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The trickier import: Should the use of 'social exclusion' (shakaiteki haijo) be abandoned in Japan?

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In my main paper, I shed light on the processes through which the 'NEET' category and the Connexions Service (UK) have exerted influence on Japan's first policies for formally inactive young adults. I refrained from explicitly examining whether the closely related general paradigm of 'social exclusion' – translated typically as *shakaiteki haijo* in Japanese – has passed through similar processes of transfer and indigenisation.¹ This I did for three reasons. First, it is clear that the transfer of social exclusion to Japan has so far been partial and tentative: while the concept has attracted reasonable attention among social scientists, the central government and the general public hardly acknowledge it. Hence, unlike 'NEET', it is not (at least yet) a concept that *directly* drives and informs policy (although it may be doing so implicitly). Moreover, 'social exclusion' faces stiff competition from the 'disparity' and 'independence' discourses. Second, since this is a concept that has potential relevance to a number of social policy sub-fields and research traditions, it is most likely being interpreted and introduced in several *parallel domains* in an uncoordinated fashion. Third, there have been few serious attempts to explicitly *adapt* social exclusion to the Japanese context: most accounts instead trace its usage in Europe or omit defining it altogether. All of the above makes it difficult to speak of 'indigenisation' in a proper sense of the term.

This afterword elaborates on the above points by asking *who* in Japan currently use 'social exclusion' and by inquiring into how this concept contrasts and overlaps with the two far more widespread notions of 'disparity' (*kakusa*) and 'independence' (*jiritsu*). In the final section, I raise critical questions pertaining to the future of this idea in Japan. What is the *utility* of 'social exclusion' as a policy paradigm in the Japanese context? Is it at all desirable to use an awkward-sounding translation of a European concept to reframe social problems and policies in Japan? Even granting that policy ideas and

¹ In this paper, I am concerned throughout with the *concept* of 'social exclusion' rather than with actual forms of exclusion that may be empirically shown to exist in society (e.g. the exclusion of the homeless or of single mothers etc.).

terms from abroad are often adopted in Japan with a *strategic* purpose in mind (as was the case with ‘NEETs’ and Connexions), it is hard to see much value in pushing for the language of *shakaiteki haijo* in Japan: another concept that captures the idea of dynamic and overlapping disadvantages (both material and non-material) could indeed fare much better.² If, regardless of these sceptical views, ‘social exclusion’ is to become a viable concept that can inform actual *policy*, then I argue it is required that a) the concept is convincingly adapted to the Japanese context, and b) that a strategy is formulated for pushing this concept into the government’s vocabulary so that it will stand a chance of significantly influencing policy-making. In the end, I provide some of such strategic considerations and contemplate how an approach resembling social exclusion but that is fully adapted to the relevant social context – and that builds on pre-existing discourses – could come into being in Japan.

It should be noted here that this account draws heavily on my research into Japan’s youth independence support measures (*wakamono jiritsu shien seisaku*), including a year’s worth of fieldwork in the Japanese youth support community. Hence, I put emphasis on the relevance of ‘social exclusion’ in this particular policy domain while acknowledging the need to pay attention to how the concept has been employed in relation to the disabled and the elderly, for instance.

The use of ‘social exclusion’ in Japan at present

Somewhat surprisingly, ‘social exclusion’ has begun to attract considerable attention across segments Japanese society. The predominant Japanese term for ‘social exclusion’ is *shakaiteki haijo*, essentially a literal translation from English. However, *haijo* (exclusion) has previously been associated with the oppressive discrimination that groups such as the Burakumin and the Ainu have faced in Japan. Hence, to many ordinary Japanese people, ‘exclusion’ has a strongly negative connotation and implies near-complete marginalisation. This arguably makes the term *per se* hard to popularise in a general sense. Its negativity also makes it unlikely that the government would adopt

² Room (1999) distinguishes five dimensions of ‘social exclusion’ in the EU and the UK that sets it apart from earlier poverty-based approaches. However, in minimal form, social exclusion essentially denotes a process by which deprivation of material resources and/or social connections to the wider ‘mainstream’ society or community is experienced by individuals and households (Scott and Marshall 2005:204). This is similar to the UK New Labour government’s understanding of social exclusion as multiple deprivation and as ‘joined-up problems’ that require ‘joined-up solutions’ (Hills & Stewart 2005:9). These two minimum formulations inform the present inquiry, although it should be acknowledged that social exclusion remains an ambiguous concept.

‘social exclusion’ as an official policy concept as this would amount to recognising the existence of particular excluded groups, leading to stronger obligations to redeem the situation. This is why it is more probable that *social inclusion*, the counterpart to ‘social exclusion’ that has a more positive ring to it, will receive a favourable treatment in official circles. Although a translation of ‘social inclusion’ that uses Chinese characters (*shakaiteki hōsetsu*) does exist, a katakana rendering (*sōshahru inkurūjon*) is more commonly used. The reason for this may be that although both *hōsetsu* and *inkurūjon* are relatively unfamiliar words, the latter has the advantage of sounding both fashionable and open to newly ascribed meanings – hence also the triumph in the popular consciousness of ‘NEETs’ (*nīto*) over ‘non-working youth’ (*jyakunen mugyōsha*). This section will briefly review how ‘social exclusion’ has been received and employed within four relevant layers of Japanese society.

Social scientists

Recognising that ‘social exclusion’ is essentially a social science concept closely connected to the field of social policy, it is critical to examine whether Japanese scholars in these realms have adopted it or not. It appears that indeed some of them have, at least partially. To begin with, nearly every book on ‘NEETs’ published in 2004 and 2005 cited the concept in connection with the Blair government’s Social Exclusion Unit (see e.g. Genda & Maganuma 2004; Kosugi et al. 2005).³ However, few of these works – that were authored mainly by labour market economists and support practitioners – went as far as explaining in depth what ‘social exclusion’ meant and how it had evolved within its European context. This was a task attempted by Higuchi (2004) in a theoretical account on social exclusion mechanisms and the dilemmas of inclusion published in the leading Japanese sociology journal, *Shakaigaku Hyōron*. That the paper was chosen by the journal as the best of the year shows the topic was considered important, and that the horizontal paradigm of exclusion-inclusion was accepted as viable by many Japanese sociologists. Nevertheless, Higuchi’s article stopped short of fully adapting the concept to the specific circumstances prevailing in Japan.

Since the early 2000s, dozens of new articles and books on social exclusion – some translations of English-language volumes – have poured out yearly in Japan at an accelerating pace. Many of those penned by Japanese sociologists have been concerned with understanding ‘social exclusion’ in its European context and with the study of

³ By this time, of course, the Blair government’s social exclusion agenda had greatly expanded and the Social Exclusion Unit was no longer its main bastion.

education, poverty or social enterprises (including NPOs). Fukuhara's (2007) edited volume, *Shakaiteki haijo / hōsetsu to shakaiseisaku* (Social exclusion / inclusion and social policy), is perhaps the most notable work in this stream as it employs social exclusion across numerous sub-fields of social policy. While the first half of the volume focuses on the development of the concept in Europe, its latter half proposes a tentative Japanese index of multiple deprivation and considers issues such as lack of pension and social insurance coverage, homelessness, inequalities in education and youth problems as examples of exclusion (Fukuhara 2007). This is certainly novel, but the book disappoints in two crucial senses: first, it adopts a fundamentally affirmative, uncritical view of the concept of social exclusion, arguing that it captures well the nature of contemporary social problems and that it is policy-oriented (Fukuhara 2007:11). Second, although 'social exclusion' is applied to a range of topics in the volume, no convincing *adaptation* of this concept to the Japanese context is attempted. What are the most important forms of 'social exclusion' evident in post-bubble Japan and do they lead to a different conceptualisation of exclusion vis-à-vis those that are popular in Europe? In Fukuhara's book, little attention is furthermore paid to *discourse* and to *strategic* aspects that pertain to turning 'social exclusion' into a viable policy paradigm in Japan that can inform policy across several domains. It is somewhat odd that more consistent and pragmatic proposals are not provided despite the fact that most of the writers are largely in favour of applying 'social exclusion' more widely in Japanese social policy.

The media and the public

'Social exclusion' has been slow to take hold in the media and among the general public in Japan. To be sure, particular newspaper reporters who take a keen interest in social issues, including poverty that appears to be on the increase, are sympathetic to the term but nevertheless rarely use it, perhaps due to its negative ring that was mentioned above. Another reason why 'social exclusion' is not likely to enter the popular media vocabulary anytime soon has to do with the strength of pre-existing formulations such as that of *kakusa shakai* (a society characterised by disparities). The *kakusa* discourse is arguably more media-friendly and easier to grasp than 'social exclusion' and hence hard for the latter to displace. However, it is not necessary for a policy concept to become popularised before it can exert influence on policy-making: in the British case it was the Blair government that actively promoted 'social exclusion' – a hitherto marginal concept – bringing it into the mainstream discourse in an astonishingly short period of time (Levitas 2005).

The government

It would be straightforward to argue that ‘social exclusion’ has been entrenched in Japan (to an extent) had the government adopted it as part of its official lexicon. However, as of 2008, it is clear that this has indeed not taken place: ‘social exclusion’ is not part of the vocabulary of bureaucrats either at the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) nor the Cabinet Office, and the term is all but absent in government white papers and reports. With regards to the problems of young people such as ‘NEETs’ and the *hikikomori*, the bureaucrats in charge at the MHLW speak of ‘alienation’ (*sogai*) instead of ‘exclusion’, whereas at the Cabinet Office, there is a acknowledgement of the possibility of a possible ‘negative chain’ of events (*fu no rensa*).⁴ The discourse on ‘independence’ (*jiritsu*), while contested by many civil society groups and activists, is still the dominant discourse that frames policy for the disabled, single mothers as well as part-time working and formally inactive youth (*freeters* and ‘NEETs’). This broadly stems from the conservative ideology of the Koizumi-era (and post-Koizumi) Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) that places ultimate emphasis on economic ‘independence’ via deregulated labour markets rather than on any other notion of ‘inclusion’. Self-responsibility is stressed over societal responsibility. Social welfare commitments are minimised via the discourse on *jiritsu* that potentially comes into conflict with the paradigm of ‘social exclusion’ since the latter tends to emphasise social structural factors and multi-dimensional policy responses (even if it deflects attention from inequality *per se*).

Yet, there have been points where the social exclusion paradigm and government policy interact and overlap. One such point was the Committee Regarding Comprehensive Independence Support Measures for Youth (*Wakamono no Hōkatsuteki na Jiritsu Shien Hōsaku ni kan suru Kentōkai*) that was convened by the Cabinet Office in 2004 and 2005. Although superficially adhering to the ‘independence’ discourse, professor Miyamoto Michiko of the Hōsō Daigaku – the chairperson of the committee – forcefully championed the idea of ‘social exclusion’ within it. What had predisposed this particular scholar to introduce European policy ideas to Japan was a year spent at the University of Cambridge as a special researcher dispatched by the Japanese Ministry of Education. She had moreover conducted field research in the UK, in Sweden and

⁴ Interviews with three bureaucrats in charge of youth support programmes at the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (Career Development Support Bureau, Occupational Skill Development Section / *Kyaria Keisei Shienshitsu*, *Shokugyō Nōryoku Kaihatsukyoku*, 1 June 2007) and of two bureaucrats in charge of youth affairs at the Cabinet Office (Office of Director-General for Policies on Cohesive Society, 21 March 2008).

Italy. Although this committee was especially important, Miyamoto had significant influence over government bureaucrats already in 2002 when she argued that young people in Japan were turning into a socially disadvantaged, feeble minority (Miyamoto 2002). In her book she portrayed irregular young workers and jobless youth as ‘outsiders’ who were excluded from mainstream society and attendant benefits; discussed the concept of social exclusion; and introduced the British Connexions Service which she has consistently promoted as a ‘model’ for youth policy responses in her own country (Miyamoto 2002:180).

While keen to cite the term frequently, Miyamoto has clearly been more interested in the enactment of comprehensive and inclusive (youth) policies than in puzzling over how to define ‘social exclusion’. She finds most attractive the idea of holistic and integrated support measures for youth to help them make the transition towards adulthood (Miyamoto 2004:22). Indeed, in line with these observations, Miyamoto has pushed the language of *comprehensive*, *individualised* and *continuous support* on the committees she has taken part in. Perhaps as a result, these three signifiers made their way into official white papers and descriptions of new youth policy measures such as the Youth Independence Camp and the Youth Support Station. What is interesting is the implicit way in which the three words embody defining features of the ‘social exclusion’ paradigm: comprehensive, individualised and continuous support services are needed because disadvantages are viewed as *multi-dimensional*, *temporally dynamic*, and as *impacting in different ways on different individuals*. Hence, albeit within the boundaries set by the dominant *jiritsu* discourse, European formulations of ‘social exclusion’ have covertly entered actual policy-making processes in Japan, at least in the realm of youth policy.

There is another earlier point at which Japanese social policy and thought regarding social exclusion may have interacted. In December 2000 the Social Assistance Bureau (*Shakai Engokyoku*) of the MHLW published a report regarding welfare provisions for the disadvantaged which discussed the ‘re-construction of contemporary connections’ (*konnichiteki na ‘tsunagari’ no sai-kōchiku*). It is said that this report drew on the social inclusion paradigm and had a tremendous impact on the thought of local governments and social welfare practitioners across Japan and also stirred interest in ‘social exclusion’ more widely (Fukuhara 2007:3). Another publication by the same ministry around a year later focused on ‘support towards independence through employment’ (*shūrō jiritsu shien*) and marked the official entry of ‘workfare’ into Japan (MHLW 2002). Since labour market activation and ‘welfare-to-work’ initiatives have been closely tied to discourses of ‘social exclusion’ in Europe too, it could be said that this is

another manifestation of the influence of such discourses on Japanese policy.

Social work practitioners

Based on my fieldwork observations, practitioners in the fields of social welfare and youth support are relatively interested in the notion of ‘social exclusion’ and often apply related terminology when describing the conditions of their customers. In the realm of youth support, support staff find ‘exclusion’ a particularly appropriate term for describing the condition of a subset of youth who are socially isolated (living as *hikikomori*), rejected by the core labour markets, and poorly served by existing social services. While the mainstream society might view social withdrawal (or being an inactive ‘NEET’) as a largely voluntary choice, practitioners, due to the nature of their work, observe and appreciate the complex and dynamic nature of the problems their clients face. For them, ‘social exclusion’ appears to capture key elements of such problems. This is likely to be true also of those who work with the disabled or with various minority groups since ‘social exclusion’ is capable of subsuming both economic disadvantage as well as experiences of discrimination and stigma. Importantly, although practitioners cannot typically participate in actual policy-making processes, they can wield influence as a collective group through communicating their views to the media and the bureaucracy. In the case of youth support, practitioners indeed play a large role in collecting and disseminating information on youth about whom little accurate data has existed before, thereby potentially influencing future policy.

The contending ‘social disparity’ and ‘independence’ discourses

I have already highlighted the two main contenders of ‘social exclusion’ in the Japanese context. These are, again, the respective discourses on social disparities (*kakusa*) and ‘independence’ (*jiritsu*). I have also indicated how ‘independence’ has, on the level of government policy, been essentially equated with self-sufficiency achieved through the (deregulated) labour markets, while noting how this discourse remains open to influence from ‘social exclusion’ with which it may to some extent be compatible. Practitioners frequently criticise and refute ‘independence’ as a one-dimensional, inadequate concept while some activists highlight its inherently oppressive nature (Amamiya Karin, for instance, denounces ‘independence’ as a suffocating ‘self-responsibility discourse’, *jiko sekinin-ron*, while members of the New Start youth support organisation claim that youth are being ‘threatened’ into independence). Still, it remains part of the dominant

discourse in government publications as well as newspaper articles, with new youth support legislation being described in terms of ‘independence support’ as recently as October 2008 (Asahi Shimbun, 24 October 2008). It is thus unlikely this discourse will suddenly fade, at least in the absence of great political change, but its meaning may gradually shift and come to resemble some of the ‘harder’ and moralistic European formulations of ‘social exclusion’.

Be that as it may, we are also required to consider the parameters of the enormously influential and visible *kakusa shakai* debate here. A social problem discourse of the widest possible appeal, the thousands of analyses and commentaries relating to *kakusa* that have poured out over the past decade have greatly promoted public awareness on inequality in post-bubble Japan. Referring essentially to a society characterised by marked disparities, this ubiquitous discourse was initially sparked by a book authored by Tachibanaki (1998) on the widening economic disparities in Japanese society. While the debate first focused on economic polarisation between households, individuals and regions, it soon expanded to disparities in employment, education, marriage, different family types, and even ‘hope’. Yamada, who is known for research on the latter, finds that although rise in inequality across the board is hard to prove objectively, at the very least, the general *consciousness* of inequality and its diverse forms has risen in Japan (Yamada 2006:26).

The disparity debate hence focuses on states of social bifurcation where, for instance, employees are divided into a regular, prosperous group and an irregular, low-paid one, and young people into those able to marry and those ‘doomed’ to single living and so forth. The discourse springs mainly from macro-level analyses of disparities in various spheres rather than from a concern with individuals’ access to key resources or inclusion in important social activities. Clearly, unlike ‘social exclusion’, ‘disparity’ in this context primarily denotes an *outcome* and not a *process* marked by potentially complex risks and opportunities for individuals, households and communities. It is in these respects rather different from ‘social exclusion’ that may de-emphasise economic inequality but that regards disadvantage as consisting of dynamic and multi-dimensional processes that can be influenced at the micro-level via policy. *Kakusa shakai*, by contrast, does not link up with such micro-level policy with the same ease. For example, there have been few attempts to discuss NEETs in terms of ‘disparity’, perhaps partially due to household-based income statistics that conceal the potential poverty of many youth who live with parents. Arguably, the disparity discourse does lend itself to the promotion of more strongly redistributive policies as well as to equal employment initiatives; however, the first of these appears largely a political taboo and the second

hard to realise in the absence of massive labour market re-regulation.

Should *shakaiteki haijo* be abandoned? Adaptations, strategic considerations and ‘sustainable inclusion’

The above sections have highlighted the complex landscape within which ‘social exclusion’ is being introduced in Japan. The strongly negative connotation of *shakaiteki haijo* as well as competition from pre-existing discourses were shown to be among the obstacles to the entrenchment of this new concept within the Japanese policy vocabulary. At the same time, implicit ways in which thought influenced by European social exclusion paradigms are entering the policy discourse were also pointed out. So the picture is somewhat mixed, but the fact remains that ‘social exclusion’ is far from a mainstream paradigm in Japanese social policy. Hence, it is a good time to pose the critical question of whether further efforts should be made to push the language of *shakaiteki haijo* or whether a different strategy should be taken.

Apart from whether one personally prefers or dislikes the concept, I argued before that for ‘social exclusion’ to become a viable policy concept in Japan it must be a) convincingly adapted to the Japanese context, and b) strategically promoted so as to integrate it into the government’s and policy-makers’ vocabulary. All of this requires that this concept can ‘add value’ to the analysis of disadvantage beyond what can be done within the limits of the disparity and independence debates. Moreover, a version of ‘social exclusion’ that is agreeable to a range of actors of various ideological persuasions must be sketched before this paradigm can really take off.

These are difficult tasks that can hardly be undertaken by a small number of actors, but the first step should be to pursue substantial and integrated research into ‘social exclusion’ as it exists in the Japanese context. European definitions should be temporarily ignored and scholars should explicitly adapt – or *indigenise* – the concept so that it can make sense to local policy communities. Empirical studies should be undertaken to highlight much more tangibly the forms of exclusion that appear important in Japan. Thorough efforts to re-conceptualise ‘social exclusion’ based on such findings should then be made. The challenge is to create a useful minimal definition of exclusion that can be applied to policy across various domains.

Compared to the *kakusa* and *jiritsu* debates (the first being mainly academic and media-driven, the second a conservative policy discourse), the arguable advantage of ‘social exclusion’ in its basic form is that it considers access to both material and social resources, and that unlike the two largely static concepts, it brings attention to *dynamic*

processes connected to disadvantage. In this way, it may be used to bring about social services that are more holistic e.g. via combining cash benefits and comprehensive services. The contrary is always possible though, as has been evidenced by the 'NEET' discourse that, translated to policy, has emphasised swift attachment to any kind of work or training (i.e. 'exit' from the NEET category) over sustainable, long-term inclusion. So the real challenge is to not fall into simplistic, one-dimensional conceptions of inclusion that take a short-term perspective.

Several other related dilemmas plague social exclusion as a policy concept. One is that the very targeting of support measures at groups perceived as suffering from exclusion is bound to exclude *other* groups in ways that can be rather arbitrary. Moreover, singling out particular groups focuses attention on the qualities of people in such groups at the cost of downplaying wider social mechanisms of exclusion and inequality. Also, as Higuchi (2004) points out, social inclusion initiatives (especially active labour market policies) tend to reinforce social *hierarchies* where the less powerful are forced to enter poor-quality and low-paying jobs in the name of 'inclusion'. However, the most fundamental conundrum regarding 'social exclusion' concerns the relationship between exclusion and *inequality*. Crucially, researchers as well as policy-makers should ponder whether a degree of economic equality and equality in accessing resources is an essential prerequisite to sustainable types of 'inclusion' in a given society. It appears as if researchers both in Western countries and Japan have been hesitant to merge considerations of social capital (i.e. inclusion in various networks and relationships) and economic equality, despite the fact that these dimensions are likely to be related. Naturally, parliamentarians in conservative parties ignore discussions of inequality altogether, and it has become harder for any mainstream party to raise this theme in most of the world's advanced democracies.

The above points, needless to say, apply to Japan as well. There is a real risk that 'social exclusion' will come to be starkly separated from considerations of inequality in the Japanese context, leading to the targeting of particular disadvantaged groups while ignoring wider inequality. This is to some extent already evident: groups such as inactive youth ('NEETs'), single mothers and the moderately disabled have received 'independence support measures' that aim to quickly integrate them in the labour markets. Most of such policies are at the moment largely failing because they ignore wider contexts and because they take a short-term perspective. For instance, although individual youth receive useful guidance and support at sites such as the Youth Independence Camps and Youth Support Stations, the government is not making efforts to secure sustainable job opportunities to young people to whom mainstream jobs are

not suited (or whom most companies do not accept due to short or fragmented work histories etc.). Since ‘employment’ (*shuurou*) has so far been the predominant goal, it has been considered less important whether such employment is permanent or of temporary and low-paying type. Clearly, without a long-term, dynamic perspective that actively incorporates wider societal contexts it is difficult to achieve ‘inclusion’ – or even economic ‘independence’ for that matter – in any sustainable sense.

So, for researchers and all advocates of ‘social exclusion’ in Japan, it is crucial to keep these dilemmas firmly in mind and treat the concept they are advocating with utmost scepticism from the outset. The almost unlimited malleability of ‘social exclusion’ is both its strength and its weakness: the key for proponents of the concept is to *win the game of redefinition and reinterpretation*. In other words, advocates must proactively take control of the processes of ‘indigenisation’ pertaining to ‘social exclusion’ in Japan. If we accept the abovementioned dilemmas as serious, then the task is to try to compensate for them by consistently moving the Japanese definition of ‘social exclusion’ away from them towards what could be called *sustainable inclusion*.

Sustainable inclusion, while a high ideal, captures the paradigm of social exclusion at the same time as it underlines the need to adopt a long-term perspective to the alleviation of any social problem, including wider societal inequality. It would allow researchers and policy-makers to largely drop the negative-sounding and confusing term *shakaiteki haijo* and engage in creating a much more attractive language that opponents would find hard to oppose ‘social exclusion’, indeed, is too vulnerable to criticism as it by definition requires convincing ‘proof’ of actual exclusion which is hard to produce). Making it clear that many people and groups are insufficiently ‘included’ in contemporary society (in ways detailed by extensive empirical and conceptual research) and associating ‘inclusion’ with long-term social stability would be a powerful way to advance and reform thinking on social problems and policy in Japan.

Cox (2001), in his account on the social construction of reform imperatives, reminds policy-makers and policy-entrepreneurs of a critical issue that can serve to either make or break a new policy proposal or concept. This has to do with how such new proposals and ideas chime in with pre-existing principles and discourses. What is implied is that ideas that create a sense of *continuity* with entrenched values, perceptions and principles are much more likely to succeed than ideas that ignore what came before. Hence, some notions and proposals simply appear ‘ahead of their time’ and are promptly rejected. The trick is thus to do something new while creating linkages with pre-existing discourses.

Applying this insight to Japan suggests, first of all, that instead of rejecting the

‘disparity’ and ‘independence’ discourses outright, proponents of ‘social exclusion’ (or, preferably, ‘sustainable inclusion’) should cite them, borrow from them and integrate them as parts of a the discourse they themselves are building. The two contending discourses have been successful in the media, the world of research and in policy-making not just because of clever marketing strategies and conservative hegemony in the government, but because they in some way invoke fundamental social values. There exists in dominant parts of Japanese society a high valuation of hard work as well as a sense that a measure of equality is essential to social cohesion. As for ‘exclusion’ and ‘inclusion’, Japan can be said to be both heavily inclusionist as well as formidably exclusionist, depending on the domain and the prevailing circumstances. Accordingly, the key is to appeal to the inclusionist tendencies that are currently present and/or that have existed in the past. This does not mean bringing back old-style policies, but it may mean evoking old sensibilities and memories. Research can investigate how the strong inclusionist orientations present in Japan can be extended and reconfigured ‘organically’ (in ways that build on local values and practices rather than conflicting with them) via tools available to social policy and/or the civil society.

Conclusion

This paper has engaged with a topic that is extremely timely and important to social policy in Japan. It has argued that, regardless of emerging interest, ‘social exclusion’ has not (yet) had great influence on policy-making and that it faces several challenges. Partially, it may be a failing discourse in the Japanese context, and the language of *shakaiteki haijo* should probably be abandoned. However, some of the key paradigms embedded in ‘social exclusion’ – the relevance of both economic and social types of deprivation and the dynamic nature of such deprivation – are relevant to Japan. What is lacking is a proper and thorough – perhaps even bold – adaptation of these paradigms into to the Japanese context. Such an adaptation is in any case possible and it should build both on sound research as well as on strategic observations of pre-existing discourses and principles. Identifying a new, positive-sounding and widely agreeable term such as sustainable inclusion (*jizoku kanou na inkuruujon*) would help with building a new policy language that can integrate and subsume especially the discourse on ‘independence’ (in the policy-making domain), but also to some extent that on ‘disparity’ (that is dominant in the media). It is certain that there is a growing agenda in Japan for inclusion measures, not only to incorporate inactive youth, day labourers and single parents, but to integrate *immigrants* and their off-spring, the population of which

is more likely to increase significantly than decrease in the coming decades. Whether such sustainable policies of inclusion require a certain degree of economic equality backed by redistributive income policies is a topic that should be fiercely debated. It is hoped that this paper and its subsequent versions will in some small measure help to stir discussion on both 'inclusion' and 'equality' in Japan and beyond.

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