

U.S.-Japan Innovators Project Participant's Report



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A HYPOTHESIS ON SOCIAL INCLUSIVENESS

Introduction

In November 2005, Japan Society arranged my visit to New York and Boston as part of the Society's *U.S.-Japan Innovators Project*. Japan Society is a nonprofit organization with an endowment of ¥8 billion supported by more than 300 American and Japanese corporations. The organization is located near the United Nations headquarters at a Japanese-style building with about 60 employees. It has been contributing to U.S.-Japan exchanges in diverse fields such as culture, politics, economics, and welfare since it was founded in 1907. As the Society approaches its centennial, it has launched the *U.S.-Japan Innovators Project* to establish a network of innovators from various fields in the U.S. and Japan. I participated in this project as one of the "innovators," and had the opportunity to meet with various individuals ranging from leaders of grass roots groups and city officials to scholars.

I think an important quality in an innovator is a ceaseless effort for self-improvement. We can say the same thing for a society. In the 60 years since the end of World War II, Japanese society worked hard and, while we still have various problems, we have managed to attain a certain standard of living. However, we are now facing a major problem as we switch from the industrial age to the information age—the issue of social inclusion. The primary question I tackled on my exchange program was: "Is it possible in Japan to integrate people from different religions, values, ethnic groups and languages?"

Many Japanese draw a line and do not let non-Japanese cross it. That is how the Japanese traditionally treat outsiders. However, the time has come for non-Japanese to play an important role in Japanese society. If they are not allowed to do so, Japan will decline and face a dire situation. In fact, this is not only a problem related to issues surrounding foreigners. In Japanese society, there is a deep-rooted idea that welfare for low-income earners and poor people should only amount to the minimum to get by. If Japan does not reform its society, it can not maintain its vitality.

In order to approach my question about social inclusion in Japan, I took advantage of this chance to explore perspectives on social inclusion in the U.S.

In New York and Boston, social inclusion is not particularly played up because public policy is already necessarily infused with the concept. In London, they officially advocate social inclusiveness and are making an effort to adopt it as a society and as part of public policy.

By comparison, no one in Tokyo is paying attention to the issue. Some projects deal with social inclusiveness unintentionally but there is no clear focus on the issue yet. Allow me to contrast Tokyo's inactivity with progress in other parts of the world.

Social Inclusiveness in the London Plan

In 2005, the Greater City of London developed and announced the "London Plan" and explained that the phrase "social inclusion" is defined as:

The position from which one can access and benefit from the full range of opportunities available to members of society. It aims to remove barriers for people that experience a combination of problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low income, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health, and family breakdown.

As I worked on translating the London Plan, I learned that the aim is to create social inclusion proactively. In other words, "social inclusion" is not only about including people who are excluded, but also about working to create policy to improve people's lives. One of the major themes in the London Plan is a move to give all Londoners the opportunity to share in London's success, "to promote social inclusion and tackle deprivation and discrimination."

The main policies to meet this goal are:

- Tackle unemployment by providing job training, guidance and other support to produce high quality employment among people who need jobs, especially women, young people and ethnic minorities.
- Tackle specific areas where poverty is concentrated.
- Tackle homeless issues.
- Tackle discrimination and promote the diversity of London in the area of economics and culture. Make the city a comfortable place for people with disabilities to live.
- Present a framework of spatial policies, learning, health, safety and other major social and regional services.
- Ensure profits based on the economic growth of regional communities and establish a process of development.

My experience in Tokyo

Welfare benefits for the aged

Welfare benefits for the aged basically ask that recipients accept cash and close their eyes to the inadequate services available to the elderly, such as nursing homes. It is an easy way out for the government as long as citizens do not complain. If the government were to implement home care services by sending a helper to a bedridden aged person, or place them in a special nursing home, the cost for one person would be about ¥400,000 per month. In comparison to that, if providing benefits of ¥55,000 a month takes care of the problem, it is a small price to pay.

When Shintaro Ishihara became governor of Tokyo, he dismantled this program. Around the same time, a public elder-care insurance system started and everyone over 40 joined. Municipalities were required to provide nursing-care services to anyone needing them. From then on, as a society, we have made a strong effort to provide real nursing-care services such as nursing homes and home care services. Welfare benefits for the aged and poverty are two different problems. One lesson that we can learn from this experience is that once we start providing cash as benefits, it is hard to scrap the program and it also does not resolve the problem. This is the beginning of social inclusiveness.

Measures for homelessness

Each municipality is dealing with problems of homelessness in their own way. In many cases, as temporary measures, they provide accommodations for a short period of time to a limited number of homeless people or hand out food and clothes. Even when they provide job placement services, it only has a limited effect.

There are various reasons why people become homeless. Typical cases are alcoholism, gambling, crime, families and family-related problems, and mental illnesses. The common denominator in these cases is unemployment. The issue of homelessness can only be solved by eliminating the cause.

There are groups who gather homeless people at places such as parks and provide soup runs. I recognize the thoughtfulness of the soup run providers, but we must know that soup runs can not resolve the problem. In fact, speaking candidly, soup runs can indeed be harmful because they sustain and prolong people's homeless lives.

I think actions that perpetuate homelessness should be banned by law or ordinance. I think it is a violation of human rights to let people sleep in parks and in the streets and leave them there. When I say we should ban homeless people from public places, I am not suggesting that we crack down on homeless people—rather, I am asking society and the government not to let these things happen. Assistance should not perpetuate homelessness, it should help end it. To make this happen, the government must not expect the social welfare division or the management division of parks, streets and rivers to come up with measures for homelessness. I think it is better to call on the private sector.

For example, there are many inns that you can stay in for ¥1,000 per night. That means the room would cost ¥30,000 per month. If the government gives a homeless person a street cleaning job, which would pay approximately ¥10,000 a day, this person can afford a place to stay by working a certain number of days per month.

When I say private sector in these instances, I do not necessarily mean social welfare corporations or businesses. Nowadays in Japan, there are an increasing number of citizen groups, which are as capable as social welfare corporations and businesses corporations in terms of continuity, financial power and organizational strength. It would be a good idea to collaborate with these groups to come up with full-scale measures for homelessness.

I argued forcefully for these ideas at meetings of the Exploratory Committee of the former Ministry of Health and Welfare, but my points gained little traction, except in the minutes of the committee's reports: "In addition, one of the committee members voiced an opinion in regard to this issue that it is necessary to establish special legislation that builds in the responsibility of the state for special measures for employment, promotion of a comprehensive policy that includes housing, medical care, and welfare, and regulation on illegal occupation of public facilities." ("Exploratory Committee regarding social welfare for people who need social help," December 8, 2000.)

When Governor Ishihara ran for re-election, I proposed an ordinance that would prohibit homelessness. He did not take up my proposal. I still believe that it is necessary to have a law that explicitly does not permit homelessness.

I have been thinking about these problems for many years. When I learned about Japan Society's *Innovators Project*, I was impressed that there were people thinking about the same kinds of issues. I joined the project with high spirits and participated in their exchange in the autumn of 2005. The following is a list of the people I met with during that exchange. After the list, I discuss the conclusions I came to by the end of my time in the U.S.

Rosanne Haggerty, Founder and President of Common Ground Community. Common Ground is a nonprofit organization with an annual fiscal budget of more than \$3 billion that works to solve homelessness. [www.commonground.org]

George T. McDonald, Founder and President; and **Nazerine Griffin**, Program Director, The Doe Fund. The Doe Fund houses people in need of assistance for up to nine months and helps find jobs for them. [www.doe.org]

Ken Knuckles, President and CEO; and **Hope Knight**, Chief Operating Officer, Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone (UMEZ). The UMEZ is committed to economic development and creating a comprehensive welfare system in Harlem. [www.umez.org]

Lucille McEwen, President and CEO of Harlem Congregations for Community Improvement (HCCI). HCCI is a coalition of inter-faith congregations who work together to revitalize Harlem. [www.hcci.org]

Guillermo Linares, Commissioner, Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs. Mr. Linares has been active in civic movements and city government for more than 25 years and was appointed to his current office in 2004 by Mayor Bloomberg. [www.nyc.gov/html/imm/html/home/home.shtml]

Robert Immerman, Senior Research Associate, East Asian Institute, Columbia University. [www.columbia.edu/cu/weai/]

Ruth Abram, President, Lower East Side Tenement Museum. The Tenement Museum, located on Orchard Street on the Lower East Side, is housed in a former tenement building originally built in 1863. [www.tenement.org]

Shaun Donovan, Department of Housing Preservation and Development. Commissioner Donovan is responsible for implementing Mayor Bloomberg's \$3 billion housing initiative, which will fund the creation or preservation of 65,000 units of housing over five years. [www.nyc.gov/html/hpd/html/about/bio-shaun-donovan.shtml]

Jerilyn Perine, Former Commissioner for the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (Mr. Donovan's predecessor).

Andrew Alper, Head of New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC). When I told Mr. Alper that the theme of my trip was social inclusion, he said, "When you talk about New York City, you're talking about the definition of social inclusion." [www.nycfedc.org]

Sarah Knapp, 311 Call Center, New York City. The Call Center is designed to answer citizens' inquiries related to city government, handling problems other than crime, fire and medical emergencies. The City of Yokohama has adopted a similar system in Japan. [www.nyc.gov/html/doitt/html/about/about_311.shtml]

Joshua J. Sirefman, Chief of Staff to Deputy Mayor Dan Doctoroff and Director of the Mayor's Office of Economic Development & Rebuilding. Mr. Sirefman used to work for Mr. Alper on Wall Street. [www.nyc.gov]

Darren Walker, Director of Strategic Planning, The Rockefeller Foundation. [www.rockfound.org]

Suzanne Siskel, Director; and **Miguel Garcia**, Acting Deputy Director, Community Resource Development, The Ford Foundation. The foundation's goals are to strengthen democratic values, reduce poverty and injustice, promote international cooperation and advance human achievement. [www.fordfound.org]

Lloyd Sederer, Executive Deputy Commissioner, Mental Hygiene, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, New York City. Dr. Sederer wrote a book about mental health service reform in Japan. [www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/home/home.shtml]

Joanne Cummings, Associate Director of Admissions, Office of Admissions, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. [<http://web.mit.edu/admissions/>]

Maria Brennan, Assistant Director, International Students Office International Student Advisor, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The International Students Office is designed for the 3,000 foreigners studying at MIT, including 2,800 international students. [<http://web.mit.edu/iso/www/>]

Walter Armstrong, Environmental Consultant. During my stay in Boston, I asked every person I met about the "Big Dig." When I met Mr. Armstrong, who undertook a successful water purification project in the Boston Bay, I told him that I had been following the project for 10 years.

Bill Mitchell, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Professor Mitchell specializes in urban planning and is a member of the advisory committee for the usage of the land that will be freed up by the Big Dig. [www.media.mit.edu/people/bio_wjm.html]

Renee Loth, Editorial Page Editor, *The Boston Globe*. Ms. Loth told me that *The Boston Globe* has been supporting this project. According to her, this is a bigger public project than building the Panama Canal. [www.boston.com]

Mark Maloney, Chief Economic Development Officer and Director, Boston Redevelopment Authority. The BRA oversees the Big Dig. Mr. Maloney explained to me the plan to remake the city of Boston. [www.ci.boston.ma.us/bra/]

James Greene, Emergency Shelter Commission, Mayor's Office, City of Boston. In Boston, there are about 1,000 homeless people during the summer and 300 during the winter. Rent increases are one of the reasons that homelessness has increased. The ESC would like to use the Big Dig project as an opportunity to create housing as Boston is redeveloped. [www.cityofboston.gov/shelter/]

Mary Lassen, Senior Fellow in Public Policy, The Boston Foundation; former CEO of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union (WEIU). The WEIU works to improve women's welfare, employment and working situations. [www.tbf.org/; http://www.weiu.org/]

Hypothesis on Social Inclusiveness

The current and former commissioners of the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (Mr. Donovan and Ms. Perine) spoke to me about creating employment opportunities when discussing housing policy. In Harlem, things did not get better only by improving housing. The revitalization took off by creating stores and using them as places that provide employment opportunities. If the main problem is the clustering of economically disadvantaged people, the smart approach would combine employment, education and housing policies.

A society's response towards homelessness reflects how inclusive a society is. Will the society take interim measures such as setting up temporary shelters and offering food, only to let the homeless situation last forever? Or, will the society tackle the problem with full-scale education, training and employment policies?

A common problem that Japan and the U.S. have is dealing with evacuees of disasters. During my trip to the U.S., I spoke with many people about how the New Orleans hurricane evacuees have been unable to return to where they lived and about the 700 people who died in isolation during a heat wave in Chicago.

In comparison to that, I was often asked why there were no cases of isolated death among the evacuees from Miyake Island after a volcanic eruption there in 2000. (By contrast, after the Kobe earthquake, there was a series of isolated deaths at temporary housing facilities and revitalized housing facilities.) The reason there were no isolated deaths among the 3,800 island residents during the period of the evacuation is because they were transplanted to existing communities and lived in vacant public housing units on the Japanese mainland.

When the Miyake Island residents started to live in public housing, the rent was free. Basic charges for water, sewage and electricity were waived. Basic housewares, a total of 31 items, were provided that included an electric rice cooker, refrigerator, futon and blankets. In addition to that, each household received ¥1 million from a fund that was created based on a law to support disaster victims. Able victims started to work so they did not need to be provided with a ¥30,000 per month grocery allowance.

I have felt throughout my work that simply providing cash is not effective welfare policy. I was encouraged to find out that this idea resonated with people that I met in New York.

The situation in New York City is the same as the London Plan, which prioritizes social inclusion and economic development. We must not forget that security, welfare, urban planning and the economy are all inextricably linked. Welfare cannot be realized only by welfare policy. Welfare succeeds by integrating urban planning and economic policy. In other words, for public policy, the biggest challenge for the administration in the 21st century is the “integration of policies.”

New York is a city of immigrants, one that continues to accept thousands of new immigrants every year. The city was founded by people from diverse backgrounds and residents have an innate awareness about social inclusion. In London, social inclusion is a stated policy. Like New Yorkers, Londoners are strongly aware of the importance of social inclusion. What about Tokyo?

In Tokyo, the city is making a transition into the information era by revitalizing the central district, updating functionality, enhancing cultural activities and exchange, and transforming industrial structures. It may not be sufficient, but the city is trying. However, what has been done in terms of social inclusion? I am not only talking about policy, but people’s awareness. For the next generation, I believe that the Japanese, especially those in Tokyo, should enhance their awareness of social inclusion.

Welfare policy should not be a safety net. We must integrate policies such as education, job training, employment and housing so that they have a trampoline effect on people in need, allowing them to bounce back and rejoin the game. Social inclusion shares the same goal—raising awareness and implementing policies that foster an environment in which people feel included and able to contribute to society.

Addendum

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone I met with. I would also like to thank Daniel Rosenblum, Vice President of Global Affairs, and all the staff at Japan Society who helped arrange the trip. Thanks to Harper Alexander’s arrangements, I was able to carry out fruitful research in a short period of time. Thanks to Fumiko Miyamoto’s translation, this essay is available in English. I also would like to thank Ruri Kawashima, who accompanied me to all the meetings as I walked around New York. I believe she wore out her shoes! Thanks to everyone, I was able to open up new dialogue about social inclusion. My life-long theme is “Tokyo.” From now on, I am committed to engaging people on the idea of social inclusion in Tokyo. I will continue to seek your guidance.