

Is Social Security Reform Really Willing to Deal with Poverty?

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Abstract

In Japan, the growing issue of poverty has been in the spotlight since 2000. Due to the government's Social Security Reform, the state of anti-poverty policy, including the public assistance system, has come into question, and new structures (philosophies and systems) for supporting poor and needy persons have started to be introduced. This movement is not unrelated to ideological discussions and trends occurring in social security policy in the West and East Asia.

While presenting trends in poverty research and social security policy (specifically, anti-poverty policies) in Japan and abroad, this paper first confirms the kinds of restructuring of social security systems recently taking place in various countries in light of conceptual/ideological discussion and political/economic background. Second, this paper presents and assesses movements in specific social security policies in Japan and abroad, while referencing frameworks for ideological discussion such as basic income theory. Third, the challenges that remain in Japan's anti-poverty policy are examined based on the above discussion by contrasting them with social security policies abroad, particularly focusing on problems regarding minimum subsistence and income redistribution.

Introduction: Awareness of Issues and Research Objectives

Japanese anti-poverty policy was developed with a focus on a public assistance system (Public Assistance Act [1946]) which combined minimum subsistence (economic benefits) with support (social work to provide support with living and employment). This public assistance system was designed as

comprehensive social assistance and was operated as a social security safety net for coping comprehensively with the diverse forms of poverty. However, this form of public assistance, which was effectively weighted toward economic assistance, came under question. New anti-poverty policies began to be developed through government social security reforms against the background of increasing poverty, particularly in the mid-1990s and beyond, and neo-liberalism. These policies were strikingly apparent in the strengthening of a workfare program called “jobseeker support” and the introduction of “the self-reliance support system for needy persons” (Act for Supporting the Self-reliance of Needy Persons [2015]), which partially replaced and supplemented public assistance.

These changes are thought to have been implemented with significant impact from anti-poverty policy trends and ideological discourse in Europe and North America, including the movement toward strengthening the guarantee of services (or “intervention”) for the poor, unemployed and low income earners, who are regarded as requiring livelihood support, which is also referred to as workfare and activation, in addition to monetary benefits for economic poverty. This trend emphasizes not only monetary benefits, but also services (the term “support” is used in Japan). Such service-focused initiatives were also being developed in Japan under the names of “jobseeker support” and “social inclusion” in the 2000s and beyond. It can be said that the self-reliance support system for needy persons truly embodies the ideology and incorporates its substance. Also having impact was the trend toward introducing more universal and rational income guarantee systems (jobseeker’s allowance, tax credits and tax benefits, minimum guaranteed pension, etc.) rather than the highly selective public assistance, which is associated with stigma and the related ideological discussions (basic income theory, negative income tax theory, etc.). Although it has been stated that economic benefits and “support” were implemented in combination in Japan, some researchers have pointed out the need for them to be separated, making income security into a more rational system.

It can be said that the development of such anti-poverty policies was generally evaluated positively in Japan as an effort to build new mechanisms for guaranteeing minimum subsistence to replace conventional public assistance, which was high selective. However, any evaluation of the outcomes of such new anti-poverty policies amid the promotion of reform to the social security system based on neo-liberalism, which champions the “marketization” of

welfare, needs to be carefully discussed.

In this paper, I will first examine the characteristics seen in the emergence of the poverty problem in Japan and the nature of the social security policy (in particular, the anti-poverty policy) that was developed based on social structure and ideology. Secondly, taking the perspective of “marketization” as the characteristic of the anti-poverty policies implemented in 2010 and beyond in particular, I will show that these policies were developed against a background of neo-liberalism, leading to operation with an emphasis on cost-effectiveness and reduced costs. Thirdly, based on the above, I will examine a converse strengthening of “selectivity” and “managerialism” in social assistance and the loss of the minimum subsistence guarantee perspective in the development of Japan’s new anti-poverty policy.

1. Poverty and Social Security Policy in Japan in the 1990s and Beyond

1.1 Rapid Development of “Poverty” in Japan

“Poverty” rapidly came to be recognized as a social problem in Japan in the second half of the 1990s. As Japan concentrated on expanding and maintaining its industrial economy from the 1950s through the first part of the 1990s, it had managed to avoid confronting the problems of poverty, unemployment and low incomes despite experiencing the oil crisis. Problems such as workers in irregular employment, the working poor, and single mothers were overlooked as Japan long maintained full-time full employment premised on an industrial economy and families based on gender norms.

Subsequently, Japan entered a prolonged recession accompanying changes in its industrial structure, and the aging of its population entered the severe stage at the same time (the aging rate rose sharply from 14% in 1994 to 23% in 2010). In the early 2000s, unemployment and irregular employment became social problems due to an increase in redundancies and flexible employment, and the issues of a sharp expansion in homelessness (“rough sleepers”) in urban areas and youth poverty (NEET: “not in employment, education or training”) were discussed. In addition, as social welfare philosophy turned to deinstitutionalization, disabled people and the elderly were removed from social hospitalization and came to live alone or with family

support in the community. With inadequate welfare services for such vulnerable people, families were expected to be responsible for their care. As a result, poverty involving families increased, and the problems of family abuse and violence and those of young carers emerged. This “new poverty,” featuring abuse, violence, isolation and exclusion of long-term unemployed people, homeless people, and elderly people, suddenly appeared at the center of Japan’s social problems.

Due to the sharp increase in “new poverty,” research questioning the concept and semantic content of poverty drew attention starting in the 2000s. Much of this research was strongly influenced by British and French social exclusion theory, and it was argued that a shift from economic poverty to “relational poverty” had also occurred in Japan (Spicker, 2007; Bhalla and Lapeyre, 2004; Iwata, 2008). In addition, the significance of “inclusion” as opposed to exclusion was discussed as a part of the problem with calls for guaranteed participation and entry (Miyamoto, 2004).

The concept of social exclusion has come to be used favorably to direct the policy known as workfare in the EU and individual countries since the 2000s (Bhalla and Lapeyre, 2004). However, it is also a concept that justifies passive policy on economic benefits for the poor, and has a tendency to be used in conservative politics to reduce the problem of income redistribution to an issue of inequality in employment opportunities, thus portraying poverty as merely personal (Lister, 2004; Byrne, 1999).

Thus, the argument that initiatives focused on “employment” and not only on economic benefits are essential to address poverty attracted attention in Japan as well. As a policy to address social exclusion, more emphasis has come to be placed on the guarantee of “recognition,” that is initiatives that secure a place of residence and encourage social participation, than on the redistribution of income.

1.2 Inability of Social Security Structure to Deal with Poverty

One of the reasons for the focus on social exclusion theory is related to a multi-disciplinary discussion of the fact that Japan’s social security system contains “structural issues” that were created historically. Social security in Japan was completed in the early 1960s as a system with a two-fold structure of social insurance for all citizens and public assistance (the framework for that had been established in the 1930s). It was considered that universal social

insurance primarily supported independence for full-time workers and their families, while selective public assistance was mainly a residual assistance system for those without the ability to work and those without relatives. Moreover, these policies assumed labor norms that stress independence through full employment and working, gender roles based on the male breadwinner household model, and a nation state with no immigration.

Social insurance is stratified with a two-fold structure involving pension, health and unemployment insurance proportional to remuneration for employees, and pension and health insurance for farmers, the self-employed, and “other citizens.”

Despite the term employees, it basically assumes coverage for full-time workers (male breadwinners) and their families, while part-time workers and people in irregular employment are treated as “other citizens.” It is stressed that the pension system based on the insurance principle, as well as the increase in the number of people in irregular employment, have meant an increase in the number of people at risk of having no pension. In addition, with no “unemployment benefits” for farmers, the self-employed, and people in irregular employment, public assistance also made no attempt to cover the unemployed and the working poor (Kaneko, 2017).

Social assistance was operated in an extremely residual manner based on the package of benefits under the public assistance system. The recipient rate of the system operated on the principle of selectivism stood at 0.7% at its lowest in 1995 and finally exceeded 1.0% in 2003 (and 1.6% even in 2017). The public assistance system also includes publicly funded health care and housing benefits (rent subsidies). However, it is practically impossible for these special benefits to be provided by themselves (single payments), and only the “limited poor” who pass all the asset requirements and family support requirements can receive the public assistance package in exchange for the stigma.

The media has frequently reported on “incidents” in which public assistance is operated excessively only for people with no capacity for work and assistance has been terminated when there was some capacity for work, resulting in deaths at home as people were unable to get food or medicine or in which applications from the homeless have been rejected due to the lack of a residence. If “people with work capacity” fall into poverty, they are called the working poor. These people cannot easily access public assistance, and there is no system for guaranteeing their income in Japan.

This public assistance system, which could be termed the only social assistance, was characterized by selectivity and a residual nature through its rigid operation. In particular, many of the workers in irregular employment and working poor who fall through the net of social insurance but have some savings or family considered able to support them are unable to pass the requirements and are thus ineligible for public assistance. The unemployed, people in irregular employment, and those referred to as the working poor are effectively not included in the scope of public assistance, and with no other system for them, poverty is becoming more severe without any relief.

1.3 Various Problems of the Rigid Social Assistance System

The inability of the social assistance system to respond to diverse forms of poverty is a problem that has long been debated in Japan. It has been argued that while the basis of the problem is the system structure related to the requirements for receipt and the means test, operational issues in the administrative agencies that actually implement the system form a “dark area” that further exacerbates the structural issue (Kaneko, 2017). At the heart of the operational issues lies the tactic adopted by the administrative agencies, termed the “*mizugiwa* (waterfront) strategy,” by which they refuse to accept applications for public assistance at welfare offices without conducting screening. This involves inappropriate actions such as conducting interviews with the needy who consult welfare offices that deter them from applying for assistance or sending them home without giving them the application forms. In some cases, intimidating interviewers are assigned to welfare offices to make applicants reluctant to apply by encouraging them to seek employment and providing ambiguous (or untrue) representations about family support and assets requirements.

Although public assistance operates in such a rigid manner, the number of recipients has continued to rise since the 2000s. The reasons for this are the increasing severity described previously, particularly the sharp increase in such problems as long-term unemployment, the increase in the number of people in irregular employment, the aging society, and the increase in homelessness.

The Democratic Party of Japan coalition government, which took office in 2009, attempted to improve operations to implement appropriate public assistance for the homeless and working poor. As a result, the number of recipients

increased sharply. However, since the Liberal Democratic Party coalition government returned in 2012, curbs on social security expenses (like the UK austerity policy) and operation that restrains public assistance have been implemented once again. The recipient rate for public assistance exceeded 1.7% in 2015, but subsequently fell for the first time in 20 years in 2017, standing at around 1.6% again (Figure 1).

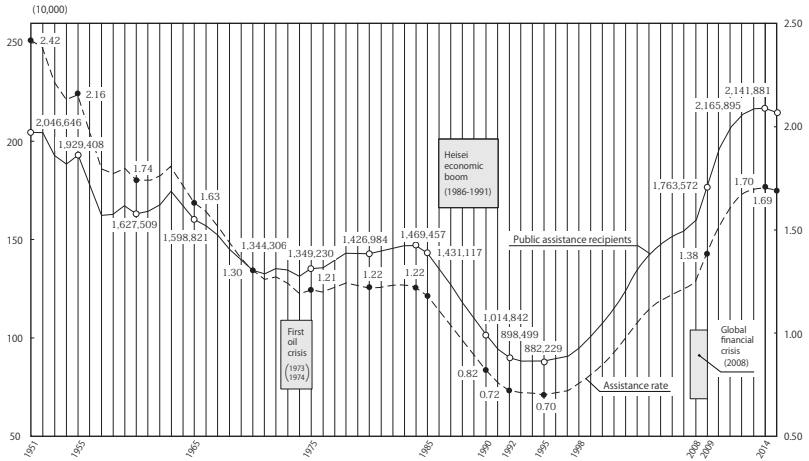


Fig.1 Changes in the number of public assistance recipients and recipient rates (Source: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare)

In 2010, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare announced estimates for the take-up rate. Where the take-up rate is defined as “the percentage of households receiving public assistance out of the number of low income households (considering income and assets),” the take-up rate for public assistance was determined to be 32.1% (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2010). However, according to research by Kensaku Tomuro, making an estimate based on materials such as the Employment Status Survey and Survey on Public Assistance Recipients, the take-up rate was calculated at 15.5% (2012). According to this research, Toyama Prefecture has the lowest take-up rate at 6.5%, while Osaka Prefecture has the highest take-up rate at 34.2%. Toyama Prefecture is the prefecture with the lowest recipient rate for public assistance while Osaka Prefecture is the prefecture in the highest

category. In other words, there was found to be a positive correlation between the take-up rate and the public assistance recipient rate by region (Tomuro, 2016).

In general, a low recipient rate for public assistance has been accepted as a demonstration that poverty is not a serious problem. However, this research clearly showed the problem that recipient rates are lower in regions where public assistance is operated in a rigid manner.

2. Anti-Poverty Policy Reform and Its Political Objectives

2.1 A New Development in Anti-Poverty Policy: Strengthening “Support for Independence”

The period since the 2000s has not been without opportunities for “improvement” of Japan’s problem-riddled anti-poverty policy. One of these opportunities is the reform of the public assistance system, and another opportunity is the creation of anti-poverty policies outside of the public assistance system.

The 2004 report delivered by the Expert Committee on the Future of the Public Assistance System, which had been established by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, formed the key impetus that initiated the reform of the public assistance system. This report presented a reform plan to reconstruct public assistance into a system that makes it “easier to enter and exit,” and recommended further strengthening “support for self-reliance” of recipients. Strengthening of “support for self-reliance” here marked an intention to enhance various programs such as workfare and activation to promote reform with a focus on “services” in the name of support for self-reliance rather than purely economic benefits.

As a result of this discussion, the services (support for self-reliance) provided in the form of the public assistance system have been changing since the second half of the 2000s. The Support Service Programs for Self-Reliance was introduced in fiscal 2005, social workers with more expertise than in the past were hired, and the outsourcing of services was promoted. Employment support was emphasized in particular, and welfare offices (public assistance benefit service centers) and public employment security office (employment service centers) were partially integrated, with the assignment of experts.

Under the Support Service Programs for Self-Reliance, local governments were encouraged to actively use private-sector service providers. Private-sector service providers have gradually come to be used not only in employment support but also in areas such as employment preparation support, education and vocational training, financial management support, and social participation support for mentally disabled people. The Personal Support Service implemented since 2009 is also a model project that utilizes private-sector service providers while offering one-stop support that matches the needs of people in poverty. Model projects have been implemented in 27 regions nationwide with the support of NPOs and NGOs (Okuda, et. al., 2014).

2.2 The Introduction of the Self-reliance Support System for Needy Persons

As the second reform, new anti-poverty policies were introduced to replace and supplement the public assistance system. One of these policies is the self-reliance support system for needy persons implemented in 2015. This system aims to promote independence of needy persons through the provision of various programs such as independence counselling and support and employment preparation assistance as well as paying housing benefits to needy persons. The eligible “needy persons” are defined as “persons at risk” of falling into poverty (receipt of public assistance payments), effectively including people in poverty while also assuming the low income group just above those in poverty.

In addition, the self-reliance support system for needy persons made it possible for the government to provide financial backup for a range of private support for the poor provided in the community (support for the homeless, housing assistance, children’s cafeterias, meals-on-wheels, learning support). Local governments were able to provide independence advice and support programs and subcontract them to private-sector service providers (NPOs, NGOs and for-profit companies, etc.), including “employment preparation support” and other optional programs.

Among the various programs, the independence advice and support program was stipulated as mandatory for local governments. Local governments have to implement an independence advice and support program based on advice and support for employment and other types of independence and the

creation of plans for the utilization of the program. Previously in Japan, the application and welfare center for public assistance of each local government dealt with intake consultations from people in poverty, and they tended to deploy the negative tactics described previously. Under the independence advice and support program, intake consultations can be outsourced to private-sector service providers. In the statistics for 2017, 61.0% of local governments have outsourced the independence advice and support program to a private-sector service provider (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2017).

Another mandatory program for local governments under the same law is a mechanism for providing housing benefits to needy people of working age who have lost their home due to losing their job. This is a system for the payment of the cash equivalent of rent (public assistance criteria), and can be described as the first systematic public housing benefit in Japan outside of public assistance. However, actual use was only 6,631 new payments in fiscal 2015 (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2017).

On the other hand, four programs stipulated as optional were employment preparation support, temporary livelihood support, household finance advice and support, and learning support, and there is a range of programs for each depending on the local government. For example, the household finance advice and support programs provide support for the management of household finances and support related to rent and tax delinquency, debt consolidation and loan facilitation. Many local governments also provide integrated loan and financial management services called the livelihood and welfare loan program, which can also be said to be a program that involves many social work functions. Many local governments organize learning sessions for low income households as learning support programs to address childhood poverty and the “reproduction of poverty.”

Thus, in comparison with the public assistance system, the self-reliance support system for needy persons is based on a group of systems that focus more on services (support) than economic benefits, and its potential has been discussed (Goishi, et. al., 2017). However, I would like to evaluate the system below, taking into account how it is actually forced to operate.

2.3 Reform of the Social Security System Focused on Cost Effectiveness

Anti-poverty policies to strengthen “support for self-reliance,” developed as

described above, exist, but what position are they considered to occupy within the government's overall social security policy? In considering this, I would like to give some attention to the Social Security System Reform Bill (2012) and the Report of the National Council on Social Security System Reform (2013). Both of these set out "building a sustainable social security system that maintains the balance between benefits and burden" as the philosophy for social security in the future. Based on this philosophy of sustainability, the government stressed that curbing benefits and increasing the burden on citizens will be essential in order to maintain the existing system. In addition, it clearly showed that social policy is a part of an economic policy aimed at stimulating the market economy.

This philosophy has also been guiding anti-poverty policies. For example, the strengthening of "appropriate implementation" of public assistance (tightening of application procedures and strengthening of employment support), revision (lowering) of the public assistance threshold, and the reforms that include greater use of private-sector service providers in anti-poverty policies have aspects of being implemented in conjunction with the curbing of benefits and marketization in anti-poverty policies.

Among these, the idea that revision was equal to the lowering of the public assistance threshold caused controversy. The public assistance threshold, which is also the poverty line, has been progressively lowered since the mid-2010s. The government has downwardly revised the public assistance threshold, thereby reducing the number of public assistance recipients, and poverty has once again been made invisible. Some see the reduction in recipients while lowering the public assistance threshold as a "political achievement," but it is natural that the number of recipients will decrease if the threshold is lowered.

This lowering of the public assistance threshold was driven by the Ministry of Finance and the Cabinet. The grounds for lowering it were the populist ones of considering the motivation of the working poor to work and ensuring that working people do not "lose out," with the approach taken to consider the balance between the consumption of households in receipt of public assistance in comparison with that of low income earners not in receipt of public assistance. In other words, households in receipt of public assistance were regarded as having a higher standard of living than low income earners not in receipt of public assistance, and the government concluded that the public assistance threshold should be lowered based on the concept of so-called

less-eligibility (Kaneko, 2017). Again, this confirms that public assistance has failed in democratic operation and implementation.

Another trend of the reforms is the focus on cost effectiveness through the marketization of social assistance. For example, the Plan to Advance Economic and Fiscal Revitalization included in the government's Basic Policies decided by the Cabinet in June 2016 set out curbing social security benefits and the "industrialization" of social security as key pillars. In addition, in order to achieve this, the plan aimed to incorporate a number of management techniques into the service provision system for public assistance. By doing this, the aim to control the total costs related to each field of social security in addition to pursuing the implementation of benefits and services with a focus on measurement of results through cost effectiveness were set out as important objectives (Kawakami, 2015). As shown in these government objectives, it can be said that social security policy became incorporated into the trend of neo-liberalism aimed at curbing benefits and "marketization."

The Economic and Fiscal Revitalization Action Program compiled by the Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy in December 2015 added further momentum to this trend. The "visualization" in the program referred to making both "amount of public money spent" (inputs) and the results (outputs) visible to demonstrate more effective policy implementation. In addition, the program emphasized a "focus on necessary expenditures with high policy effects," drawing a distinction between expenditure that should be prioritized and expenditure that should be curbed.

The Action Program broke down each of the reforms set out in the Plan to Advance Economic and Fiscal Revitalization, their targets and time schedules in a reform schedule in an attempt to implement the policies effectively. A trend had been observed toward the introduction of private-sector management techniques such as New Public Management (NPM) and Private Finance Initiative (PFI) into social security policy since the 1980s. However, the Action Plan has now adopted the key performance indicators (KPIs) management technique in the reform schedule.

For example, the Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy's Reform Schedule 2016 Revised Edition set out concrete policy objectives and the KPIs for each one. The use of KPIs is considered to be a management technique that clearly states policy targets and fiscal cost effectiveness as numerical values in order to "visualize" policy challenges and to confirm

achievement levels in detail (Kawakami, 2016). For example, the Reform Schedule set out a total of 18 KPIs for the “Public Assistance, etc.” category. Specifically, there were numerical targets that included “60% participation rate in employment support programs by fiscal 2018” and “100% formulation of generic drug use promotion plans by local governments aimed at rationalization of healthcare assistance.”

Satoshi Kawakami has organized the characteristics of KPIs as a management technique into the following three points (Kawakami, 2016).

- (1) Areas that cannot be quantifiably identified are excluded and not indexed.
- (2) Since the indicator is for the purpose of achieving and improving management targets, corporate headquarters basically manage and operate it in an integrated manner.
- (3) A major precondition is use of ICT, which promotes big data management, monitoring, and use of analysis results.

The fact that areas that cannot be quantified are excluded produces the problem that support with outcomes that are difficult to identify in a simple quantification of outcomes is disregarded. For example, no matter how much a private-sector service provider offers courteous, face-to-face support and provides comfortable, secure places to live, it may only be evaluated on “employment rate” under the KPIs.

In addition, the Action Program made local governments the unit of reform and employed a method of encouraging greater efficiency through autonomous reform by stirring up competition between local governments while conducting comparative analysis of policy effects between them. For example, the items that contribute to “lowering costs” such as “the percentage of people who were able to find employment through employment support” are evaluated in a one-dimensional manner without taking account of circumstances such as the population distribution and employment situation in the region as well as social resources. This manner of policy development that is excessively focused on cost-effectiveness gives rise to the issue that will be considered next.

3. The Challenge of Anti-Poverty Policy in the Face of Fiscal Austerity and Managerialism

3.1 Client-Focused, Business-Like Anti-Poverty Policy?

Based on policy development to date, I will now consider risks regarding the challenges arising in Japan's anti-poverty policies (the public assistance system and the self-reliance support system for needy persons), particularly the marketization of anti-poverty policies leading to operations with a priority on cost-effectiveness and reduced costs.

As a trend in social policy in each country since the 1980s, Sarah Banks has discussed the observation of policy development with a focus on measurement of cost-effectiveness in service provision, including New Public Management (NPM) and value for money. This approach features the following five points (Banks, 2012, pp. 186–7).

- (1) Marketization: a concern to offer 'customer choice', alongside increasing efficiency and competitiveness in service delivery.
- (2) Consumerism: a concern to offer a consistent standard of service, linked to service users' rights and quality assurance.
- (3) Managerialism: which seeks greater control over the work of employees.
- (4) Authoritarianism: which emphasize the social control function of practitioners.
- (5) Deprofessionalization: a process that entails characterizing social workers as officials carrying out agency policy and/or as sales brokers.

This discussion indicates that the reform of service provision in social security also has a significant impact on social work setting. According to Banks, rationalistic management techniques such as "the production of quality standards, procedural manuals and assessment schedules" have been introduced into the support setting through the development of modern social security policy in addition to establishment of goals for service and support and measurement of the performance of social workers (*ibid.*, p. 186). In other words, it is becoming possible to extend mechanisms for the control and management of users into every corner of social work and support set-

tings for fiscal and resource purposes.

Banks offers the critique that through this promotion of enhanced management, a “client-focused, business-like model” has become entrenched in social work settings, giving rise to cost containment (cost-saving) measures and a “target culture” (a culture involving the setting of targets and pursuit of their quickest achievement). Moreover, she points out that “management by results” symbolized by cost-effectiveness takes the approach of depersonalizing and privatizing welfare services in addition to being linked to imperative demands for cost reductions (*ibid.*, p. 189).

Thus, amid the implementation of economic and fiscal policies that give cost containment the greatest value in accordance with the “cost reduction imperative,” social policy and social work that produces the maximum performance at low cost is sought. This means that management and control-oriented reforms that value fiscal rationalization will be developed. It leaves major challenges when seen from the perspective of ensuring satisfaction of the needs and protection of the rights of users as well as improving quality of life. As discussed in this paper, Japan’s anti-poverty policies, and the self-reliance support system for needy persons in particular, are at risk of approaching this “client-focused, business-like model.”

3.2 Further “Targeting” of the Poor and Managerialism

Moreover, the fact that social security system reforms have been carried out in combination with “marketization” has further increased this risk. While controlling both the inputs (finance) and outputs (results) of private-sector service providers, the government is also extending its authority across the community. For example, a private-sector service provider that needs to consider organizational and business survival is forced to target and guide users. Consequently, service providers might positively coordinate employment support services for a person with high potential for employment, but a person with low potential for employment may be “passed around” from service provider to service provider. In other words, it yields targeting of the parties eligible for services. Targeting is conducted so that clients who are likely to produce results from the outset are accepted as eligible for support while those who seem unlikely to produce results are excluded from eligibility for support (“cream skimming”).

Can private-sector service providers guarantee independence while

receiving government funding? Can they listen to participants without being trapped by paternalism amid the demand for results? The more outsourcing is increased and the more organizations take on large paid staffs, substantial assets and social responsibilities, the more they will be unable to escape from this loop.

Although the development of social security policies focused on cost-effectiveness appear to have achieved strong performance through the visualization of the “business-like” results (fiscal rationalization) of the policies, because they are introduced in combination with lowering costs, they serve to leverage power over service users and social workers, giving rise to management and control as distinct from meeting needs (Kaneko, 2017). Introducing business management methods into social security will not be the best way to carry out an anti-poverty policy without paternalism.

3.3 Minimum Subsistence Guarantee Missing from Discussion

Finally, I will consider whether the development of Japan’s anti-poverty policies against the background of fiscal austerity and managerialism can meet the needs of the poor.

Japan’s public assistance system uses an old style of social assistance that integrates economic benefits with services. By contrast, the self-reliance support system for needy persons is a system centered on the “support” of workfare and activation, which is considered as achieving differentiation from public assistance. In other words, through the introduction of the system, the path of symbolic separation of “benefits” from “support” was selected for Japan’s anti-poverty policy. Most of the “benefits” are limited and concentrated in public assistance, while “support” has been enriched in the form of the self-reliance support system for needy persons.

There is discussion in Japan about several advantages and disadvantages of an anti-poverty policy that separates “benefits” and “support.” However, the policy of “separation” should be implemented as a part of rationalization in order to meet the “needs” of the poor. In other words, there is a need to reaffirm that rationalization is not for fiscal, management and control purposes (Kaneko, 2017). With regard to the “benefit,” the need for creating a universal social security system beyond the constraints of public assistance has been discussed. For example, the basic income theory has been debated with a certain reality, rather than idealistic thought, in recent discussion in

Japan. Basic income here is not limited to a system that provides a minimum subsistence guarantee (or the so-called full basic income), but rather a discussion of reconfiguring income redistribution mechanisms, including the tax system and allowances. In recent debate, such concepts as a universal benefit for people deprived of work through the threat from artificial intelligence (AI), and the concepts of tax deductions for the working poor and a minimum guaranteed pension for elderly people who do not have a pension have been discussed as similar to that of the basic income. This concept of an income guarantee has been under focus as being more rational and economically efficient than social assistance. It must be observed that the perspective of a minimum subsistence guarantee is missing.

With regards to the “support,” as seen in this paper, outsourcing to the community and the private sector accompanied by lowering cost should be avoided, and there should not be excessive reliance on evaluation based on the perspectives of cost effectiveness and value for money. The government and private-sector service providers should build trusting relationships to provide for the needs of parties receiving support as a right rather than based on paternalism.

Today when the discussion of social security policy has increased opportunities to speak in the logic and terms of the “market” and “finance,” I would like to once again affirm the need for a comprehensive discussion of the future of anti-poverty policy from the perspective of a minimum subsistence as a right and support as a right.

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