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Marc Humbert and Yoschimichi Sato, eds., *Social Exclusion: Perspectives from France and Japan*. Sato: Tohoku University, 2012. xiv + 162 pp. Tables, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$34.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-1-920901-69-1.

Review by Marion Demossier, University of Southampton.

At a time of major economic transformation and debate about the widening gap between different sections of contemporary society, very little has been written about social exclusion in comparative perspective, especially about its effects on individuals, groups and communities in post-industrial societies. This short but dense volume, *Social Exclusion: Perspectives from France and Japan*, edited jointly by Marc Humbert, Professor of Political Economy and Research Fellow at the French CNRS in Japan and Professor Yoschimichi Sato, Director of the Center for the study of Social Stratification and Inequality of Tohoku University, offers an innovative analysis of processes of social exclusion in two vibrant and dynamic postwar societies, which have both experienced the growth of a middle class, rising unemployment and a “crisis” in their respective education systems.

Arising from a symposium held at Nichifutsukaikan (Maison Franco-Japonaise) in Tokyo in 2009 and subsequent international collaboration, this volume offers a timely comparative discussion of inequalities discussed from a sociological perspective. The editors have adopted a broad historical span from the end of the Second World War to the present in order to explain the different junctures associated with the increase and spread of social exclusion, which, as they acknowledge in their introduction, has become difficult to conceptualise. While the authors agree that both countries share similarities in terms of their economic trajectories, there are many striking differences in terms of social attitudes and policy approaches to exclusion. France remains attached to its welfare state and to the role of governmental policies in lifting the poor out of poverty. Japan, on the other hand, offers a different picture as social inclusion is secured through long-term employment whether in the public or private sectors, rather than through the welfare state.

The volume itself includes a preface, followed by eleven chapters, divided between France and Japan. The editors have been careful to address the methodological pitfalls associated with such a comparative enterprise by providing the reader with three introductory chapters (by François Dubet, Yoshimichi Sato, and Serge Paugam) setting out the parameters of the discussion on social exclusion and examining “opportunities, fluidity and paradoxes” (p. xiii). As they argue, rather than adopt a traditional Marxist interpretation along class lines, the focus is on “places” and “strata” using a wide array of research methods (p. xii) in order to discuss the complex facets of social exclusion. After setting out the common sociological parameters of social exclusion in France and in Japan and offering a useful discussion on contemporary forms of broken social links through filiation, elective participation, organic participation and citizenship, the volume focuses on a discussion of young people, the homeless and government policies. If the quality of the chapters is uneven, they, nevertheless, read like a joint conversation attempting to offer a critical comparative framework, and they can be read together or independently from each other. Yet sometimes a clearer and more systematic socio-economic and political background is needed to shed light on the various dimensions of social exclusion examined, and a broader discussion of gender and ethnicity would also have been welcome.

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After setting out the theoretical framework, Yuji Genda examines, in chapter four, the emergence in Japan of a group of socially withdrawn young people, the *hikikomori*, known in the West as NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training). If no clear definition is given of them from an institutional point of view, the author argues that a sense of resignation and a lack of hope characterises their self-experience, especially in the way they regard themselves in contrast to traditionally hard-working Japanese society. It is noteworthy that people work on average more than sixty hours a week in Japan, while in France the thirty-five-hour-week is the norm. Genda points out three major reasons for the rise of the NEETs: the global economic context, the sense of isolation and loneliness which has grown up in Japanese society, and finally the transformations affecting the family.

The discussion on the insertion of young people into the labour market and their growing sense of insecurity is pursued by François-Xavier Devetter (chapter five) who examines the concept of “job quality” in France. Starting from the premise that the job market and employment prospects in France have worsened and have become precarious following the development of mass education and the low percentage of students who are actually working, the insertion of young people into the labour market has become more of a challenge. Devetter’s statistical analysis demonstrates that young people are more frequently affected by the fluctuations in the job market and especially by recession. Indicators associated with job quality include salary, working conditions, job security, and access to resources which have all been affected negatively by global economic change.

Chapters six and eight concentrate on Japan and expand the discussion on young people, government policies, and employment towards the homeless people. In chapter six, Yuki Honda examines the problems in the youth labour market, focusing on economic change and on the dualism between regular and non-regular workers. She also discusses the media construction and changing public discourse on young people which frequently blames them for their lack of employability. This is an interesting discussion on work and its societal conceptualisation as young people are at the heart of any future economic development and sustainability, but end up being negatively portrayed and as a result, remain segregated from the rest of society. The author invites the reader to adopt a more critical approach to policies by proposing a set of necessary measures which include a review of the education system, the recruitment of new graduates, addressing the gap between regular and non-regular workers, and, finally, vocational guidance. Chapter eight discusses public policies towards homeless and the politicization of civil society in Japan, offering a mirror to the discussion proposed by Xavier Emmanuelli in chapter seven. Focusing the discussion on political mobilisation around homeless people in Shinjuku, the author argues that policymakers have been influenced by parochial communities and radical left activists such as Yuasa Makoto who have both shaped the agenda on civil society “in ways that challenge the mainstream views that developed from past actions” (p. 99). Yet at the core of any debate remains the definition given to the “homeless” with, for example, the rising number of internet café refugees in Japan or even the treatment of the Roma in France.

In chapter nine, Nanako Inaba offers an impressive discussion of social movements of people at the margins of society in France and Japan. Based upon a transnational research project in which the author becomes a participant and informs the debate while keeping her original stance as a researcher, this chapter questions the future of the “have-nots” movements in both France and Japan, arguing that they have not succeeded in proposing an alternative because of their lack of acceptance by mainstream society. The transnational dimension of the phenomenon provides an interesting additional dimension to the debate on social exclusion. This offers a fruitful perspective on social and political issues which could have been developed further. Yet the chapter bridges nicely the comparative discussion on social exclusion.

In chapters seven and ten, Xavier Emmanuelli and Pierre Concialdi adopt a more traditional approach to discuss governmental policies aimed at addressing the problem of social exclusion and the limits and shortfalls of French employment policies. While their chapters tackle a complex issue, they remain

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highly descriptive and could have been placed at the beginning of the volume rather than the end. Finally, the book concludes on a more militant note proposing to look at what Isabelle Giraudou terms a new “adjudicative space” for social rights (p. 135), which are far from being implemented in France. She argues for an analysis of the use of law and rights as instruments of political action in the fight against poverty.

This volume offers much food for thought and it will appeal to scholars and postgraduate students of social exclusion who wish to go beyond the traditional and comfortable boundaries of the nation-state by combining a solid empirical and analytical discussion of a complex phenomenon.

#### LIST OF ESSAYS

François Dubet, “Equality of Places vs. Equality of Opportunities”

Yoshimichi Sato, “Stability and Increasing Fluidity in the Contemporary Japanese Social Stratification System”

Serge Paugam, “The Paradox of Exclusion: Crossed Considerations on the Contemporary Forms of Broken Social Links”

Yûji Genda, “Poverty and Exclusion in Japan: Young People and their Hopes”

F.X. Devetter, “The Insertion of Young People into the Labor Market, and Job Quality”

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Xavier Emmanuelli, “Policies against Social Exclusion in France”

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Nanako Inaba, “Comparison of Poor People’s Participation in Social Movements in France and Japan”

Pierre Concialdi, “Employment at all Costs? Limits and Shortfalls of French Employment Policies”

Isabelle Giraudou, “When Law is Facing Poverty: Looking for a New ‘Adjudicative Space’ for Social Rights”

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