

# Combating Social Exclusion Faced by Disabled People in the Wage Labour Market in Hong Kong

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*This article contributes to the search for suitable approaches to combat social exclusion faced by disabled people in capitalist wage labour markets. Referring to policy and service examples in Hong Kong, it reviews four social exclusion approaches – the Moral Underclass (MUD), Social Integrationist (SID), Redistributive (RED) and Collective Production (COP) approaches. These approaches are explored in relation to three key issues: (1) the diverse preferences of disabled people; (2) the myth of infeasibility regarding unconventional approaches and (3) the defects of the medical model of disability. The article argues that the MUD and SID approaches are more associated with the medical model of disability and emphasise individual changes. The RED and COP approaches contain more features of the social model of disability and are in favour of social and structural changes. The COP approach stresses the diverse preferences of disabled people and supports innovative services to combat social exclusion.*

**Keywords:** Medical model, social model, social exclusion, disabled people, labour market.

## Introduction

Drawing on her study of the New Labour Policy in Britain, Levitas (1996, 1998, 2005) has presented different discourses of social exclusion. The discussion of these discourses has generated three widely quoted approaches to social exclusion, namely the Moral Underclass (MUD), the Social Integrationist (SID) and the Redistributive (RED) approaches. The contribution we intend to make to this discussion is concerned with the link between the debate of these approaches and the study of social exclusion faced by disabled people in the capitalist wage labour system. We will concentrate on three key issues concerning the search for suitable approaches to tackling such social exclusion with reference to the wage labour system in Hong Kong: (1) the diverse experiences of disabled people; (2) the myth of infeasibility regarding approaches which aim to combat social exclusion in the capitalist wage labour system; and (3) the defects of the medical model of disability.

This article starts with a brief discussion of the concept of social exclusion. This is followed by the discussion of the three key issues and how they are related to the MUD, SID and RED approaches. Our intention is not to make detailed comparison of these

three approaches, but to point out their relative strengths and weaknesses in combating social exclusion faced by disabled people. In addition, a fourth approach, namely the Collective Production approach (COP) will be explored with empirical service examples from Hong Kong. In the final part of the article, we provide empirical examples of the four approaches to social exclusion. These examples are drawn from the discussion of the policy measures for supporting (or challenging) the wage labour system in Hong Kong. As we illustrate, the Productivity Assessment Scheme is an example of both the MUD and SID approaches to social exclusion, the proposed social insurance scheme for disabled people is an example of the RED approach to social exclusion, and the proposed scheme for financially assisting disabled people to set up cooperatives is an example of the COP approach to social exclusion.

### **Social exclusion**

Social exclusion has been widely discussed since the late 1980s (Chau and Yu, 2002; Levitas *et al.*, 2007). This concept attracts not only the interest of the academic community but also policy makers and policy analysts. In 1989, the European Commission was asked by the Council of Ministers to examine policies to combat social exclusion. The Labour government in the UK set up the Social Exclusion Unit to explore the solution to this problem. The increasing popularity of this concept represents concerns that people in marginal positions in society suffer not only economic deprivation but also non-integration into a social and family network. In discussing vagrants, Castel (2000) highlighted that people may find themselves in different zones in the social space – integration, vulnerability and disaffiliation zones. According to Castel (2000), to be in the zone of integration means that one is guaranteed a permanent job and receives support from social relationships; to be in the zone of vulnerability means that one has both insecure work and fragile relationships; and to be in the zone of disaffiliation means one has no job and faces social isolation. Castel's ideas are supported by the discussion that social exclusion has not only a material dimension but also a relational dimension. The Social Exclusion Unit in the UK stressed that social exclusion is a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from not only economic difficulties such as low incomes but also relational problems such as family breakdown (Levitas *et al.*, 2007).

Discussions of social exclusion faced by disabled people in relation to the labour market also indicate that many disabled people experience not only economic difficulties but also relational issues. By discussing paid work and disability, analysts (Abberley, 1997; Roulstone, 2000; Barnes and Mercer, 2005; Chau, 2009) show that the economic and relational dimensions of social exclusion faced by disabled people are highly related.

There is a more specialised complex division of labour with the emphasis on organic solidarity in the process of industrialisation, in which the wage labour system plays an increasingly important role as an inclusion mechanism (Abberley, 1997; Barnes and Mercer, 2005). Studies show that even citizenship is associated with being an active economic agent, with the assumption that paid employment is privileged over other forms of work activity (Grint, 1998; Levitas *et al.*, 2007). As a result, those excluded from paid employment are likely to find themselves on the margins of society (Chau and Yu, 2002; Yu, 2008). Since it is more difficult for disabled people to find paid employment, they are more likely to be vulnerable to poverty and regarded as less than full members

of society (Abberley, 1999). Using Castel's languages, they are likely to find themselves in the zones of vulnerability and disaffiliation.

### **Three key issues**

#### *1. Diverse experiences of disabled people*

A number of studies show that disabled people have diverse experiences in the wage labour system and therefore different kinds of public intervention would be needed to enable their inclusion in paid employment (Barnes and Mercer, 2003; Taylor, 2004; HKCSS, 2013; Ho, 2014; Yu and Chung, 2014). The following scenarios are some of the examples drawn from studies in Hong Kong:

- a. Some disabled people are not given sufficient working opportunities or financial rewards in the wage labour system irrespective of their working abilities. Hence, measures such as employment quota systems and minimum wage policies would be needed to improve their position in the wage labour system (HKCSS, 2013; Ho, 2014).
- b. In formulating pension policies, the Hong Kong government assumes that many workers work 44 hours a week, and have a working life of 40 years (HKSAR, 2015). However, this assumption is not necessarily in line with the physical and social conditions of disabled people. It is thus important to make alternative work arrangements that can accommodate various patterns of life courses of disabled people (LegCo, 2008).
- c. Some disabled people have as great potential to run their own business as to be an employee. However, many of them cannot fulfil this potential because of a lack of financial capital. Hence, it is necessary to financially support them to become an employer or be self-employed (Yu and Chung, 2014).
- d. Some disabled people make unpaid contributions to society (such as taking care of themselves and others) but their contributions are regarded as of less economic value than paid work. There is a need to review the value of paid work and unpaid contributions respectively (Yu and Chung, 2014).
- e. Some disabled people (as well as some non-disabled people) have difficulties in taking part in economic activities for different reasons, such as mobility issues, health problems and care responsibilities. It is necessary to provide them with some highly decommodified measures such as unconditional provision of basic income so that they can have a reasonable standard of living independent of the wage labour system (The Forthright Caucus, 2009).
- f. Some disabled people are able to gain a foothold in the wage labour system despite their disabilities.

Given the diverse circumstances of disabled people in the wage labour system, taking part in this system as an individual employee should not be treated as the only way for securing social inclusion of disabled people. Hence, analysts suggest alternative ways of organising care and work such as making the public recognise disabled people's self-care activities as work, repositioning disabled people as employers or self-employed, and providing people in need (both disabled and non-disabled people) a basic income

unconditionally so that they can enjoy a decent standard of living and take part in voluntary and non-market activities (Barnes and Mercer, 2003; Taylor, 2004).

## 2. *The myth of infeasibility*

The wage labour system is an indispensable part of a capitalist society. It could be difficult to implement any policy suggestions that risk negative impact on this system. However, this does not necessarily mean that these policy suggestions are unimportant. In the case of disabled people (and other socially disadvantaged groups), their diverse abilities and preferences should be respected as much as those of the rest of society. The social exclusion they experience should be tackled despite the fact that the policy measures concerned may not fully align with features of the wage labour system. Policy analysts and policy makers should keep an open mind on alternative approaches and to challenge the myth of 'infeasibility' of certain policy suggestions. As argued (Yu, 1996), the implementation of policy measures is more than a material transaction. It also leads to production and reproduction of normative messages. It could be difficult to launch large scale reforms on the wage labour system in the short run. Nevertheless, small scale pilot projects (such as those discussed later in this article) may still serve as possible alternatives. The delivery of such projects shows that it may not necessarily be technically impossible to provide alternative ways of tackling social exclusion. The real difficulty may lie in convincing governments to support extensive provision of these projects because they could be seen as bringing negative effects to the logic of capitalism and vested interests in capitalist societies. Campaigners for alternative measures to tackling social exclusion faced by disabled people could be accused of making 'unrealistic' demands on the government. While on the other hand, the government could be criticised for attaching more importance to defending the wage labour system than respecting the diverse preferences of disabled people.

## 3. *Inadequacies of the medical model of disability*

The medical model of disability focuses on the disadvantaging outcomes of physical or mental impairments rather than the environments in which people with impairments operate (Oliver, 1996). From a medical model perspective, 'disability' is a tragic problem for isolated individuals who have 'something wrong with them' (Oliver, 1990; Docherty *et al.*, 2010). With the assistance of individualised services, disabled people are expected to make individual changes to attain social inclusion. As this model stresses disabled individuals' adjustment to existing social and economic systems, it pays little attention to the defects of these systems. It also ignores the diverse preferences of disabled people on how social exclusion should be tackled.

On the contrary, the social model of disability switches the focus from the functional limitations of individual disabled people with impairments onto the problems caused by the barriers (social, financial, attitudinal barriers) to social inclusion within society (Oliver, 1996; Docherty *et al.*, 2010). It also removes the casual link between impairment (functional limitation) and disability (socially imposed restriction). From a social model perspective, disability is not caused by biological impairments that restrict social participation but is caused by the failures of society to accommodate people with impairments and the barriers presented by such failures of accommodation (Oliver, 1990;

Macdonald, 2009; Oliver and Barnes, 2012). In other words, disability can be seen as something imposed on disabled people 'on top of' their impairments by oppressive social and institutional structures (Terzi, 2004; Macdonald, 2009).

The social model of disability raises our awareness that requiring individuals to adjust to the wage labour system is not the only way to handle social exclusion. Taking a social model perspective, emphasis should be placed on clearing barriers to the participation of disabled people, or replacing the wage labour system with other systems which could help secure the inclusion of disabled people.

However, the social model of disability is not without criticisms (Morris, 1996; Corker and French, 1999; Corker and Shakespeare, 2002; Shakespeare, 2013). It has been criticised for conflating 'difference' among the wide range of people labelled disabled (Morris, 1996; Hughes and Paterson, 1997; Corker and French, 1999; Corker and Shakespeare, 2002). Other critical approaches draw upon the work of international feminist, poststructuralist and postcolonial theorists to argue for more critical, nuanced understandings of disability (Thomas, 2007; Meekosha and Shuttleworth, 2009; Goodley, 2011). Their suggestions include avoiding conflating impairment and disability (Goodley, 2011); removing the conceptual barrier to the development of a sociology of impairment (Hughes and Paterson, 1997); drawing attention to the dimensions of race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, impairment type and class in the studies of differences between disabled people (Thomas, 2004), being sensitive to individual experiences of impairment (Crow, 1992) and developing social relational approaches to understanding disability which take account of restrictions of activity caused by individuals' impairments and their interaction with external barriers to social inclusion (Thomas, 2007; Shakespeare, 2013).

It is important to note two points here. The first is that the critics of the social model of disability provide support rather than challenges to the view that disabled people have diverse preferences on how social exclusion should be tackled. The second is that despite the efforts made by activists to promote the social model of disability, the problems addressed by this model (such as social, financial, attitudinal barriers within society) remain as important causes of social exclusion faced by disabled people; much work remains to be done by both activists and academics if these external barriers are to be removed. In view of this, it is necessary to make further efforts to challenge the medical model of disability, and the related approaches to social exclusion.

### **The MUD, RED AND SID approaches**

The ideological foundations of the MUD approach are neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism (Levitas, 2005). This approach focuses on the moral and cultural characters of the socially excluded rather than the structural problems of society (Lyons and Huegler, 2012). Its proponents stress changing socially excluded people's attitudes to welfare and help-seeking behaviours (Murray, 1984; Yu, 2008). In order to reduce the reliance of socially excluded people on the government, this approach favours cutting benefit provisions. For example, the government may tighten the disability benefit eligibility criteria to reduce the number of eligible users (Grover, 2014). Relying on welfare provided by the government may enable people to maintain a reasonable standard of life without taking part in the wage labour system (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Hence, reduction in welfare provision may reinforce the importance of the wage labour system in people's life.

The ideas of the SID approach are illustrated in two European Commission (EC) white papers on social and economic policy issued in 1994 (a and b). Levitas (2005) points out that this approach emphasises exclusion as exclusion from paid work rather than a broader view of exclusion from social participation. Hence, unsurprisingly this approach stresses re-insertion of the socially excluded into the labour market as a remedy for social exclusion (Lyons and Huegler, 2012). SID proponents argue that paid work is not only an effective route to get the socially excluded out of material poverty but also an integrating factor in its own right (Levitas *et al.*, 2007). To follow this approach, vocational training and career guidance would be the measures to enable disabled people to take part in the wage labour market and to reduce their social exclusion.

Unlike the MUD approach and the SID approach, the RED approach shows reservations on both the wage labour system and the medical model of disability. The RED approach is concerned with reducing inequalities through redistribution of power and wealth in societies (Lyons and Huegler, 2012). RED proponents see social exclusion and poverty closely related to each other (Levitas, 2005) – both problems are caused by a lack of resources. Hence, they stress redistribution of resources from the rich to the poor as a way of reducing social exclusion. This may be achieved by implementing social democratic redistributive reforms, such as tax reforms, expansions of benefit systems, reduction of earning differentials, financial recognition for unpaid work, introduction of a minimum wage and minimum income for those unable to work (Townsend, 1997; Walker, 1997). To follow the RED approach, the government may guarantee disabled people a decent standard of living independently of participation in the labour market through the provision of comprehensive financial support. By doing so, disabled people who are unlikely to be employed would have the necessary material resources to tackle social exclusion to an extent.

With reference to challenges to the medical model of disability, the defects of the MUD approach to social exclusion are easily identified. Firstly, it overlooks institutional barriers of the wage labour system to social inclusion. Secondly, cutting benefits to socially excluded groups may deprive them further of the necessary resources to live a customary way of life in society, and may thus make them even more socially excluded.

The SID approach to a certain extent poses challenges to the wage labour system as it is based on an assumption that the wage labour system is not necessarily a self-correcting mechanism. That is why this approach supports policy measures that ‘facilitate’ disabled people to take part in the wage-labour system such as subsidising employers to employ disabled people and providing disabled people with vocational training. However, this approach overlooks the needs of those disabled people who have the potential to tackle, social exclusion through acting as employers or being self-employed but lack sufficient financial capital to do so. Moreover, this approach takes for granted that people’s working life patterns (for example, how the retirement age and working hours are set) associated with the wage labour system should be determined in accordance with the logic of capitalism and not individual preferences or circumstances. As a result, it overlooks the fact that the ways some disabled people deal with their life events are not necessarily in line with the logic of capitalism.

Instead of requiring socially excluded groups to make individual changes, the RED approach focuses on dealing with the structural causes of inequality and institutional barriers to social inclusion. It stresses the significance of enabling disabled people and other socially excluded groups to live a life independent of participation in the wage

labour system through the provision of financial protection. However, the RED approach is not without weaknesses. The implementation of the above social democratic reform measures is not sufficient to guarantee a full realisation of social model understandings of disability. It is important to note that exploitations in the wage labour system and sub-standard welfare programmes are not the only causes of social exclusion faced by socially excluded groups. As discussed above, the unequal distribution of the means of production is also partly responsible for this problem. Since many socially excluded groups do not possess the means of production and lack bargaining power in the production process, their participation in society is likely to be affected as well (Yu, 2008).

### **The COP approach**

In response to the inadequacies of the RED approach, activists have been exploring alternative ways of responding to social exclusion related to social inequalities. An example is the strategy of developing cooperatives by the Hong Kong Women Workers' Association (HKWWA) and their allies in Hong Kong (HKWWA, 2016). This strategy is composed of three elements – launching small scale pilot projects, exploring the long term goal of developing the COP approach and persuading the government and other NGOs to reform their project based on this long term goal.

Firstly, the members and allies of the HKWWA set up cooperatives for selling food in public organisations such as universities (HKWWA, 2016). These cooperatives encourage and allow employees to contribute part of their income as an investment in the cooperatives. As a result, employees are also respected as the owners in the sense that they enjoy the right to participate in the decision making process, have an ownership of the means of production and share the profits of the cooperatives as business partners. These cooperatives encourage disabled people and other members to join.

Secondly, they set a long term goal of developing a fourth approach to social exclusion, namely the COP approach. In order to address the issue of unequal distribution of the means of production, this alternative approach is marked by features concerning the ownership of the means of production, the production goals and the control over the production process:

- a. Disabled people and other socially excluded groups are given the opportunities to have more means of production in the short run and to achieve a fair share in the means of production in the long run.
- b. With possession of the means of production, disabled people can take part in making important decisions concerning the production process.
- c. The management of the production units is based on their need for work life balance, and their life course.
- d. The products of production are seen as instruments for meeting their needs rather than reinforcing the logic of capitalism.

Thirdly, the members and the allies of the HKWWA attempt to persuade the government and other NGOs to reform their existing projects with reference to the COP approach. For example, under the existing 'Enhancing Employment of People with Disabilities through Small Enterprise' project, the government financially supports businesses which have no less than 50 per cent of employees who are disabled people (HKSAR, 2014). This scheme could be expanded to disabled people to start the business

by themselves and become disabled employers (Yu and Chung, 2014). There is also a suggestion that the NGOs should take actions to assist those disabled people who lack financial capital to start their business by accepting their non-financial contributions (such as their labour, time and expertise) as a kind of investment (Yu and Chung, 2014).

To sum up, the RED and COP approaches may not necessarily meet all the needs of disabled people given their diverse preferences on combating social exclusion. However, they provide more choices. Comparing to the MUD and SID approaches, they are in better position to address the three key issues discussed above.

### **The wage labour system in Hong Kong**

Hong Kong is famous for its vibrant capitalist economy. The Hong Kong government has a long established reputation of being a keen defender of capitalist ideologies, such as free market, self-reliance and residual welfare. Unsurprisingly, it is eager to urge (by carrot and stick) people in different circumstances to earn their living through the labour market and to reduce reliance on social provisions.

As far as disabled people are concerned, the Hong Kong government has made various attempts to enhance their participation in the wage labour system. One of these is the Productivity Assessment Scheme (PAS), which has been carried out as a part of the minimum wage policy since 2010. This scheme gives disabled people opportunities to elect to have their productivity assessed to determine whether they should be remunerated at not lower than the statutory minimum wage level; or at a lesser rate commensurate with the results of the assessment (LegCo, 2010). Under this scheme, the assessed productivity level of disabled people in their work must be stated in a certificate of assessment, which is signed by the disabled person concerned, the employer and approved assessor. From 2011 to 2014, 389 cases of assessment were conducted under the Minimum Wage Ordinance (LegCo, 2014). One rationale for this scheme is to encourage more employers to provide jobs for disabled people. Instead of being an isolated measure, this scheme can be seen as part of the government's policy measures to facilitate participation of disabled people in the wage labour system. In addition to this scheme, the government provides several other measures (HKSAR, 2014; LegCo, 2015), including:

- a. Carers scheme:  
This scheme provides subsidies for recipients of the Higher Disability Allowance to hire carers to assist them in travelling between their home and workplace<sup>1</sup>.
- b. Employer subvention scheme:  
This scheme gives a maximum allowance of HK\$5,500 per month for two months to an employer who employs a person with disability<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, the employer will continue to receive an allowance equivalent to two-thirds of the monthly salary paid to the employee with disabilities (subject to a ceiling of HK\$4,000 per month) for a maximum period of six months.
- c. Job matching services:  
Information and personal services are provided for assisting disabled people to search information in the job market.
- d. Social enterprises subvention scheme:  
This scheme financially supports people to start a business which employs no less than 50 per cent of employees who are disabled people.



e. Disregarded earning scheme:

This scheme provides disregarded earnings of HK\$ 4,000 per month in maximum for recipients with disability under the Comprehensive Social Security Scheme<sup>3</sup>.

Apparently these measures are reinforcing the SID and MUD approaches to social exclusion. Like the SID approach, these measures emphasise taking part in the wage labour system as a solution rather than a cause of social exclusion. For example, some supporters of the PAS stress that their primary concern is to secure working opportunities for disabled people, and they are prepared to accept that disabled people may carry the risk of receiving less than the minimum wage (Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation, 2007; Rehabilitation Alliance Hong Kong, 2009). Like the MUD approach, individual changes are stressed for securing social inclusion. For example, the PAS provides a means for disabled workers to make their individual efforts to prove their value and that if disabled people are as productive as non-disabled workers, they can bargain for the same level of wage (Rehabilitation Alliance Hong Kong, 2009). Moreover, the government assumes that disabled people should find a foothold in the employment market on their own in the long run. Hence, the subsidies provided by the government through various schemes are usually capped at certain amounts, used only to form part of the disabled people's income and given in a limited length of time. Hence, disabled people are expected to sell their labour individually in the paid labour market as the main way of achieving a reasonable standard of living.

Given the diverse preferences of disabled people on their relationship with the wage labour system, it is unsurprising to see criticisms on the above policy measures. One criticism is concerned with their ineffectiveness in assisting disabled people to seek employment and improve their life. Despite the implementation of these measures, the employment rate of disabled people is far from satisfactory. In 2013, the Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation interviewed 1,020 disabled people and people with chronic illness. It was discovered that over half of them were unemployed<sup>4</sup>. The problem of unemployment of disabled people is confirmed by official statistics. In 2013, the proportion of working aged (18–64) disabled people who were economically active was 39.1 per cent, much lower than 72.8 per cent in the overall population (Government of Hong Kong, HKSAR, 2013)

Moreover, critics also point out that these measures worsen social inequalities. Firstly, most of these measures give employers more bargaining power at the expense of the employees' entitlement. For example, employers can hire those who do not perform very well in the productivity assessment exercise but are willing to accept lower wages, and dismiss those who have good performance in the assessment exercise and are entitled to a better pay. It has also been disclosed that some employers ask their disabled workers to perform below par in the assessment if they want to keep their existing job (Apple Daily, 2010). Secondly, these measures widen inequalities among disabled people. Studies show that only 2.3 per cent of participants of the productivity assessment exercise were recognised to have productivity of 100 per cent (LegCo, 2014). These participants are over-represented by younger disabled people with higher education attainment. Undeniably there is no guarantee that those disabled people who are given 100 per cent of the minimum wage can achieve a reasonable standard of living as pressure groups have found that the level of the statutory minimum wage is too low to get workers out of poverty (Oxfam, 2016). However, relatively speaking, they are likely to enjoy more

rewards from the paid labour market than those assessed to have lower levels of work productivity.

At the same time as criticising the measures for supporting the wage labour system, some critics stress the importance of implementing alternative measures for combating social exclusion faced by disabled people in the wage labour system. Examples of these measures include:

- a. developing an employment quota system to legally require large companies to employ a certain number of disabled workers (Cheung, 2008; Ho, 2014); and to provide long term financial support to those employers who employ disabled people (The Fortright Caucus, 2009).
- b. developing a social insurance scheme to provide disabled people with a reasonable standard of living independent of participation in a wage labour system (The Fortright Caucus, 2014).
- c. developing a scheme for financially assisting disabled people to set up cooperatives so that disabled people can own the means of production and to have a more effective control on the production process (Yu and Chung, 2014).

Certainly we should not overlook the possible defects of these alternative measures. For example, the employment quota system may have disadvantages, such as loopholes allowing employers to create fake jobs to claim the subsidies and conveying the ideas that disabled people need special help and fail to compete with the rest of society. Moreover, we should not under-estimate the difficulties in convincing the government to provide supports to these alternative measures. For instance, to avoid undermining people's incentive to take up the low paid jobs, the government may not be willing to subsidise disabled people and other socially excluded groups to run cooperatives. Despite these difficulties, disabled people and other campaigners have been making unremitting efforts to promote these suggestions and to pressurise the government to support them (Yu and Chung, 2014). An important reason is that they are keen to convey messages that the diverse preferences of disabled people on how social exclusion should be tackled are not effectively met by the wage labour system, and the medical model of disability and the myth of the infeasibility of implementing alternative inclusive measures should be challenged. In order to keep these messages alive, the studies of policy measures, as a kind of social force, should support rather than discourage the campaigners and disabled people from advocating their messages.

Finally, it is worth highlighting the relationship between the Productivity Assessment Scheme and the COP approach to social exclusion. As mentioned above, the implementation of policy measures is more than a material transaction; it also leads to the production and/or reproduction of normative messages. Hence, it is important to draw people's attention to the fact that the Productivity Assessment Scheme is more than a measure for giving disabled people the opportunities to choose to have their productivity assessed to determine their level of wage; as mentioned above this scheme to a certain extent serves to reinforce the importance of MUD and SID approaches to social exclusion. Following the same logic, it is necessary to make people aware that the suggestion to develop a scheme for financially assisting disabled people to set up cooperatives is more than a policy alternative to the PAS; it serves to enhance the importance of the COP approach to social exclusion. We would argue that stressing the link between the policy measures for reinforcing (or challenging) the wage labour system and the approaches to

social exclusion is important. This is because the public should realise that in debating how to assist disabled people to take part in the productive activities, they are choosing not only between the PAS and the subsidised cooperatives but also between different approaches to social exclusion. If they choose to support the PAS and give up the ideas of setting up cooperatives for disabled people, they are in favour of the SID and MUD approaches at the expense of the COP approach. On the contrary, if they favour the COP approach rather than the SID and MUD approaches to social exclusion, they should consider supporting such ideas as assisting disabled people to set up cooperatives.

## **Conclusion**

Although social exclusion is often used in disability literature to depict the disadvantageous positions of disabled people in different aspects of social life (e.g. Burchardt, 2003; Barnes and Mercer, 2005), approaches to tackling social exclusion are seldom applied to the analysis and development of policy measures to reduce social exclusion faced by disabled people. In this article, we have tried to link the debate of these approaches to the understanding of social exclusion faced by disabled people in the capitalist wage labour system. By raising three key issues in the discussion of social exclusion of disabled people, we argue that different approaches to social exclusion perform differently in their response to: (1) the diverse preferences of disabled people in the labour market; (2) the myth of infeasibility in implementing policy alternatives that may undermine the capitalist wage labour system; and (3) the inadequacies of the medical model of disability.

The three approaches derived from the three discourses of social exclusion, namely the MUD, SID and RED approaches, have been analysed with policy examples from Hong Kong, an economy with strong capitalist characteristics. It was found that the MUD approach gives the least attention to the defects of the capitalist wage labour system. The SID approach recognises the inadequacies of the capitalist wage labour system and offers support for disabled people to take part in the labour market. However, similar to the MUD approach, the SID approach is based on the medical model and emphasises individual adjustment to existing social and economic systems. As mentioned above, an example of the MUD and SID approaches to social exclusion is the Productivity Assessment Scheme (PAS). The RED approach focuses on the structural causes of inequality and institutional barriers to social inclusion, and advocates financial protection for socially excluded groups to enable them to live an independent life despite being excluded from the wage labour market. An example measure of the RED approach is the social insurance scheme for disabled people. However, this approach overlooks the unequal distribution of the means of production as another fundamental cause that leads to social exclusion.

By referring to some service initiatives in Hong Kong, we identify a fourth approach to social exclusion, namely the COP approach which respects the fact that disabled people may need various care and work arrangements, and have different life courses. It also stresses the inclusion of disabled people in the ownership and decision making process of economic production. As mentioned above, an example measure of the COP approach to social exclusion is the scheme for helping disabled people to set up cooperatives. Similar to the RED approach, this approach has the potential to undermine the wage labour system and the underpinning capitalist ideologies and vested interests. Therefore it is less likely to be favoured by the government. However, we argue that this approach is still

worth pursuing as it is in a better position to respect the diverse abilities and preferences among disabled people in their inclusion in the labour market. As this approach is receiving the support of more government and non-government organisations, it would help to reduce the assumption of being unrealistic and infeasible for any policy measures that may not fully align with capitalist requirements in the labour market. Finally, the success of these service initiatives in enabling disabled people to take an active role in economic production will serve as strong evidence that their impairments should not be a justification for their social exclusion. When social, financial and attitudinal barriers in the production process are eliminated, disabled people are as able as the rest of society to contribute to social and economic life in many and diverse ways.

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### Notes

1 Higher Disability Allowance is intended to provide support to severely disabled persons whose disabling condition will persist for at least 6 months, and must be certified to be in need of constant attendance from others in his/her daily life; and is not receiving care in residential institutions subsidised by the government or all public hospitals and institutions under the Hospital Authority are eligible for the allowance (Social Welfare Department, 2016a).

2 The exchange rate of one pound is equivalent to HK\$9.895 at the time of writing.

3 The Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme is to provide a safety net for those who cannot support themselves financially. It is designed to bring their income up to a prescribed level to meet their basic needs (Social Welfare Department, 2016b).

4 Legislative Councillor Fernando Cheung has discussed the findings of the survey report by the Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation (HKSAR, 2014).

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