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Marc Humbert, Yoshimichi Sato (eds), *Social Exclusion. Perspectives from France and Japan*, Melbourne, Trans Pacific Press, 2012, pages 176, ISBN: 978-1-920901-69-1

This book - a collection of independent and self contained discussions - focuses, from the particular perspective of French and Japanese societies, on the crucial theme of social exclusion.

Both France and Japan were formerly among the most successful societies in the achievement of high economic growth rates and in the pursuit of social cohesion. However, since 1980, even these two countries have witnessed a “decline” of the middle class and a de-escalation of their economies, and first of all a growing imbalance in income distribution and the restriction of welfare resources.

Ensuring an overall education system that prepares young people to successfully enter the labor market - a kind of “magic formula” to avoid individual and collective failure, in which both France and Japan excelled for many years - is no longer sufficient today, and aspirations to join middle class society are largely frustrated.

These important transformations of recent decades pose the problem of social exclusion, the ways in which social exclusion is reinforced and the remedies for reducing social exclusion.

Previously, lack of housing (Chapter 7) and unemployment or job loss (Chapter 10) were distinct problems, experienced separately by the individuals affected and confronted separately by French social policy but today - with the extension of the exclusion phenomenon and the tendency for these two disadvantages to be lumped together - their “convergence” is clear, first of all, in the new protest movements.

In Japan work was formerly considered a priority and the sole valid means for enjoying full social and citizenship rights. Therefore focusing on a high level of employment was a primary policy goal. Today, however, Japan has to deal with a labor market characterized by stability for only a favored few, and by increasing fluidity for other groups of workers, with serious repercussions on social stratification (Chapter 2 and 4).

In addition to the interesting positive aspects highlighted up to now, the most evident limit is the following. We appreciate the comparative structure of the essay and we do not expect it to provide definitive answers. But it seems appropriate to provide a deeper analysis of the debate regarding the complex theme of social justice. The authors present a comparative examination of the inequalities active in Japan and France, the traditional “guide” and “benchmark” by which 150 years ago modernization and industrial progress were imported. The impression is that the view of this study of inequality in Japan applies a model mostly appropriate for the French reality. While this approach facilitates the comparison between the situations of the two countries, it is ineffectual in focusing in depth on the themes which are unique to and crucial for Japanese society. For example the (still strong) gender disparities - extensively analyzed by authors such as Chizuko Ueno and Yoshie Kobayashi - are dealt with just superficially.

(Giulia Mascagni)