CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN JAPANESE SOCIOLOGY: PAST, PRESENT, and FUTURE

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GENERAL TRENDS

Japanese sociology has expanded and diversified greatly since the end of World War II. Earlier, sociologists were relatively few and they formed a community in which all knew each other. Since this community had only a small number of leaders, it is rather easy to trace its trends of study (see Takada 1933; Matsumoto 1937; and Odaka 1957). The increased number of sociologists today, however, no longer permits the continuance of a homogeneous community, and it is impossible to summarize modern sociology as a single trend of development.

The scope of sociology in Japan today is not much different from that in the United States. According to conventional classification, the discipline is divided into sociological theory, methodology, social history, history of social thought, family sociology, rural sociology, urban sociology, industrial sociology, sociology of labor, political sociology, economic sociology, sociology of law, educational sociology, sociology of knowledge, sociology of religion, social stratification and social mobility, social development and social change, organization theory, social problems and social disorganization, social movement, social psychology, and population study. However, these subjects overlap each other and the criteria of classification are not standardized. Social history, for example, deals with the history of the family and rural society, thus overlapping with family sociology and rural sociology. Economic sociology, industrial sociology, and the sociology of labor compete with each other, and the difference in titles somewhat reflects differences in approach. Sociology of law and educational sociology have their own independent academic societies and university curricula, and are parts of schools of law and schools of education respectively. Social psychology also has its own academic society. Organization theory, overlapping with industrial sociology and political sociology, forms an interdisciplinary field together with political science, business administration, and social psychology. Present-day diversification in Japanese sociology thus means more than diversity in fields of study. It means also discreteness in scholarly bodies. Each subfield tends to become an independent study.
group and has an independent history.

The major differences in the contents of American and Japanese sociology which impress me are the following. There is a group of sociologists in Japan who are skeptical of the recent American trend of abstracted and analytical method from the viewpoint of historicism. Unlike the United States, demography in Japan has been regarded largely as a branch of economics rather than sociology; the sociology of law originated in law schools and thus has been considered a subfield of jurisprudence. Other contrasts in the sociology of Japan and the United States are that social statistics and mathematical sociology are less well-developed and the Marxian orientation is much stronger in Japan. Symbolic interactionism in the United States has had no direct influence on Japanese sociology.

Still another aspect of diversity relates to the age of the scholars concerned. What I shall call the first generation of living scholars is composed of persons over 60 years old. These people spent their youth in the relatively liberal days of the "Taishō democracy," generally studied classical Marxism when they were young, and later were under the influence of German and French sociology in the 1920's. These men were leaders in the formation of the sociologists' communities in prewar days and continued after the war to be leaders in Japanese sociology. The second generation is composed of scholars in their 40's and 50's who spent their youth in the period of quasi-war and war, and felt strong dissatisfaction with Japanese society during that period. Their academic lives began during the period of the postwar democratization movement and they emotionally committed themselves to that. Generally, they have opposed systematic and theoretical approaches of the foregoing period; instead, they have accused traditional elements of Japanese society of being undemocratic. They advocated "jumping into the real world" and denied most of the approaches of the scholars of the first generation. The third generation is composed of scholars in their 30's and younger, who began their academic lives around 1955 when the Japanese economy began to prosper. Since they have observed Japanese society as "mass society," they regard the modernization movement of the second generation as out-of-date. This generation is internally split in its theoretical orientations. After World War II, when the third generation began its academic training, the influence of German sociology waned and American sociology became strongly dominant. Many members of the third generation accepted American sociology but others rejected it. Those who accepted have tried to revise and reorganize it in the Japanese intellectual atmosphere; however, their directions in doing so vary greatly. Those who rejected American sociology mostly chose Marxism. Their Marxism is, however, no longer the classical one and is split into many schools. The third generation thus greatly accentuates the general diversity.

(For accounts of postwar trends, see Fukutake, Hidaka, and Takahashi, eds. 1957-58, Vol. 9: 61-216; Ariga 1967: 143-176.)
Japanese sociology is about ninety years old, but the works of the pioneer sociologists such as Nagao Ariga, Shōichi Toyama, Hiroyuki Katō, and Tongo Takebe are no longer read except as historical data. (For a detailed study of Japanese sociology in the Meiji era, see Takahashi 1965.)

“Classical” works having direct influence today begin with the writings of Yasuma Takada, who published many books on sociological and economic theory for a half-century beginning in 1913. Reflecting the liberal mind of the Taisho era, Takada rejected organicism and was methodologically individualistic. He also rejected the idea of developmental stages of Marxism and ideas of the German historical school. Takada approached the study of society dualistically in terms of association and dissociation, cooperation and conflict, and integration and disintegration. He hypothesized a “desire for gregariousness” as the principle of integration and a “desire for power” as the principle of change. His explanation of the process of integration somewhat resembles Talcott Parson’s theory of socialization and institutionalization, and his explanation of the process of change resembles a little Dahrendorf’s conflict theory. Takada held that the desire for power realizes the leveling and standardization of society as the result of conflict over power. Basing his reasoning upon “the law of fixed quantity of association,” he saw the gradual extinction of the intermediate groups between the two poles of family and state, and thought that in the future society would advance toward individual atomization and “mass society” (Takada 1919, 1922). It is amazing that he had such insight 50 years ago. His conflict theory reminds us of Simmel, and his methodological individualism of Max Weber. If his lengthy Shakaigaku Genri (Principles of Sociology) had been translated into English or German, it might well have been one of the world’s classics in sociology.

Takada’s sociological theory was not displaced by scholars of the second generation, who emphasized empirical and historical studies. When the third generation became dissatisfied with the “static” bias of American structural-functional theory, the works of Takada were reevaluated. It is true, as the second generation complained two or three decades ago, that Takada’s sociology is not linked with the analysis of real Japanese society. However, Takada’s theoretical writings contained many ideas and propositions which may be used to guide such empirical study (see, for example, Takada 1925, 1940, 1955, 1956). In the analysis of postwar economic growth in Japan and accompanying social changes, his formulation concerning the relationship between “economy” and “society,” when used in conjunction with such later Western works as Economy and Society by Parsons and Smelser, provides us with an effective framework for analysis (for examples of such studies, see Tominaga 1965, and Tominaga et al 1968).
The structural-functionalism of American sociology, as exemplified by the writings of Talcott Parsons, attracted attention in Japan (e.g., Suzuki 1956; Tominaga 1958; and Shinmei 1967) partly because after Takada no Japanese formulation of systematic sociological theory of large scale appeared. However, as soon as Parsonian theory became known in Japan, it faced ideological criticism from the Marxian view, holding that it is an equilibrium theory which does not deal with the social change (e.g., Nishimura 1957; Hamajima 1964). The third generation of Japanese sociologists generally accepts structural-functional theory, however, and thinks that the criticism by Marxians stems from their failure to understand the equilibrium theory, which does not limit itself to the synchronic study of society.

Japanese sociology in the early Showa era was influenced by German historicism. Instead of further developing Takada’s theory, many scholars of the time regarded it as “formalistic sociology separated from reality” and criticized it from the standpoints of cultural and historical sociology (e.g., Shinmei 1939, 1942; Matsumoto 1935, 1937, 1938; Kurauchi 1943, 1953). Although they called their works realistic and historical, their studies were neither empirical nor theoretical. Among the works of the time, Shinmei’s “Theory of Action Correlation” and Kurauchi’s “Epistemology Between the Self and the Other” are unique in the sense that each provides us with a philosophical view of society. They do not, however, offer any theory that may be used in empirical study. Efforts by various later scholars of this persuasion (e.g., Shimizu 1950; Takeda 1952; and Nishimura 1956) are compromises of various standpoints and they lack originality. Rural sociology and sociology of the family, both of which are empirical, then came to be the centers of Japanese sociology (e.g., Toda 1937; Suzuki 1940; and Ariga 1943). Among scholars with these interests, Suzuki and Ariga have had a considerable continuing influence. Let us now turn to these works.

*Rural Sociology*

Although general sociology was unable to link itself with the realistic analysis of Japanese society, empirically grounded sociological currents that were independent of general sociology appeared in the late 1920’s. These were rural sociology, the history of rural society, and the study of family and kinship.

Inspired by American rural sociology, Eitaro Suzuki tried to apply the concept of “natural village” to Japan to explain why Japanese villages have shown far stronger unity than American counterparts. He held that Japanese villages were based upon the closed accumulation of traditional social relationships and groups, and called the strong living rules created out of such accumulation the “spirit of the natural village.” Suzuki’s “natural village” is an autonomous and traditional community formed by the ac-
cumulation in a relatively small area, wherein every social relationship is complete, of the administrative organization, religious organization, cooperative labor organization, kinship group, and other social groups. Suzuki held that the Japanese "village" was a spiritual entity "naturally" formed by accumulation of such social relationships and social groups.

Suzuki's concept of the "natural village" was accepted by many scholars with some criticisms, the most common of which was that it is a descriptive and not an explanatory concept. Suzuki did not discuss conditions leading to or ending the closedness and self-sufficiency that gave rise to the spirit of the village. A later scholar, Tadashi Fukutake, argued on this point that "excessively small-scale farming prohibiting independence" explains the strength of the unity of the Japanese village. Hiromichi Yoden (1961) has argued that the need for cooperative organizations connected with irrigation explains it. These interpretations, intertwined with analyses of the medieval western "community" by researchers of European economic history (e.g., Otsuka 1955), developed into what has been called the "community argument" (Sonraku Shakai Kenkyukai 1956; Matsubara 1957; Sumiya 1963; Shimazaki 1965).

Kizaemon Ariga, the central figure in the sociological study of kinship, decisively influenced postwar rural sociology and his influence extended to urban and industrial sociology. From ethnographic data he had gathered on rural tenancy practices in the early Showa era, he saw the essence of landlord-tenant relationship in the village in the traditional family system. Stimulated by the "feudalism dispute" among Marxian economic historians of the time, Ariga opposed both the "Kōza-ha" view that the landlord-tenant relationship was a remnant of feudalistic land ownership and "Rōnō-ha" view that it constituted modern land ownership, and called his own standpoint a "third position." According to Ariga, the prototype of landlord-tenant relationship was the relationship of authority between the head family and the branch family of the Japanese extended family, a social unit which had existed since ancient times. Tenancy grew out of practices of corvée labor for a landlord by tenants subordinate to him in social status, and this subordination was modeled after the subordination of family members to the family head in the ancient "extended family." When the extended family changes from joint residence ("compound family") to smaller, separate family units, it becomes a hierarchically ordered federation of independent families, a social unit for which the name "dozoku-dan" was established in sociological usage by Ariga, Hiroshi Oikawa (1940), and Seiichi Kitano (1949). Families in the dozoku-dan recognize "descent relationship" and a "boss-follower relationship" in which the head family is the boss. Descent follows the paternal line. However, since the dozoku-dan may include families that are not genetic or affinal kin, Ariga argued that the essential nature of the dozoku-dan was a master-servant relationship.
Ariga’s ideas stimulated many studies of various Japanese social groups: rural villages (e.g., Takeuchi 1947; Tsukamoto and Matsubara 1955); kinship among members of a Buddhist sect (Morioka 1962); kinship among merchants (Nakano 1964); the traditional miners’ mutual-help association (Matsushima 1951); and the familistic ideology in the management of Japanese enterprises (Hazama 1964).

However, when these studies were at their height, the tenancy system which Ariga discussed had mostly collapsed as a result of the postwar land reform. Moreover, we must add that collapse of the kin group had actually started in the Tokugawa era, however. In Meiji times, centralization of land ownership and establishment of the absentee landlord system further weakened the kin group (Kawamura and Hasumi 1958; Mitsuyoshi 1968).

In prewar Japan, about two-thirds of the farmers were tenants, but the land reform gave the finishing blow to the dozoku-dan as well as to tenancy.

Today, the significance of these studies of kinship is principally historical. Ariga provided no guide to the study of the postwar rural society and no general theory about Japanese society. He continued to insist, however, that since the rural dozoku-dan could incorporate genetically unrelated people or fictive kin, various other social structures of Japanese society could be understood as derivatives of the dozoku-dan—the human relations in capitalistic enterprises, the “vertical relationship” in bureaucracy called sectionalism, and factions in political parties in a fictive parent-child relationship (Ariga 1943: 696-710). This idea also stimulated much research. However, Ariga's sociology was quite static and did not include insights on change. For this reason uncritical use of his ideas might lead to misleading simplification in the interpretation of changing Japanese society.

**CHANGE**

**New Trends and Subjects**

As mentioned earlier, the postwar years saw many sociological studies concerned with the democratizing of Japanese society. When various problems of the postwar reforms were settled, Japan underwent unprecedented social changes such as rapid technological changes in industry, changes in agricultural management as a result of a rapid decrease in the agricultural labor force, and progress in urbanization accompanied by urban problems such as industrial pollution and problems of housing. Sociological attention then shifted increasingly to these developments. The years 1957-58 saw the “mass society dispute” (Tsujimura 1968; Watanuki 1957), and since 1960 empirical studies of social change have appeared (e.g., Fukutake, ed. 1961a). Symposia were conducted at the meetings of the Japan Sociological Society on the subjects “Social Change” in 1959, “Japanese Management” in 1960, and “Urbanization” in 1961. Contemporary emphasis is on the subjects of modernization, urbanization, and
industrialization (e.g., Watanuki 1962; 204-222; Tominaga 1965: 170-203; Kurasawa 1968: 20-47).

In 1955 the first large-scale national survey of social stratification and social mobility was conducted. This revealed that among most occupational categories, except agriculture, the rate of intergenerational mobility was high (Nihon Shakaigakukai Chosaiinkai 1958; Kunio Odaka, ed. 1958a). According to a second national survey conducted in 1965, the outflow rate from agriculture increased rapidly from 38.9% in 1955 to 64.0% in 1965. A survey conducted in Tokyo in 1960 showed that among younger workers emigrating from rural districts, the largest group was composed of graduates of junior and senior high schools, most of whom became manual workers in the small enterprises and constituted the lower stratum of the occupational structure. After considerable occupational movement, most of these migrants became self-employed workers: for example, shop clerks became shop owners and manual workers became owners of small factories (Kurasawa 1968). The study of social mobility is today one of the most important sociological topics (e.g., Yasuda 1962; Tominaga 1964) and this study includes some attention to systematization of theories of social class (e.g., Mukai 1963; Nagao 1967; Tominaga 1965b).

The rapid decrease in Japan's farm population after 1955 was far greater than expected by most sociologists. A surprising estimate of a future decline to 20.7% (Tobata and Kamiya, eds. 1964) was actually exceeded by 1968, when the figure was less than 20%. Ideas prevailing among scholars of village problems that Japanese agriculture is extremely small-scale farming and is the pool of excess population and latent unemployment accordingly needed revision. Rural sociology, which formerly emphasized the study of kin groups and later focused on the results of the land reform (Sonrakushakai Kenkyukai 1955), has come to deal with new themes such as the increase in sidework among farmers (Tobata and Kamiya, eds. 1964: 135-144), the activities of farming cooperative associations in rationalizing farm management (Fukutake, ed. 1961b), and the impact on villages of community development policies which disperse factories in rural areas (Fukutake, ed. 1965; Matsubara 1968). One study contends that the many middle-size farmers first produced by the land reform has led to a small number of rich farmers and a worsened position for most middle-size farmers (Shimazaki 1965: ch. 3 and 4).

Another focus of sociological attention is the growth of the gap between cities and villages as a result of increased industrialization. Postwar economic growth at first considerably narrowed the gap between cities and villages in incomes and standards of living. This was brought about by governmental policy on rice price that favored the farmer, an increase in remunerative side-work by farmers, and the outflow of the farm population. The rate of growth of productivity in agriculture has, however, been much
lower than that in industry, and agriculture tends to be the backward sector in the Japanese economy (Fukutake 1964: 21-30; Minagawa 1968).

Industrial sociology and sociology of labor deal directly with the subject of the social impact of technological change and intensive industrialization. Industrial sociology began soon after the end of the war with the analysis of traditional labor relations in such backward industries as small- and medium-size enterprises and mines (Matsushima 1951; Odaka, ed. 1952). Advocacy of the “human relations approach” followed and contributed greatly to the systematization of industrial sociology (Odaka 1958b). On the other hand, the view that traditionalism in labor relations has its roots in traditional rural society which has supplied the industrial labor force also had broad influence (Okochi, ed. 1956; Okochi and Sumiya, eds. 1955). As technological innovation in Japan proceeded, changes occurred in the work environment and the organization of labor in industrial enterprises. Such problems as the social impact of technological innovation and accompanying change in labor-management relations then came to be the focus of study (e.g., Sumiya, ed. 1959; Nihon Jinbun Kagaku-Kai, ed. 1963; Satô 1964; Okamoto 1967). As a result of the various changes, it is expected that: “Japanese characteristics” in labor management and labor relations will also gradually change (Matsushima 1962; Odaka 1963). Historical data have not been entirely neglected in these studies. Certain studies of “familistic management” in business enterprises are historical researches on labor management in the Meiji and Taishō eras (Sumiya 1955; Hazama 1963, 1964). Odaka (1965), advocating “employee participation management” as the desirable labor-management ideology in the modern period of technological change, has presented a problem to Japanese enterprises.

Another postwar focus of sociological studies has been the great changes in the “social consciousness” of the Japanese population brought about by industrialization, urbanization, and the rationalization of agriculture. Among farmers, trends that have been pointed out are a growth of “farm business consciousness” (Sonoda 1961) and a change from conservatism to progressivism among farmers engaging in side-work (Fukutake 1964: 253-255). In the cities, a trend of change has been noted in the distribution of political attitudes according to educational levels and age. The youthful and the highly educated formerly tended to be strongly progressive, and the middle-aged, aged, and people with little formal education were strongly conservative (Kido and Sugi 1954). These generalizations must now be modified as a result of investigations that show less rigidity in political attitudes according to age and education (Watanuki 1969).

Future Trends and Critical Comments

Before World War II the number of Japanese sociologists was very small, inadequate to cover the full range of sociological subjects. Certain fields
were emphasized and others slighted or omitted from study. From early Showa times, rural sociology dominated and created an image of sociology as the study of villages, the family, and kinship. In pre-war times, empirical study was limited almost entirely to rural sociology. No research whatsoever was conducted in the fields of business and labor.

After World War II, as the number of sociologists increased, the former imbalance in coverage improved. Researchers in fields other than rural and family sociology had no past tradition in Japanese sociology upon which to build, however, and depended upon foreign sociology, especially American. Thus, although Japanese sociology has a history of nearly a century, all fields except rural sociology and family sociology are less than twenty years old. The passage of time is necessary to make the science of any nation distinctive or original. Prewar sociology in Japan had distinctive traits; postwar sociology has not yet reached this point except insofar as certain old emphases remain evident.

Today, sociology in Japan is progressing in various directions and publications have become innumerable. The foregoing discussion has not attempted to cover every lesser subject of modern sociological study and it omits even mention of a great many individual studies. New subfields are appearing, and it is sometimes difficult today to distinguish between rural sociology and cultural anthropology, sociology and social psychology, industrial sociology and business administration, sociology of labor and labor economics, or political sociology and political science. Quantitative and qualitative growth is now rapid and this tendency will continue in the future.

Empirical studies in every subfield are abundant in postwar Japanese sociology, but there has been no indigenous body of theory to give guidance to research. In order to change empirical study from mere topic-oriented monographs to theory building, further consideration must be given to methodology. Consideration of models, the logic of explanation, mathematical inferences, computer application, and the like have been quite inadequate. Only one book, by Saburo Yasuda (1960), concerns methodology relating to empirical studies in sociology. Many sociologists seem to be too naive about methodology to be concerned about it.

Model building must be guided by theory. For the time being, a beginning might be made with middle range theory, but a road to general theory must be opened. Several decades ago, American sociology was said to be an accumulation of empirical studies without theory. Postwar American sociology has had much theory of its own. The present state of Japanese sociology may be said to resemble the former circumstances in the United States.

Another problem concerning theory that Japanese sociology faces is an overemphasis on ideological values. A typical case is the Marxian group
which tends to replace analysis by ideological assertion. Ideological disputes would be expectable and probably in some measure unavoidable. However, when research is evaluated on the basis of whether or not it accords with specific ideology of this kind, freedom of inquiry is lost. It cannot be said that this problem has entirely disappeared for the third generation of Japanese sociologists.

Probable trends in the future development of Japanese sociology may be summarized as follows: (1) further accumulation and improvement of empirical research; (2) development of methodology to prepare the way from empirical research to theory building; (3) development of indigenous general theory to guide empirical research by providing it with conceptual frameworks and hypotheses; and (4) increased freedom from excessive ideological biases of the kind we have described. Although Japanese sociology has greatly expanded quantitatively during the past twenty years, the degree of its future qualitative improvement will depend upon its success in solving the problems that these trends of development involve.

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