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## The Role of East Asian Sociology in the Coming Century

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Round Table: the Future of Sociology

### THE ROLE OF EAST ASIAN SOCIOLOGY IN THE COMING CENTURY

BY

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Starting assumptions of modern sociology

Sociology was set to birth in the middle of the 19th century. On the one hand, it was the result of the differentiation of social sciences in Western Civilization. They are divided into some specialities which are known now as politics, economics, anthropology, psychology, study of religion, and of course, sociology. This special configuration can be called as the allocation of social sciences in the 19th century way. On the other hand, it can be said that all of these social sciences have Western origin, though this fact is left unconscious or even ignored by Western scholars. Anyway, sociology was born almost 150 years ago, and is now facing a totally different scene (as stated later) from its birth time.

The giants of Western sociology found the "society" at that time. When they called it society, they meant a vague and huge area of phenomenon which was not covered by other social sciences, namely, politics, economics, and else. It was a residual. Moreover, when they used the word "society", they implicitly presumed that it was an industrialized, Christian society, that is to say, one which is quite similar to their own. Factually, Islamic societies and Asian societies were neglected so far as they were not Western ones.

There was a big split of social thoughts in the 19th century, namely, the split between Marxism and Modernism. Both of them regarded modern

society as one of the historical stages, but differed each other in the following point: Marxism regarded society to be historical therefore changeable through revolution, while Modernism (or modern liberal thoughts) regarded it to last forever because they believed it to be the final stage of historical progress. The whole process of the following century showed at last that Marxism was wrong in its prediction of the decline of modern capitalistic societies. All the Marxist states are disappearing after the Cold War. But it doesn't necessarily mean the victory of Modernism. There emerged a totally new scene -- the rise of East Asian societies.

#### Impact of Asian modernization

When Max Weber wrote the famous "Protestantische Ethik", industrialized countries were almost limited to Europe and the United States, though Japan was starting its way to modernization. Weber's hypothesis of regarding Protestantism as a drive to forming capitalist economy seemed very persuasive, since England, New England and Holland were the areas which had all been deeply influenced by Puritanism.

But after that, Japan was successful enough in industrialization throughout the 20th century, and became the second biggest economic giant in the world in early 1970s. There should be some explanation for that, because Japan has little Christian background to sustain its capitalism. Then some believed it to be the thought of Zen, a sect of Buddhism, while others believed it to be Shingagu, which is the mixture of Confucianism and Buddhism advocated by Baigan Ishida, a thinker, and was popular among merchants of Edo period. But I think, none of them is not enough, as a single cause, to explain the whole process of Japan's modernization. Some hidden or invisible factor(s) other than them is(are) supposed to have made it possible for Japan to become a fully industrialized society like today.

Adding to it, East Asian economies are now developing with an incredible speed which overpases everyone's expectation. In 1980s, the so called

Four Dragons, namely South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, have become highly industrialized countries, and in 1990s mainland China is still developing with a speed of over 10% per year. Most authorized thinktanks in the United States estimated that until 2020 China will catch up the United States in GNP, and that finally Chinese economy will grow up to be even twice as large as that of the United States. It is too early say that this estimation will come true or not, but at least we can believe that the next century will be the era of Asia.

It follows that the whole scheme of social sciences drawn in the 19th century should be reconsidered. The center of gravitation of world economics will be moved to the Yellow Sea or somewhere else around there, which is the situation that Marx or Weber could not even dream of. The coming social science, especially sociology, should be able to explain adequately the final development of East Asian countries. And that will mainly be up to the Asian sociologists.

About Japanese modernization, some authors have said something in many ways. For example, Dr. Brejinski wrote a book titled Japan : A Fragile Flower just after the rapid progress of Japan economy, which says that the prosperity of Japan is superficial and has only weak foundations to support it. After a few years, there appeared again a book titled Japan As Number One by Ezra Vogel, a notable researcher of Asian countries, which says this time on the contrary that Japan will be a real super power of the world in a short time. This book was accepted by a large number of readers who had astonished and impressed by the rapid success of Japan economy.

In the year of 1989, Karel van Wolfren, a journalist who has been living in Japan for more than twenty years, published a book The Enigma of Japanese Power which soon became a million seller in the United States. Mr. Wolfren says in this book that the clue to Japanese economic success was the System prevailing almost everywhere and every sector of the society. The system, not necessarily set up in a formal way, is seldom noticed, but it does really exist. Namely, the System is a kind of behaviour pattern which is common to

ordinary Japanese people. It may possibly be the decisive factor that has long been sought for the explanation of Japanese economic success.

Japan has been analyzed like this. But, as many other Asian countries other than Japan have started modernization at the same time, the story should be rewritten from the beginning. Dr. Francis Fukuyama said in his book titled The End of the History that after the cold war there would be an era of permanent lasting peace and coordination, but it was not true. Then Dr. Charmars Johnson predicted that in The Collision of Civilizations that the Islamic and Confusian civilizations will crash with Western civilization, but its evidence has still not been seen. Now we should think this problem again.

#### Is There Any Common Cultural Bases For Asian Countries?

In the past thousands of years, the cultural center of East Asia was, in fact, China. There are also Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Mongolia, Vietnam, Tibbet, Phillipines and so forth in this area other than China, and almost all of the people or ethnic groups there, with few exceptions, were deeply influenced by Chinese culture.

For example, Korea and Japan. At the begining of civilization both of them recieved all the cultural items such as Chinese character, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, legal and administration system, architecture, medical techniques and pharmacy, military system, and others. The list would be much longer if you want to be perfect. These cultural items were necessary for them to build up a centralized political state from their primitive situation at that time.

The people of the neighbouring area were influenced more or less by Chinese culture. It is one of the big four civilizations from several thousands years ago. And Chinese influence is, actually, one and only character that is common to this area.

Of course, I must admit to say that there are vast areas called South East Asia and Central Asia, and the people in these areas were not so much

influenced by Chinese culture. The importance of these areas are not negligible, but for a while, in order to avoid complexity, we limit our investigation to the East Asian area where the impact of Chinese culture was heaviest and most total, and try to find if there is any cultural base for this area.

First, about Buddhism. Can it be considered to give some common base for the East Asian societies?

It is sure that it was a common essential factor for Tang dynasty China, Korea and Japan. But, its influence soon disappeared when China regarded Buddhist temples as waste of resorces because they were supported by the governmental budget. Then many temples, especially those in big cities, became a target of budget cutting and disappeared. Only the temples of Zen sects which encourage priests to work their own bread survived until now, though they modified themselves and became a little similar to Taoism. In Korea, the situation surrounding Buddhism was similar. In Li dynasty, temples were pushed up to the mountain area under the constant pressure by Confucianism. It can be said that the influence of Buddhism is negligible in both China and Korea today.

As for Japan, the situation is seemingly different. All of the Japanese people were registered to a temple which is a branch of Buddhist sects allowed by the Shognate government, and in principle they still remain Buddhists as they were. They conduct a funeral as a Bhuddhist ceremony, bury the dead in the backyard of the temple. But it is true that the Buddhism in Japan lost something most essential to it, and at that cost they could survived until today. For example, we can see the Jyodo-shinshu and the Nichiren-shu sects. The former abolished the rule of marriage prohibition for the priests five hundred years ago, which was the most important rule for Buddhist priests. The latter ignored the importance of Buddhist texts except Hokke-kyo, and moreover it made it a rule to repeat everyday only the title of Hokke-kyo hundreds of times in a loud voice instead of reading its text intensively. These sects are the biggest two in Japan and almost half of Japanese people are estimated to belong to them. Furthermore, conducting the funeral ceremony was strictly forbidden to Buddhist priests in India because it was believed to be a secular job. How was

it possible? It is important that the "sila", or the rules for the priests of Sanga that was given by Buddha himself, was not introduced in Japan for some reason which is too complicated to state here. Anyway, it can be said that Japanese people misunderstood Buddhism, and modified it into the form they needed.

Next, Confucianism. It is true that traditional China is a country which is organized by confucianism from top (the emperor's bureaucratic government) to bottom (Zongzu, their kinship group). Confucianism was the authorized dogma of traditional China and Li dynasty Korea. Chinese and Korean peoples organized their government, selected their bureaucrats through examination on catechism, read and wrote texts, and lived under the refined norm of Confucianism.

Such phenomena didn't exist among Japanese people. It was often believed that they, especially the Bushi (warrior) class people in Edo period, were Confucianists, but it is not true. Surely some Bushi were eager readers of Confucian texts, and even produced original interpretations to them. But it was not necessary for them as far as they serve as Bushi. Moreover, social functions of confucianism is quite different in China and Korea in contrast with Japan. The texts of Confucianism worked as a manual for everyday life in China and Korea, in this sense quite similar to the role of Hadith in Islamism or Torah in Judism. On the other hand, Confucian texts were read only for pleasure, for culture, or for thoughts at most in Japan. Confucianism kept some influence on the style of documents in Meiji era, but it doesn't mean the texts written in this style, such as Imperial Rescript on Education and Imperial Rescript for Servicemen, had real Confucian content.

Japanese modernization was not pursued in the course of Confucianism. Instead, Kokugaku (Japanese classical studies) and Rangaku (Western studies) played a great role in Meiji Restoration. In China, the traditional bureaucracy of Qing dynasty turned out to be obstacles for modernization. The same can be said also for Korea. As a conclusion, the modernization of East Asian countries were accomplished t h o u g h they had the common

Confucian tradition.

It would be safe that we take into consideration some possible positive effects of Confucianism, which would support the process of modernization indirectly. But, at least as the direct effect, Confucianism worked negatively. Japanese modernization was achieved because Japan had least influenced, not most, by it. Factually, modernization cannot be achieved by Confucianism. The Mandarin Bureaucrats of Qing dynasty were quite unable to cope with Western Powers, while Japanese Bushi warriors influenced by Rangaku and Kokugaku knew what they should do when they were threatened by Western gun-boat policy.

Thirdly, other common factors.

But what should they possibly be? It is hard to say what they are, because each East Asian country has different bases for its modernization. Some countries like Mainland China, North Korea and Vietnam have first experienced colonialization and then communist regime. Japan and Thailand remained independent as a constitutional monarchy. Some other countries like South Korea, Taiwan and Phillipine traced their other courses which started from colonialization, then through developmental dictatorship, and at last reached democracy. We can see a wide variety instead of uniformity.

As a conclusion, we cannot expect that there are some common cultural factors for East Asian countries that can serve as a substitute for Christianity in European countries.

Moreover, there are ill feelings between East Asian countries caused by the former wars. For example, Japan is accused of lacking of war responsibility China, Korea, Singapore and other countries. Again, the oppositions between North Korea and South Korea, and between Mainland China and Taiwan, are the heritage of Cold War. The contradiction between China and Southeast Asian countries has cultural and historical origin. After all, East Asian countries cannot make a new start for harmonious cooperation until they liquidate the past.

East Asian countries have little in common and are separated with

each other for various reasons. There are many misunderstandings, and Asian sociologists are expected to solve them.

#### The New Role Of Asian Sociology

Social sciences, especially sociology, are a mirror of self-consciousness of a society. I believe, therefore, that if our sociology have got a new means of description of ourselves, then as a result East Asian societies have got something which can serve as a new base for our integration. I believe it should be produced, not found.

The rise of East Asia is a challenge to the present world. After Russo-Japanese War until early 1970s, the success of Japan was regarded as the one and only exception. But in 1980s, so-called Four Dragons started their remarkable economic progress, and now almost everyone acknowledges that East Asian countries besides Japan has eventually entered the line of most developing countries. Mainland China is also following them. Under the Reform and Opening policy since 1978, China has achieved rapid economic growth. Authorized institutes estimates that the GDP of China will be twice as large as that of the United States before the middle of the next century. Now the East Asia as a whole is becoming a new center of world economy, which no past sociologists even dreamed of.

Therefore, a new goal for sociologists in the coming century will be the explanation for the sudden rise of East Asian countries while other third world countries for the most part still remain underdeveloped. The world will have two centers, namely, Western center and Asian center. The standard sociology found Protestant ethics as the driving motive of Western industrialization. Then, what would be the motive for Asian countries? This is a repeated question which was raised for Japan a long time ago. This time, it is up to all the sociologists of East Asian countries to give a systematic explanation for the rise of East Asia as a whole.

This explanation leads us to decentralization (or universalization)

of the sociological concepts from their Western origin. A large number of fundamental concepts have been derived from Western (i.e. Christian) context, which is of little importance in East Asia. Of course there should also be a kind of labour ethics here, but it is not suitable if it is called like innerweltliche Askese or salvation.

It is up to sociologists of China and Korea to put the Confucian tradition into universal terms. It is up to sociologists of Japan, Vietnam and other countries, to put the tradition of peripheral societies into universal terms. These efforts would be parallel to ex-ethnocentrism in Western thoughts.

In late 1950s, Claude Levi-Strauss, a French anthropologist, became famous as a leader of Structuralism. Later, Michel Foucault and others became famous as Post-Modernists. Structuralists say that Western civilization is not the one and only center of human culture, instead, there are many other rational and humanistic cultures equivalent to Western one. Adding to this, Post-Modernists say that Western civilization is neither logically consistent nor rational enough in its own nature. For example, its subjectivity is an effect of institution (training and discipline). Thus, modern Western thinkers are trying to relativise their own standpoint, but they still don't know how they can reach the more universal knowledge.

These new trends started after Marxism had lost its absolute power over intellectual circle. Marxism belonged to Western thoughts, but it believed itself to be free from its Western origin, and tried to give a general description of all the societies and the whole history of mankind. The tool for their description was economic categories such as classes, exploitation, class struggles, historical dialectic, market economy and so forth. When it became evident that Marxism was going to break down, sociology revived, especially in socialist countries, as it was expected to provide a new set of terms to describe societies as they are. But I believe it is too much for the present sociology to expect to do that.

The major concepts of the present sociology were brushed up by Max

Weber and Talcott Parsons. Role, status, action, personality, authority, salvation, .... were these concepts. Seemingly they are universal enough, but actually not. They are positive and objective when they are used to describe Western societies, but they lose their descriptive power when they are applied to societies other than these. Therefore, Western sociologists are, in general, easily satisfied with the given set of concepts of the present sociology, while Asian sociologists are more often unsatisfied with them.

Asian sociologists has been trying to absorb the results of Western sociology for a long time, but this process will come to an end soon. Then a new era of East Asian sociology will begin.

The main goals of East Asian sociology are as follows:

- (1) to reconstruct a set of concepts from more simple and universal bases,
- (2) to describe more concrete aspects of Asian societies in detail.

These are the goals that Max Weber intended to attain but did not fully succeed at last. We can pursue them as Weber would do if he were alive now.

Weber pointed out, in his comparative sociology, a certain basic principle of behaviour as an explanatory factor for the economic success of Western societies, and traced it back to its religious foundation. It is still a most promising plan if modified a little.

I think that late Masao Maruyama's work is noteworthy in this point. Being influenced by Max Weber, he investigated the political thoughts of Confucian tradition of Bushi warriors in Edo period, and concluded that something critically modern and rational was found in Sorai Ogyu's thought. He called it "Sakui No Keiki (moment of intentionality)". Though his work is sophisticated and excellent, I don't believe that it was fully successful, because he didn't inquire into the main stream of Japanese Confucianism that had led the Meiji restoration, namely Ansai Yamazaki's school. Nevertheless, his work dealt with the concrete aspects of an Asian society in detail, which will be a model for us.

We, Asian sociologists, have to investigate our own past societies like Masao Maruyama did. We have to reconstruct the history of East Asian

countries upon our own concepts, and obtain a new perspective having equal distance from both Western and Asian societies.

In order to do it, I myself have developed a set of simplest universal concepts, namely, Body, Sex, Power, Language and so forth. I called this plan Linguistic Sociology, and reconstructed the early history of Buddhism in India on them.

Comparing with Max Weber, we are advantageous in one point. Most of the data that Weber used about Asia were only secondary because he did not understand Asian languages, while we can use abundant first-hand documents.

We can also follow Michel Foucault who reduced standard Western concepts such as subject, sexuality and will into the institutions that were formed historically. Thus, he found the formation process of subject in the 17th century, and that of sexuality in Ancient Greece.

We can trace back our own domestic concepts into the past historical process of East Asian societies. This process can be analysed in contrast with Western history. It is expected that at last we will have a tree structure which shows how our societies have differentiated each other, and what factors our societies have been based on. Then, East Asian sociology itself will be a common knowledge for East Asian people, and hopefully, a community will be built in this area upon this knowledge.

When we have accomplished the East Asian sociology, we have achieved at the same time the ex-Westernization of sociology. One of the big problems we will face in the next century is the everlasting underdevelopment of the third world. Most countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America have many troubles of their own which prevent them from taking off. East Asian sociology can help them much in specifying which are the most critical factors of their underdevelopment and how they can be removed. Thus, sociology will be able to play an important and indispensable role for building up the global community.

As a conclusion, I believe that East Asian sociology will provide us a common knowledge for the formation of East Asian community. It will contribute much for the formation of the global community as well.

