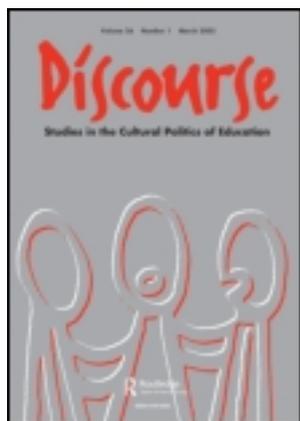


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### Risk management by a neoliberal state: construction of new knowledge through lifelong learning in Japan

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## Risk management by a neoliberal state: construction of new knowledge through lifelong learning in Japan

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This article examines the current developments in Japan's lifelong learning policy and practices. I argue that promoting lifelong learning is an action that manages the risks of governance for the neoliberal state. Implementing a new lifelong learning policy involves the employment of a political technique toward integrating the currently divided and polarized Japanese population – popularly called *kakusa* – into the newly imagined collective, namely, *atarashii kōkyō* or the New Public Commons. Examining the macro policy discourse on Japan's educational policy, this article demonstrates Japan's inflections of neoliberal governmentality with the new distribution of responsibility between the state and the individuals through the construction of new knowledge supporting the New Public Commons. In fact, new knowledge is the epicenter of the national educational policy discourse aiming at generating social solidarity in local communities.

**Keywords:** lifelong learning; risk; *kakusa* (socioeconomic divide); neoliberalism; local communities; Japan

### Lifelong learning and risk

The nurturing of an independent-minded individual is an important agenda in contemporary education. It is also becoming crucial to generate a sense of 'public' to foster the active participation of such an individual in society... Lifelong learning should play a key role in developing this sense among Japanese citizens. (Central Council for Education, 2008, p. 6)

Lifelong learning can be defined as continual learning efforts at any stage of life that help people improve their lives and adapt to society. Japan has a rich tradition of learning activities at the grass-roots level (see Rubinger, 2007), and researchers have argued that lifelong learning in Japan primarily follows a cultural construct revolving around personal learning centered on liberal arts, painting, sculpting and sports (cf. Schuetze & Casey, 2006). The latest available survey on Japanese lifelong learning (Cabinet Office, 2008) revealed that nearly half of the respondents (47%, to be precise) had taken up at least one lifelong learning activity. Meanwhile, lifelong learning is gaining attention in Japan's contemporary educational policy-making. Its heightened importance became evident in December 2006, when the term *shōgai gakushū* (lifelong learning) was added to the Fundamental Law of Education – Japan's educational charter. This was the first amendment to the law since its

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enactment in 1947. Furthermore, the current discussion on the topic goes beyond the scope of cultural construct, through the introduction of a new term: *atarashii kōkyō* – the New Public Commons. Since the early 2000s, this term has been widely discussed in the Japanese policy-making circle, in relation to the revision of the Fundamental Law of Education.

The concept of the New Public Commons can serve as a foundation for solidarity, which, in turn, can enable conscientious citizens to improve society. It can also function as a sphere wherein people in general, or those interested in a specific cause, voluntarily participate. In the ongoing policy discussion, Japan's new lifelong learning initiative is primarily expected to contribute to the formation of this public sphere. It is expected to produce a new type of disciplinary state-sponsored knowledge that, in turn, is expected to support the creation of the New Public Commons. Armed with this new knowledge, citizens can contribute to activities like spontaneous agenda setting and problem solving at the grass-roots level and respond suitably to a constantly changing social and political life. Through a new lifelong learning initiative, this social imaginary – the New Public Commons – involves an attempt to redefine the boundaries of moral responsibility between the state and the individual, emphasizing more the virtues of self-regulation.

Over the past decade, I conducted extensive ethnographic fieldwork on Japan's lifelong learning (Ogawa, 2009a), drawing on Foucauldian post-structuralist theoretical insights. In this article, I argue that promoting such lifelong learning is an action that manages the risks of governance for the state. Clearly, engaging in lifelong learning activities toward updating their knowledge and skills is apparently more of a risk-managing activity for individuals trying to enhance their flexibility in the knowledge of economy-based labor market (Ogawa, 2009b). However, my focus in this article is on the state. In fact, one of the most recent comprehensive policy papers on Japan's education [Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), 2009] used the term risk six times in the 403-page document. Twice, it was used to discuss the significance of lifelong learning – unprecedented in policy discourse – and four times, it was used to imply a natural threat in the context of science/technology promotion policy. Here is an excerpt from the policy paper in the section on lifelong learning:

It is necessary for the state to support individual's learning which makes it possible to acquire knowledge and skills and for economic independence, as *risks* of the expansion of non-regular type of jobs and the bankruptcy of corporations are prominent, and socioeconomic divide and poverty issues are major social problems. (MEXT, 2009, p. 80, emphasis added by the author)

I argue that implementing the new lifelong learning policy indeed involves the employment of a political technique toward integrating the currently divided and polarized Japanese population – popularly called *kakusa* – into the newly imagined collective, namely, the New Public Commons. After World War II, Japan generated a relatively equal society in terms of chances and outcomes. In a welfarist society, the state tended to act as the general risk manager – insuring its citizens, indemnifying them against losses, protecting them from social harm and economic disaster, and regulating economic risks and environmental dangers. Behind these functions were conceptions of responsibility, relations between social groups and

techniques of insurance, all of which converged to produce a distinctively social mode of managing risk and promoting solidarity (Garland, 2003, p. 61). However, since the 1990s, Japan's societal model of a divided society has gradually replaced the general middle class or "90 per cent middle-class" society prevalent since the 1960s (Chiavacci, 2008; Economic Planning Agency, 1967; see Tachibanaki, 2005). In its economic survey of Japan, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) identified the country's increasing inequality and poverty levels as its major economic problems (OECD, 2006). While this socioeconomic dividedness stems from disparities of income, the matter is not confined to this aspect. It could potentially lead to social exclusion – "the loss of social cohesion resulting from growing inequalities and the return of mass social and economic vulnerability for an increasing part of the population" (Bhalla & Lapeyre, 2004, p. 1).

Sociocultural research on risk provides a rich source of ideas on the theme of social change and selfhood (e.g. Beck, 1992; Beck, Giddens, & Lash, 1994; Douglas, 1966; Foucault, 1991; Giddens, 1990). The nature of risks has indeed changed in the present scenario. A risk connotes few opportunities for gain and a greater possibility of loss. It is broadly considered as involving a threat, hazard, danger or some form of harm. Further, risks today refer to unquestionable uncertainties. They have become more global, less readily identifiable, more problematic, less easily managed and more anxiety-provoking, leading Ulrich Beck to describe contemporary society as a "risk society" or "second modernity" that Anthony Giddens terms "reflexive modernization". Meanwhile, the existing risk scholarship has been argued in the Western context, mostly in Germany and Britain. However, in fact, risks tend to arise in new and challenging ways in contemporary Japan as well.<sup>1</sup>

In Japan, the rolling back of the welfare state and rise of neoliberal politics, conspicuous factors since the tenure of former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi (2001–2006) of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), has rendered the social safety net inadequate for many sections of society (Arnoldi, 2009). Globally, neoliberal governments have indeed sought to depart from the classic postwar model of the risk-managing state (Yergin & Stanislaw, 1998). The current political rationale tends to consider that the risks previously governed through techniques such as social insurance are now better governed by individuals. This change has made the life of ordinary individuals much more precarious in terms of life planning and career building as well as in relation to the issues of identity and sense of self (e.g. Bauman, 2000; Sennett, 1998). These trends, propagated by a series of neoliberal political measures, have intensified and accelerated the socioeconomic dividedness of contemporary Japanese society. I argue that a strong lifelong learning initiative is currently functioning as a lever for social integration. Imagining the realization of the New Public Commons manages the concerns of governmental risks of such dividedness through producing new disciplinary knowledge; it shifts responsibility onto the individual, deploying the discourse of "self-responsibility" (Hook & Takeda, 2007). Risk is indeed understood as one of the heterogeneous governmental strategies of disciplinary power by which populations and individuals are monitored and managed so as to best meet the goals of democratic humanism (Foucault, 1991; see Lupton, 1999, p. 4). In its contemporary form, governmentality is a neoliberal approach to the political rationale dominating since the 1980s, which

endorses individual freedom and rights and seeks to limit excessive intervention by the state through decentralized authority (Harvey, 2005). Further, neoliberalism constitutes a particular set of social relations between the government and the governed (e.g. Ferguson & Gupta, 2002; for accounts in the context of Japan; see Miyazaki, 2010).

Through the lens of risks, this article explores Japan's inflections of neoliberal governmentality with the new distribution of responsibility between the state and the individual through the construction of new knowledge supporting the concept of the New Public Commons. It is examined primarily through the analysis of macro policy discourses on Japan's educational policy, combined with the findings from my ethnographic fieldwork. As the national policy-makers specify the local as the arena wherein lifelong learning should be defined and implemented, this article presents that local individuals participate in the new forms of state-sponsored knowledge production and circulation through lifelong learning activities. The construction of new knowledge through the lifelong learning initiative is a reflection of the "risk society" that Japan faces, and it is a risk-managing strategy for neoliberal Japan.

### **A brief history of Japan's lifelong learning**

Since the early post-World War II period, lifelong learning activities have been solidly supported by the Non-formal Education Law (*Shakai kyōiku hō*) of 1949. Under this law, the local government at the prefectural and municipal levels is required to provide lifelong learning opportunities to residents. These activities have been primarily organized in *kōminkan* or local community centers. One recent survey suggested that there were 15,953 local community centers nationwide (MEXT, 2008). Further, the law requires that each prefectural and municipal government have at least one director of nonformal education. In 1981, the Central Council for Education proposed that lifelong education encompasses learning that takes place at all life stages and includes both formal and nonformal learning (Central Council for Education, 1981). Thus, contemporary lifelong learning programs contain all types of educational activities. These activities may be carried out at schools, companies, community centers, libraries, museums or various other facilities. Further, the Lifelong Learning Promotion Law (*Shōgai gakushū shinkō hō*) was enacted in 1990, improving the institutional arrangements of lifelong learning opportunities.

Meanwhile, the 2000s have seen the rapid establishment of lifelong learning as one of the topmost priorities on the national policy agenda, as Japan seeks to create a dynamic, sustainable and knowledge-based society in today's constantly changing world – an outcome of the era of globalization. The 2003 report published by the Central Council for Education emphasized the importance of realizing a lifelong learning society, where every citizen would be able to freely avail of numerous learning opportunities at any stage of life and where the attainment of such learning would be evaluated properly in order to meet the enormous changes taking place in society (Central Council for Education, 2003). This policy philosophy was manifested when the Japanese government led by former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe revised the Fundamental Law of Education in December 2006. The revised law,

chiefly known in the media for promoting patriotic education, also stressed the significance of lifelong learning:

Article 3

Mission of Lifelong Learning:

Each nation can learn to improve itself and its citizens can strive to enhance their lives throughout their lifetimes, wherever and whenever; we aim to take advantage of our learning outcomes for the betterment of our own society.

After this amendment, the task force on lifelong learning at the Central Council for Education submitted a policy report to Japan's education minister Kisaburo Tokai on 19 February 2008, which stated that Japanese society should promote lifelong learning in order to survive in the new era. Moreover, the report confirmed the incorporation of lifelong learning as an integral part of the national education policy (Central Council for Education, 2008).

New perspectives on the development of the concept of lifelong learning in Japan were articulated in the aforementioned 131-page policy report. The initial portion of the report explained the key conceptual framework of lifelong learning in Japan, linking traditional personal learning to the knowledge construction that contributes only positively to society:

Learning is an individual activity based on a person's own interests and motivations. Promoting such learning activities makes it possible for people to have healthy, sound lives. Also, acquiring and updating skills and knowledge for a working life makes it possible to have an economically stable life. At the same time, this kind of learning activity should contribute to the development of an individual's abilities. Such individuals will ultimately contribute to the overall galvanization of society and the sustainable development of this country. (Central Council for Education, 2008, p. 3)

The present policy discussion on lifelong learning is actually beyond the scope of the old cultural model that focuses on learning liberal arts, hobbies and sports. This is because the newly advocated knowledge base is disciplinary in nature: lifelong learning is primarily argued to contribute to the quality of the public sphere that is termed the New Public Commons. There is now a stronger emphasis on the responsibility of each Japanese citizen in learning and active problem solving. In fact, lifelong learning is centrally located as an individual's contribution to this new public sphere.

### **New knowledge for the realization of the New Public Commons**

The grand challenges posed by our contemporary times have necessitated the acquiring of new knowledge. The lifelong learning initiatives currently in operation can be expected to produce a certain type of disciplinary knowledge that exclusively supports the creation of the New Public Commons. One of the major new points in the ongoing discussion on lifelong learning in Japan is symbolized by the term *sōgōteki na chi* or comprehensive knowledge (Central Council for Education, 2008). The Central Council for Education described this knowledge as an indispensable asset in the contemporary world. The council did not narrowly interpret comprehensive knowledge to mean simple knowledge and skills. Rather, it referred to it as

the “ability to identify problems as well as to evaluate them flexibly” (Central Council for Education, 2008, p. 4). The policy rationale is presented below:

Japanese society is currently experiencing dramatic changes, as administrative reforms and the economic deregulation process are being implemented across the country . . . As a result, social services formerly furnished by the government are now being transferred to the private sector. Under the circumstances, as part of her or his self-responsibility, each individual is expected to independently decide what she or he needs to know. Thus, learning opportunities should be guaranteed and supported by the state so that the Japanese people are afforded flexibility in deciding upon what they need to know. (Central Council for Education, 2008, p. 4)

One new type of knowledge is called *ikiru chikara* – the ability to survive in the contemporary world (Central Council for Education, 2008, p. 6). It is described as the most relevant knowledge for children. It advocates that no matter how much our society has changed, it is important to acquire abilities to independently solve problems, learn and think, judge the significance of situations and act accordingly. For adults, one new recommended knowledge is called *ningen ryoku* – directly translated as the ability as a human being – whereby one needs all the knowledge and skills necessary as an independent human being to survive by participating in and contributing to society.

More specifically on these two types of knowledge, an education bureaucrat who was involved in this policy-making told me that they were looking at “key competencies” that the OECD wants to promote as essential skills for the personal and social development of people in modern, complex societies. The OECD defines three categories of key competencies: interacting in socially heterogeneous groups, acting autonomously and using tools interactively (see Rychen, 2003, pp. 85–104). These three are indeed complementary. However, the second category, acting autonomously, seems particularly relevant to my argument as it induces the competencies that empower individuals to manage their lives responsibly. Acting autonomously means:

. . . participating effectively in the development of society, in its social, political, and economic institutions (e.g. to take part in decision processes), and functioning well in different spheres of life—in the workplace, in one’s personal and family life, and in civil and political life. (Rychen, 2003, p. 91)

The bureaucrat mentioned that Japan intends to enhance individual competencies as a collective (or the state) in order to cope with the demands and challenges of the contemporary world.

Domestically, this policy trend was reflected in the new Fundamental Law of Education, which was revised in December 2006. While the original law enacted in 1947 deemed the nurturing of the “independent spirit” and “spontaneous spirit” of the individual as one of the main aims of education, the subsequent revisions deleted these phrases. The aim of education became, among others, the cultivation in the minds of children “a sense of morality”, “autonomous self-control”, “a sense of public spirit and duty” and “a respectful attitude toward tradition and culture” – all of which reflected the conservative values and philosophy advocated by the ruling LDP at that time. The background of this change lies in the introduction of the

concept of the New Public Commons, which I have mentioned at the beginning of this article. In Japanese society, the term “public” or *ōyake* has traditionally meant the state or something for which the bureaucracy assumes responsibility. However, the concept of “public” has been strategically expanded through the education policy, involving a subtle shifting of responsibility to the people and a concomitant diminution of state responsibility. This policy rationale of the New Public Commons can be attributed to a statement made in 2000 by the Prime Minister’s Commission on Japan’s Goals in the twenty-first century, established by former Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi. As the central elements of reform that Japan would need to focus on, the commission emphasized the importance of empowering individuals and creating a new public sphere:

By ‘public space’ we do not mean the traditional top-down public sphere... We are referring to a new kind of public sphere created through the combined power of individuals, who regardless of their personal affiliations, consciously engage with one another and with society of their own free will. It is a public space that permits diverse ‘others’, is considerate of others, and supports others. At the same time, once a consensus has been formed, everyone should obey it. (Prime Minister’s Commission on Japan’s Goals in the 21st Century, 2000, p. 17)

The discussion record of the revision of the Fundamental Law of Education was developed following this statement:

We [the Japanese people] are stepping into a new era in which we are supporting a sense of values that we call the New Public Commons. That is, we try to independently solve the social problems we face, including the life improvement issues connected with the daily lives of the local community as well as matters related to the global environment and human rights. It is expected of people to try to use their abilities and time for others, for the local community, and for society, of their own volition. To support the New Public Commons, what one needs is a conscious awareness of oneself as an active participant in the formation of state and society, the courage to practice social justice, and an attitude of respect for traditional Japanese social norms. (Central Council for Education, 2003, p. 5)

In all the quotations cited earlier, personal learning as a cultural construct, in which nearly half of the Japanese population is currently engaged in some form or another, is now directly linked to the new lifelong learning initiative as a tool for active participation in the Japanese social and political spheres. The policy tries to promote their learning activities among the population. Their learning is a medium of social construction: personal learning is translated into collective learning. Through lifelong learning activities, the Japanese people are encouraged to become involved in something that positively impacts society. These activities will allow them to use their knowledge, skills and experience exclusively for improving society. In fact, as an ultimate goal, the policy proposal prepared in 2008 by the Central Council for Education proclaims that instead of simply being accumulated, knowledge should be “circulated” (*junkan suru*) in society (Central Council for Education, 2008, p. 8). The circulation of knowledge is expected to create a new flow of energy in society and generate another learning motivation. Thus, knowledge is expected to circulate among different organizations, generations and local communities. Through the discussion of new disciplinary knowledge, the Japanese state embodies a

problematization of the neoliberal ideology and formulas of rule that the state tries to generate. Knowledge construction directs attention to the principles of reason as inscriptions in which the current divided population “come together to govern, shape, and fashion the conduct of conduct” (Olsson & Petersson, 2008, p. 63).

### **Local communities: locations for realizing the New Public Commons**

Gaining knowledge of governing practices plays a significant role in helping the common man negotiate the complexities of everyday life and establish networks with his fellow citizens. Interestingly, the discussion on new knowledge brings *chiiki* or local communities to the policy discourse. They are considered as ideal locations for realizing the New Public through the practice of newly gained knowledge. The key policy document on lifelong learning written in 2008 claims:

In order to facilitate such knowledge construction, local communities will be expected to set up their agendas and achieve them through their own efforts. Instead of the government, local people will be expected to play the role of service providers on the basis of their own knowledge. Not only individuals but also the local community needs to enhance learning capabilities in order to respond adequately to the changes we are now facing. (Central Council for Education, 2008, p. 4)

The interim report submitted to the education minister by the Central Council for Education in January 2007 provides a relevant insight regarding this point. The report discusses a distinctive view on lifelong learning:

People who have knowledge, skills, and experience are now expected to spontaneously and actively participate in the agenda-setting and problem-solving activities of their local communities; in order to facilitate these activities, the government needs to support learning related to history and culture in the communities. Also, in collaboration with schools, public lifelong-learning facilities, businesses, and NPOs (non-profit organizations, a newly created third sector under the 1998 NPO Law), local residents are expected to jointly develop their own learning toward problem-solving activities in their communities. The government needs to support these learning efforts. (Central Council for Education, 2007, p. 6)

At the grass-roots level, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government is a frontrunner in implementing these national policy proposals. In December 2008, the Lifelong Learning Council of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government published a report that provided two meanings of the term “local communities” (Tokyo Metropolitan Government, 2008). The first was an interpretation of the term in the conventional sense in the Japanese language to mean just a geographical area. The second referred to it as the relationality among human beings, as a term representing the various networks established among local people. The report stated that it was vital to create a safe, trust-based support network when considering the reconstruction of Japanese society (Tokyo Metropolitan Government, 2008, p. 6). Such networks would be generated when people were positively involved in various types of problem-solving activities in their communities (Tokyo Metropolitan Government, 2008, p. 7). Local communities would thus be considered as a social resource for generating new types of knowledge. The new knowledge would be an essential foundation for building

grassroots skills to embody devolution – a distinctive administrative technique of rationalization in a neoliberal government.

The logic underlying the above concept is that people living in the same community unite and try to devise ways of improving their daily lives jointly under the sense of value advocated in the concept of the New Public Commons. In doing so, they can establish some kind of social solidarity and develop a collective consciousness through undertaking problem-solving activities as members of one community. This policy discourse would also work to strengthen trust and voluntary associational relations in civic life, which are popularly described as “social capital” (Putnam, 2000). As Japanese society is veering toward a socioeconomic divide, I consider this policy development as a risk-managing activity by the state in its governance of society. Risk is profoundly social. It is constructed as a factor that hinders the generation of cohesion and solidarity in the nation. The new form of knowledge construction that is achievable through lifelong learning works to instill or aid a sense of a collective belongingness as Japanese. In fact, Japan’s new lifelong learning policy is considered as a means to alleviate the negative impact of such a divide by imagining the realization of the New Public Commons.

Stratification of the Japanese populace in contemporary Japan is economically and socially bifurcated, and bipolarization – particularly among the youth – is a reality today. Japanese society is in fact becoming two-tiered, divided into the rich and the poor. On 1 September 2010, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare announced that the Gini coefficient, a measure of income distribution inequality, had registered a record 0.5318 in 2009 (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, 2010).<sup>2</sup> The closer the Gini coefficient is to one, the worse the inequality. This trend can be attributed to the drastic changes in the labor market liberalization started by former Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi following the burst in the 1990s of the asset-inflated “bubble” economy. It was further promoted by the Koizumi administration in the early 2000s under the name of neoliberal deregulation and structural reform.<sup>3</sup> Many Japanese firms have accelerated the restructuring and laying off of their workers, mostly the youth; the rate of unemployment reached 5.1% in 2009, a record high level in Japan’s history, according to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (2010), as well as the replacement of their full-time employees with young nonregular workers in order to save labor cost and survive in the fiercely competitive global market. While the Japanese traditional working style – lifetime employment – is on the verge of a breakdown, such precarious employment is fastly becoming the dominant mode of working. Furthermore, the number of so-called working poor, whose income falls below the poverty line of around JPY 2 million per annum – many youth fall in this category – has also risen.

This divided society has the omnipresent character of a risk society: it possesses the collective consciousness of anxiety, insecurity, uncertainty and ambivalence. With the collapse of social solidarity and coherence, however, local communities have not disappeared, as Scott Lash argues; rather, they are being rediscovered and re-formed around risk (Lash, 1994). According to Lash, risk is now the collective bond holding communities together as imaginary risk communities (1994, pp. 157–168, in particular). Local communities are in fact being imagined and rebuilt as locations where people would embody the social and political values of the New Public Commons. In a 2005 report, the Council on National Life, a subcommittee of the Cabinet Office, actually identified local communities as a new form of associational

entity constructed by citizens through a synthesis of traditional area-based and theme-based communities. According to the report, local communities would be based on people “with a shared consciousness of what the problem is and how it should be solved”; the term was defined as “the aggregate of connected people dealing with the issue” (Council on National Life, 2005, p. 3). On this policy development, Mitchell Dean and Paul Henman point out:

... [g]overning is fundamentally spatial because it is about ‘acting at a distance’, creating particular sites as ‘containers’ of power and authority, coordinating diverse locale, linking center with periphery, metropole with colony. (Dean & Henman, 2004, p. 490)

Local communities provide a location to practice lifelong learning and are recognized as what Dean and Henman call “containers” for directly linking the government and the governed. Following the revision of the Fundamental Law of Education in 2006, local learning movements are now increasingly examining the ways of including agenda-setting and problem-solving activities involving local people in the lifelong learning program at local community centers.

The aforementioned argument can be considered to be in line with the global efforts made by the states stepping in to implement education policies to actively involve the youth at risk (see Te Riele, 2006; Wishart, Taylor, & Shultz, 2006). In Japan, in recent times, local communities are being institutionalized as important places that afford the at-risk for being socially excluded proper access to learning opportunities at any stage of life. For example, since 2004, the Japanese government has been establishing “community schools” in its public education system at the primary and secondary levels.<sup>4</sup> As part of this initiative, children are encouraged to get actively involved in their local community just as the local people are involved in their local school activities. In other words, people from the local community volunteer to carry out teaching activities in the school. By mobilizing volunteers among the locals, the community school policy contributes toward enhancing educational skills in the local community. Further, this facilitates that students are integrated into the local community. Local communities play a significant role in offering various types of work-experience programs to students in the recently introduced “career education” course in Japanese schools. Through active interaction with the local adults, the community school system primarily aims at reducing any risks of local children being socially displaced in their adolescence. Specifically, this system ensures that not just parents and teachers but also the local adults provide proper guidance to the students.

Meanwhile, one of the new vocational courses recently funded by the state is offered by community-based local non-profit organizations (NPOs) – civil society organizations established under the 1998 NPO Law in Japan. The course aims at training people to become social entrepreneurs, but more practically, workers for NPOs, mainly because conventional businesses are unlikely to hire people in the current persistently sluggish economy. The courses are not limited to the youth, however. Recruiting the unemployed from the entire community, the local NPOs re-train them, that is, offer new knowledge and develop skills necessary for the operation of voluntary NPO activities. In the summer of 2010, the courses were started across the country, first in Aomori prefecture, the northernmost tip of the main Japanese island, followed by the Niigata, Chiba, and Aichi prefectures

and others. Such activities, that is, giving access to lifelong learning, should be part of the major efforts to bring the at-risk for being socially excluded from the mainstream Japanese society, and local communities are the focal points of such efforts. In doing so, the Japanese state can manage the risk of governance; it leads to the realization of the New Public Commons – a major political agenda nowadays.

### Conclusion

In this article, I frame the strategies adopted by the Japanese state under neoliberal governmentality from a risk perspective in the context of lifelong learning. The risk society is a reconstruction of modernity, which is oriented around the production of new knowledge. The state promotes lifelong learning as one of the foremost priorities on the agenda of the national education policy; in particular, it intends to support the concept of the New Public Commons. The state discourse on lifelong learning is expected to produce disciplinary knowledge, presented as comprehensive knowledge, in order to primarily contribute to the quality of the public sphere. I would argue that the Japanese state is replacing the Keynesian techniques of social intervention used in the implementation of welfare statehood by mobilizing lifelong learning among the population. Against the backdrop of the deepening socioeconomic divide nationwide, in imagining the realization of the New Public Commons, the Japanese neoliberal state is ultimately trying to manage the risk of governing society through the introduction of a strong lifelong learning initiative: the idea that knowledge is the epicenter of the movement aiming at generating social solidarity in local communities. As Mok (2007, p. 17) points out, the development of such new knowledge through lifelong learning can be considered as part of the capacity-building efforts being made by the neoliberal state, by revitalizing nonstate sectors in education provision, in the midst of the challenges posed by globalization. Lifelong learning is at the center of transformation at the grass-roots level, and the newly acquired knowledge should be considered as a tool for reorganizing and changing the conditions governing people's lives in contemporary neoliberal Japan.

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### Notes

Except where indicated, all quotations are taken from my field notes and all translations are my own:

1. One of the most comprehensive risk scholarships on Japan and East Asia has recently been published. See Chan, Takahashi, and Wang (2010).
2. The survey is conducted every three years, and the figures for initial income were 0.5263 in 2005 and 0.4983 in 2002.

3. A recent work by Ishida and Slater (2009) shows that this dividedness predates the neoliberal reform in Japan. My point here, however, is that such dividedness has intensified under Koizumi politics.
4. Modeled on the UK's system of a board of governors (as a governance structure for the school), a community school was introduced in 2004 as a new educational institution, which enhanced the involvement of parents as well as local communities in school management.

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