don’t have the money to own two houses it’s a little far and it would be difficult getting my daughter to her lessons—Did you know? My daughter sometimes comes on TV.”

She told me her daughter’s name but I didn’t know of her.

“Did you know?” seemed like her favorite catchphrase.

The daughter of her first husband liked science. The daughter of the second husband seemed to have her sights set on the entertainment industry. Her second husband was a hardworking and successful certified international jewel appraiser from Tohoku.

“Did you know? We rented a small space and started our own jeweler between Ueno⁸ and Okachimachi⁹ where there are plenty of jewelers and it was during our third year of marriage that we built a four story building.

“My first husband often went abroad to Israel, South Africa, and the Netherlands and his specialty was more than just diamonds—Cat’s eye, Sapphire, Alexandrite, Ruby, all kinds and he

died overseas and I suffered anxiety and had a bit of a nervous breakdown but it's strange, isn't it—doing something like shoplifting?"

The story's timeline jumped around. The woman talked about how after the death of her first husband, she leased a room in Daikanyama to someone before moving back in with her own parents. While living her carefree lifestyle, she got invited to a game of golf. That's when she met her second husband.

"My first impression of him was an old country boy. He had traveled the world for many years. Of course he had plenty of stories when I was first introduced to him. His job was going well. My friend from school was just after his money but it looked like I took him from her."

I felt like she was boasting about her school days.

"Men probably couldn't guess this but I was twenty-seven and he was forty-two when we first married and it wasn't impossible to believe that this was his first marriage because I later learned that he was the youngest of a whole bunch of girls and had a strong mother.

"The husbands of my sister-in-laws were mediocre men but my husband was the most successful sibling in the family and he lived between Kudanzakaue and Iidabashi¹⁰ and everyday my husband's relatives were around and then a building in Okachimachi was built and we moved to the third and fourth floors there.

"My daughter had already been born but my mother-in-law and my divorced sister-in-law didn't let me touch her and my husband couldn't stand back and watch his mother and sister do that to us but if you think about our child's future Kudan¹¹ would have been a better school district."

There was enough space for dance parties on the third floor, a roomy western style room, a dining area, and a kitchen. All the bedrooms were on the fourth floor. The second room was where her husband kept his appreciation for classical music and artwork. He didn't keep oil paintings. Instead lithographs caught his eye. He had early pieces by Chagall¹² and Buffet¹³.

He conducted many business gatherings. He'd invite a cook over every time to make food.

"It was a really social place—he'd hire a chamber orchestra but it was cheerful and he cherished his family and maybe it's because he wasn't very fortunate when he was a child because I heard that he was a futon salesman during the war which was when business was going really well and he suddenly became rich and wasn't able to manage his money wisely.

"But I indulged too with my decoupage, arts and crafts, and my shamisen¹⁴ and playing

my hopeless biwa¹⁵ brought him joy but my biwa wasn't a match for my daughter's piano skills because in the morning my husband would lie in bed and listen to my daughter play Chopin and apparently it was his long-time dream to do that."

Although he was from Tohoku, he often ate Tokyo style soba noodles, tempura, and eel.

He would walk and eat on his way to movie theatres and music halls.

She might have been particular about appearances but she had left in a discolored part of her hair, which wasn't very noticeable. I got the vaguest impression of a Chagall cultural style from her lamé gold sweater.

I don't think she meant to make a huge deal about it but besides piano, her daughter was studying ballet and traditional Japanese dance. Relatives and in-laws filled the seats at recitals, which her husband made sure to show up for after his international trips.

I asked, "You only have a daughter?"

"No, we had twin boys shortly after, but one of them died and it was regarded as my carelessness and the one who survived was to become the heir so that's why my sister-in-law and mother-in-law took him away to Kudan."

The woman, shocked by the death of one of the twins, lost all confidence. She entrusted her son to her in-laws, who put her son in a reputable boy's school in Kudan. They wanted her daughter to continue lessons but she failed the Peers School¹⁶ entrance exam.

"Having his jewelry shop in Ueno wasn't working out for my husband. He got angry and moved his business to a different part of the city. He made the right decision as he was trying to get more exposure for his jewelry products, not his gems. But still."

He tried in vain. Her husband suffered burnout from overworking himself. That's when he contracted jaundice, which turned out to be cancer that had spread throughout his liver. His days were numbered.

"The family doctor thought I didn't know any better and told me that it was just gallstones that were impairing his liver but he told my in-laws the correct diagnosis."

Originally, her husband did not know. He was hospitalized for a month and temporarily returned home.

"My husband was in his mid-fifties and he said that he thought he'd be able to take it easy but the doctor forbade him from traveling."

After all the work her husband put into his shop, his protégés and clients ran off like rats from a sinking ship. Even then, as long as her husband was alive, they were supported and didn't

have anything to worry about. She was told, however, that her husband ended up in the hospital six months later than the doctor had predicted because of a foot edema. Three days later, he had major bleeding in his stomach, and before she could really grasp what was going on, her brother-in-law told her the despairing truth.

As her husband, the most successful family member of his family, faced certain death, his relatives got their affairs in order.

“And so, out of pity, they allowed me and my daughter to stay in Okachimachi. I entered a business partnership with the manager of the store at first but I didn’t understand everything well so I signed some papers by accident and my husband’s inheritance became nothing and I pledged that building as collateral.”

The woman, in exchange for consolation money, moved out of Okachimachi and returned to Daikanyama.

“I didn’t want my daughter to have a tough life so I started working.”

An acquaintance of her husband got the woman a job as a hostess at a bar in Shinjuku¹⁷.

“My husband often brought me to clubs in Ginza but my job was a side that I’ve never seen before.”

She was forty years old. She put all her hopes into her daughter. As a single mother working night shifts, the woman did her best to be a good woman.

“I may look like this but I’m strong and I was naïve but I grew thick skin.”

Her daughter, who got into a school that many entertainers attended, quickly matured.

“Of course I ended up neglecting my household duties entirely and my daughter took charge but even under normal circumstances she had school on top of her lessons and so she took on the role as woman of the house and what does a good household environment for a mother and daughter even look like? You can interpret this as bad but we toiled over one another and as a parent and I knew it wasn’t good and I would come back home a little drunk in the morning and so I depended on her and my coffee would be a thermos and my stomach medicine would be on top of my pillow.

“I know that I sound like a doting parent but my daughter is so talented. She’s a future prima donna in her ballet troupe and she even got the seal of approval for her traditional Japanese dancing too. Even among all those other young dancers, she’s highly reputable. They say she has good form. I think she was born with it.”

She spoke emotionlessly without a single pause.

We drank around ten small bottles together.

She told me that a year later she married her third husband, her current partner. He was a Nisei¹⁸ Taiwanese twenty years her senior.

He was the owner of a restaurant located at the last stop on a private train that ran through Shibuya.

“I’m not the kind of person to dodge responsibility as a single mother but my previous husband’s associate had only nice things to say about him and I was told that he was personable for his age and that he also lived a stable lifestyle. At the time I was straining my nerves and before I knew it my job had become too much for me and it had to have been all that stress and people asked me, ‘What will your daughter do if something happens to you?’”

“Does this man have children?”

“He has three. All of them are out of the house. One’s a doctor and the others work in an office. The Taiwanese man’s wife passed away years ago.”

Her daughter, wise beyond her years, expressed no qualms about moving.

“I knew Daikanyama was becoming very expensive so finally I thought of getting rid of it but it’s a place with so many memories and I got people to rent out the space for me.”

She and her daughter moved in with the Taiwanese man in a house that was four stops away from the station’s central railway line. The woman became pregnant immediately after.

“I planned on getting rid of the baby but my husband was against it and it’s just that at my age I don’t have any confidence in raising a child but I knew a couple that were distant relatives of my husband—the house where my husband’s grandmother was born has a wife who married into the family and that wife’s grandchild’s wife’s younger sister was barren so I thought that she’d certainly take care of the baby.”

“The woman from before who you were watching over.”

“Yes and my husband took the initiative and made the arrangements and the couple adopted the child three weeks after birth but the little boy and his parents didn’t know anything about me.”

“Do you visit your son sometimes?”

“I hardly do and it’s a coincidence if we ever run into each other but it’s not like I ever decide when I’ll stop by their place, I guess.”

Her daughter’s dancing lessons happened to be in Akasaka¹⁹, ballet was in Aoyama²⁰, and her piano lessons were in Nerima²¹. Her school was in Shinjuku.

“It’s difficult when you’re in the advanced level but I tried my best to pick her up at night and my husband said that if I got my license he would buy me a car but my first husband died from a car accident, remember—even though it’s been twenty years since then I still can’t grip a steering wheel without losing my nerve.”

Returning to what happened with the adoption, it might have seemed like an act of selfishness but the woman later saw it as an effort based on the hardship that her husband experienced as a Nisei Taiwanese person in a foreign country.

Her husband had a kind personality. He understood the need for her daughter’s lessons. Taking the range of activities into consideration, he decided to move them to Yotsuya²².

“He’s so old fashioned and right now he’s very attached to our garden because the new place is going to be a condominium²³.”

“You said that you have bad luck with your husbands but isn’t it the other way around? There’s no need for you to give your utmost devotion to just one man. Each one has a different personality but most importantly, they are all good people.”

“You’re right about how their kindness was almost wasted on me and it must have been the age difference that made my husband puts up with my selfishness and the entertainment world costs money and things like dancing at the National Theatre of Japan costs more than a million yen²⁴.”

Thanks to her husband, her daughter was able to appear on TV.

“You’re blessed with good children too. Even if they’re not living with you, those children are definitely yours.”

“You’re right—please watch my daughter someday,”

Again she told me her daughter’s name and added, “When she appears on a big sponsored commercial someday, we’ll have money to her name.”

Said like a real showbiz parent. She was a little drunk but didn’t show it. In the same manner as last time, she left as if she was cutting all ties with me. I grew weary of the way she talked. No intonation and very few pauses.

Well, she seemed like one of those cutesy types of women. An elite business man, an ambitious jeweler, and then a Taiwanese restaurant-owner. She adjusted her life to match each of her husbands and together they built a pretty happy family life. The daughter is alone and that’s a little pitiful but since the other three children aren’t there, her parents can give her more attention.

I can't say for women in general but at least in that woman's case, she was able to build a new family an endless number of times. And as for her former families that disappeared, similar to torn-down houses, there are no pieces left to try and rebuild.

She showed some hang-up regarding the room in Daikanyama and the accident of her first husband, but it didn't amount to much.

That woman's household, for the time being, meant living with a well-off husband and having children.

It's not like I didn't take her word for it. Everyone has their own side of the story. I think that if the entertainment world affected this woman's unusual appearance as a showbiz parent, it's that kind of thing to understand. The rice wine, from her time as a stand-in hostess, became a force of habit.

Based on her day drinking and her tone of voice, I could see the sadness in her. She told me, a complete and total stranger, her long, personal history. In my honest opinion, the woman had no one else to talk to about her life.

I felt bad for her, but my conclusion is that she was a woman of pride.

And so, I forgot all about that woman.

When I happened to see that mother and child from the park, I observed them, and before I realized it, I had figured out approximately where they lived. I guess I cared more than I thought. They lived in one of the homes attached to a row of houses. You could say it was good living for a young couple.

In April, yaezakura flowers were full and heavy. When the colors grew faint late in the spring, the most elegantly shaped houses in this area were destroyed in one day. On a plot of land, estimated to be around a thousand meters, unrefined bungalows appeared. Young newcomers flocked to them to live as clamoring evangelists of some new faith.

When I passed this side of town, I always felt displeased but it was there that I bumped into the mother and her child.

The mother had a round belly jutting out of her maternity dress. Walking with a heavy gait, she captured my gaze confidently and continued walking towards me

She was supposed to have been barren. Pregnancy was impossible for her.

Yaezakura petals fell on her shoulders as she turned the corner.

It's not that my realization was based on her appearance but I understood that the other woman had tricked me into believing her make-believe story.

I look out once more at the old and new houses, lined up along a wide road leading to the station. I'm certain that with the weather having improved, that woman will snag another man, innocently sitting on a bench keeping to himself.

She'll say the lines that she's rehearsed down to the last detail.

“Do you know why I'm here? You probably won't believe this but...”

Perhaps she'll trick another person into playing house with her like she did with me.

Katei-hen (The Family Volume) is one of the fourteen short stories included in the *Tokyo Shosetsu (Tokyo Short Stories)* collection published in 1990. In these short stories, Nosaka offers a critique on Japan's Post-Bubble Economy (1986-1991) and consumer culture.

Notes:

- 1 Shibuya is a ward in Tokyo known for its vibrant nightlife and shopping districts.
- 2 Showa is an era in Japanese history that marks the rule of Emperor Showa, which lasted from December 25, 1926 to January 7, 1989. The Taisho era followed.
- 3 Shiba was a ward in Tokyo that existed between 1878 and 1947. It is currently part of Minato ward.
- 4 Yoyogi is a neighborhood in the northern part of Shibuya ward, Tokyo. It's known for being home to Yoyogi Park and the National Stadium.
- 5 Daikanyama is a Brooklyn-like neighborhood of Shinjuku ward, Tokyo. It's known for its small shops and boutiques.
- 6 The Lamaze technique is designed to help expecting mothers relax to help facilitate labor. It gained popularity in the 1950s and gained even more attention in later years.
- 7 Year twenty-four of Showa in Western calendar years is 1949, the end of Post-WWII Allied Occupation of Japan. The country went under major social and political change undertaken by the US Government. Nosaka, part of the *yakeato* (scorched earth or lost generation) who survived the bombing during WWII, often incorporated autobiographical parts in his works to reflect his struggles with adjusting to Japan during and after the Occupation.
- 8 Ueno is a district that's contains the well-known Ueno Park. It's home to many of Tokyo's cultural museums and centers.
- 9 Okachimachi is an area in Ueno that's famous for its variety of restaurants and shopping centers.

(Notes cont.)

10 Both Kudanzakaue and Iidabashi are districts in the Chiyoda ward of central Tokyo.

11 Kudan is a district of the Chiyoda ward in central Tokyo. The Imperial Palace is located there.

12 Marc Chagall was a Russian-French painter known for painting stained glass.

13 Bernard Buffet was a French painter that gained attention for his morbid and grim paintings. He was also a part of the post-WWII abstract expressionism movement.

14 A three-stringed lute that has a square-shaped body that looks similar to a banjo. It is usually played with a plectrum called a *bachi*.

15 A biwa is a pear-shaped short-necked lute with four or five frets (strings) that one must pluck to play.

16 Founded in 1842 during the Meiji Period, Peers School or *Gakushuuin* is a private school that offers levels from Kindergarten to University. The children of nobility attend the institution, contributing to its prestigious reputation.

17 Shinjuku is a ward in Tokyo known for its entertainment and business districts.

18 Nisei means second generation. It's referring to the fact that the Taiwanese man was born in Japan but is not of Japanese descent.

19 Akasaka is a luxurious district known for its grand architecture, hotels, restaurants, and entertainment hubs.

20 Aoyama is one of the wealthiest neighborhoods of Minato ward, Tokyo

21 Nerima is a ward in Tokyo. It is home to many famous Japanese animation studios.

22 Yotsuya is a neighborhood in Shinjuku, Tokyo.

23 In the Japanese text, Nosaka writes *manshon* (mansion) which refers to a large apartment, not a luxurious estate.

24 Ten million yen is approximately ten thousand USD.