A Challenge of Japan's Welfare Society:
Message to the World from the Japan Welfare Sociology Association

Japan Welfare Sociology Association

I. HISTORY AND CURRENT STATUS OF THE JAPAN WELFARE SOCIOLOGY ASSOCIATION (*Fukushi Shakai Gakkai*)

In this section the history and current status of the Japan Welfare Sociology Association will be described.

In English-speaking countries one rarely finds books entitled "welfare sociology" or "the sociology of welfare," compared to an abundance of books with phrases like "welfare economics" and "the economics of welfare" in their titles. This may reflect the fact that "welfare economics" is already established as a subfield in economics in those countries, while "welfare sociology" is not in sociology. In contrast, the term "welfare sociology" (*fukushi shakai gaku*) has long been popular in Japanese sociology. The Japan Welfare Sociology Association (*Fukushi Shakai Gakkai*, hereafter JWSA) was established in 2003 as one of the "hyphen-sociology" associations of sociology.[1]

Welfare sociology is a subfield of sociology which deals with "welfare" based on sociological research methods. The research issues of researchers who belong to JWSA cover a wide range of topics. Referring to the categories of Research Committees of International Sociological Association, the topics overlap with RC11 (Sociology of Aging), RC15 (Sociology of Health), RC19 (Poverty, Social Welfare, and Social Policy), RC41 (Sociology of Population), RC49 (Mental Health and Illness), and RC55 (Social Indicators). The study of "care" (including child care, long-term care, and health care) and disability studies are other issues tackled by many members.

JWSA was officially established on June 28th, 2003. It is a relatively young academic association with a history of only eleven years. However, there is a long history of welfare sociology in Japan before the establishment of JWSA. Professor MATSUBARA Haruo, who was coeditor of *Welfare Sociology* (*Fukushi Shakaigaku*), which was published from Yuhikaku Publishing in 1966, continued theoretical investigations into the possibility of welfare sociology. Professor SOEDA Yoshiya, who co-edited the book and later became the first president of JWSA, continued empirical research on some issues of welfare sociology. In the 1970s, Professor TOMINAGA Ken'ichi and other Japanese sociologists launched a research project on social design and social indicators.

In the 1980s, when there were heated arguments on the "crisis of the welfare state" in European countries, Japanese social scientists had just begun to study welfare states on a full scale, led by a research project of the Institute of Social Science at Tokyo University. Japan was a "belated welfare

---

[1] One of the associated academic societies is Japanese Society for the Study of Social Welfare (*Shakai Fukushi Gakkai*), which is an interdisciplinary society on social work and social welfare policy. The two societies partly overlap in research issues and methods, partly not.

state." After the late 1980s, in the National Institute of Social Security a comparative research project was carried out at full swing that was headed by a younger generation of sociologists. In the same period, academic research on the practices of social work and social support was conducted by some sociologists based on the framework of sociology, not social work.

These different streams of sociological research formed the basis of JWSA in 2003. Since then, the number of JWSA members has been on the increase, amounting to almost 500 as of June 2013. The average age of the members of JWSA appears to be relatively low compared to other hyphen-sociology associations in Japan.

JWSA has sponsored an annual meeting every year since 2003 in which several oral sessions and symposia are organized. In principle, the sessions are held in Japanese. The number of participants of each meeting amounts to 100 to 200. The annual meeting of 2011 was planned to take place at Tohoku University in Sendai when the Great East Japan Earthquake hit the Tohoku region. Although great confusion prevailed in Japanese society after 3.11, 2011, we decided and managed to hold the annual meeting at Tokyo Metropolitan University. Besides the annual meetings, JWSA sponsors research meetings several times a year in different regions of Japan, amounting to 39 times in total as of December 2012.

The other major work of JWSA is publishing an annual scholarly journal (*Journal of Welfare Sociology*), which carries original papers, book reviews, and featured articles based on the symposium of the past year. The trend of original papers published in the journal shows that a large proportion of the papers are based on qualitative methods, presumably reflecting the fact that active members of JWSA belong to a younger generation. The issues of the papers range widely, including themes such as care (elderly care and child care), volunteers, NGOs/NPOs, and comparative social policies. The themes of featured articles of the journal reflect social issues in Japan. In the 2012 and 2013 issues the articles dealt with themes concerning the problems of social welfare after the Great East Japan Earthquake. Needless to say, these various issues reflect Japan's unique experience in social change, such as an exceptionally high level of ageing and fertility decline.

In 2013, JWSA reached its ten-year anniversary. In celebration of this, JWSA edited a book (*Handbook of Welfare Sociology*, published from Gyosei) under the leadership of MIENO Takashi, the current President of JWSA. A ten-year anniversary symposium was also held during the 11th annual meeting at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto. The chapters included in this book reflect the current research interests of JWSA members.

In the same year, the *Welfare Sociology Series* was published in four volumes from University of Tokyo Press. Most of the authors of these volumes are members of JWSA. The content of the volumes is as the following: TAKEGAWA Shogo, ed., *Welfare sociology of the public sphere: What is a fair society?*; SOEDA Yoshiya, ed., *Welfare sociology of conflict: Society as dramaturgy*; FUJIMURA Masayuki, ed., *Welfare sociology of cooperation: Solidarity in an individualized society*; SHOJI Yoko, ed., *Welfare sociology of the intimate sphere: Social relationships woven by care practices*.

As a young association, JWSA is still developing and changing. One of the important tasks for JWSA is boosting international research collaboration and academic interchange. Our foremost task

should be to render our journal and annual meeting more accessible to foreign scholars, thus sharing Japan's experience in welfare and social policies with sociologists worldwide. Besides this, comparative research projects on the various institutions and practices concerning "welfare" in different countries would be most fruitful. We hope that there will be a richer interchange between JWSA and ISA members interested in "welfare sociology" in the 21st century world.

(TAKEGAWA Shogo and TABUCHI Rokuro)

II. JAPAN'S PROPOSITION OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE JAPAN WELFARE SOCIOLOGY ASSOCIATION

The Japan Welfare Sociology Association (JWSA) consists of researchers who share an interest in the welfare society. The term "welfare society" is used almost as a synonymous term with "civil society," but without implying any negative connotations such as a dependence on society. However, the former better fits Japan's context. The foundation of the JWSA lies in that term's context.

This section focuses on three topics that demonstrate how the welfare society concept is intertwined with the distinctive nature of contemporary Japanese society. The topics are an alternative notion of "public" and the public sphere based on a symbiotic government-private relationship, the possible new roles of for-profit organizations in a mixed economy, and the relational aspects of "self" in defining oneself. They correspond to three different levels of viewpoints—at the macro, mezzo, and micro levels, respectively.

1. Alternative Notion of "Public" and the Public Sphere Based on a Symbiotic Government-Private Relationship

Confusion is rampant in discussions held in relation to the term "public." Jürgen HABERMAS' seminal work (1962, 1973) on the concept of "public" and the public sphere is well known in Japan and frequently cited even today. However, it is a challenge for Japanese scholars to understand Habermas' theory because it is deeply ingrained within European historical and institutional contexts. The theory's interpretation is also influenced by how a scholar interprets Japan's historical and institutional contexts. In addition, Japan's welfare state regime is undergoing a transformation, leading to changing relationships between the government and the private sector. "Public" (公, *oh-yake*) means government in Japan, and thus institutional changes necessitate the redefining of "public" to align with Japan's transforming context. This changing situation deepens the already existing confusion in discussions about "public" and the public sphere (Nakamura, 2002).

Meanwhile, the concept of the welfare society has been widely used in Japan to summarize interest in the quality of family and community life. However, the assumptions about government-private relationship remain unchanged. Japan's current economic prosperity was possible because of a symbiotic relationship between a strong government and citizens who aspired to fulfill their material needs. The quality of family and community life is pursued within the same institutional context. A typical example is the Long-Term Care Insurance (LTCI) system implemented in 2000.

LTCI is a governmental insurance program that provides a wide range of services, such as institutionalized care, visiting nurses, and care workers for people aged 65 and older. The government funds 50% of the cost; the other 50% is paid out of insurance premiums compulsorily collected from people aged 40 and older. The co-payment of service users is 10%, and LTCI covers the remaining cost. Numerous service organizations operating under LTCI create job opportunities. Some for-profit service organizations add luxurious services to attract wealthy seniors; while nonprofit organizations focus on supporting low-income seniors. Whatever the goal of a service organization may be, the quality of service is closely monitored by the government. This situation increases options from which a service user can safely choose service providers according to their preferences. Each party related to LTCI—the government, service users and their families, workers, and private service organizations—takes on certain responsibilities and receives specific benefits. The public welcomes government intervention and both for-profit and nonprofit organizations learn to play on the same field for the public's benefit.

The symbiotic relationship between the government and the private sector in Japan contrasts with the Western perspective, which is cautious about "the functional imperatives of highly formalized domains," such as administrative-governmental function "penetrat[ing] into the private and public spheres" where citizens discourse and collaborate (Habermas, 1987: p. 323). However, at the same time, N. FRASER (1990) argues that the Western conception of the public sphere is limited as a tool in critically examining "actually existing democracy in late capitalist societies," and cautions "people in other parts of the world against heeding the call to install" a Western democratic system as such (p. 77). Japan's preferring the term "welfare society" to "civil society" may suggest its "cautious" approach in designing an alternative democratic system while appreciating its own historical and institutional context. Japan's Welfare Society Association promotes discussions of civil society based on Japan's distinctive notion of "public" and the public sphere.

2. Possible New Roles of For-Profit Organizations in a Mixed Economy

In contemporary times, effort is being expended to cultivate potential roles for for-profit organizations in increasing citizens' welfare. New concepts are emerging through these efforts, for instance, corporate social responsibility, social entrepreneurship, social enterprise, and philanthrocapitalism. These terms are as elusive as "public." For example, P. A. DACIN, T. DACIN, and M. MATEAR (2010: 38) identified 37 different definitions of "social entrepreneurship." In addition, there is persistent skepticism pertaining to these concepts. Is it possible that a single entity can secure enough profit to stay in business while also addressing social problems on a not-for-profit basis? Is it really possible that for-profit organizations will give up profit?

LCTI, which was mentioned earlier, again provides an example for exploring the possibilities. LTCI enabled for-profit organizations to participate in providing public (governmental) human services for the first time in Japan's history. Y. SUDA and B. GUO (2011) revealed that for-profit service organizations operating under LTCI are learning to emphasize the importance of supporting low-income seniors while containing their profit-seeking motives. Many of these for-profit service organizations are operating as branch offices of a larger entity. The entities are usually engaged in

other business activities, such as selling assistive devices or offering consultation services to hospitals. The organizations are accumulating profits in their business activities while taking advantage of the legitimacy established by contributing to the community as LTCI service organizations. In sum, LTCI enjoys the contributions of for-profit organizations, and in exchange it provides them with leverage to profit in other business areas.

The model observed under LTCI appears to be a realistic one in exploring the possible contributions of for-profit organizations to the public interest. The government's role is again crucial in creating the mixed economy system that LTCI exemplifies. Redefining roles of for-profit organizations in the process of designing a welfare society is another important task for Japan's Welfare Sociology Association.

3. The Relational Aspect of "Self" in Defining Oneself

Based on Alzheimer's patient care studies, W. E. DEAL and P. F. WHITEHOUSE (2000) argue that Japan's view of "self" contrasts greatly with that of the United States or the West. From the Japanese viewpoint, "self" is socially constructed. For example, "Consider the relationship between a woman who has Alzheimer's, no longer able to talk or care for herself, and her son" (p. 320). She can still be her son's mother as long as the son recognizes and treats her as his mother. People treating her as her son's mother support her "self." On the other hand, in the US or Western view, the definition of "self" emphasizes autonomy. Thus, Alzheimer's patients are often seen as "incomplete persons, or, in the extreme, as having lost their selves altogether" (p. 318). Deal and Whitehouse term the Japanese view of "self" as "relational self" and the US or Western view as "individual self" (p. 318).

The concept of relational self resonates with the way Japanese nonprofit and voluntary organizations operate. They exhibit their prominence especially in disaster relief and pay careful attention to the context of victims' daily lives when designing instrumental support. This helps the victims maintain their integrity and remember who they were before the disaster. At the same time, the emphasis on compassion, mutual understanding, and deference to groups with different standpoints could contain an attempt to insist on one's own interest.

R. PEKKANEN (2006) summarizes Japan's nonprofit and voluntary organizations as "members without advocacy" (p. 3). Advocacy often goes hand in hand with identity politics. If the Japanese have "relational selves," identity may be constructed in a different manner from US or Western identity, and this can lead to a different approach in expressing one's interests. The without-advocacy approach appears to be an avenue for further exploring distinctive relationships between "self" and society in Japan. Japan's Welfare Society Association will contribute to illuminating the context of Japan's welfare society by incorporating cross-cultural perspectives into civic discourse.

(SUDA Yuko)

III. WELFARE SOCIOLOGY AFTER 3.11 AND OUR MESSAGE TO THE WORLD

1. The Great East Japan Earthquake as a turning point

The Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011 revealed many problems and contradictions which were latent in Japanese society. One of the challenges for Japanese welfare sociology is to make clear what this unprecedented disaster means for welfare system in Japan and to provide guiding principles for the "reconstruction" of the welfare system.

One of the unique characteristics of the postwar Japanese welfare system is that it has several "functional equivalents" for low public expenditures on social welfare: family welfare based on a gendered division of labor, company welfarism limited to men, full-fledged breadwinners, and a low unemployment rate made possible by government-initiated public works. Under this welfare system, each household can sustain a secure life only if it follows a standard lifestyle that includes a full-fledged male breadwinner. However, following a "non-standard" lifestyle, i.e. a family's breadwinner being an irregular employee or female, leads to the increased risk of an unstable economic life. This is why the Japanese welfare system can be characterized as being both a liberal regime (in which income inequality is large) and a conservative regime (in which gender inequality is large) at the same time.

The year 1995, when Japan was hit by the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, marked a turning point in Japanese postwar history. Around 1995, the standard lifestyle in Japan began to collapse ever faster. The declining birthrate and increased ageing of the population, coupled with the increasing individualization of families (marked by a rising divorce rate and decreasing marriage rate), resulted in the dysfunction of family welfare. Neo-liberal political forces took greater power, and the deregulation of the labor market, which was promoted under the political ideology of neoliberalism, increased the number of irregular employee who cannot enjoy the fruits of company welfarism. The expansion of expenditures on social security was curbed, and expenditures on public works were also reduced. This has resulted in a greater level of inequality and social exclusion in Japanese society.

Whereas neoliberal policies severely devastated Japanese society, they also led to changes in the political climate in the direction of expanding social security expenditures once again. In the 2009 election a more progressive party (Japan Democratic Party, JDP) took power. Some of the policy reforms of the social security system under the JDP included suggestions to realize a universal welfare system in Japan.

The Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011, however, blew off this tiny sign of change toward universal welfare. Because large-scale fiscal expenditures were initiated in order to rebuild from the earthquake, the generous benefits for children introduced under the JDP government were reduced and eligibility for applying for public assistance for the poor was tightened. A conservative party (the Liberal Democratic Party) took power again, intolerant nationalism is on the rise, and the social movement toward an anti-nuclear society has diminished in prominence. Are we to choose to revert back to the "old" Japan? The pattern of damage from the Great East Japan Earthquake tells us "No." In order to prepare for future damage from natural disasters, we need a universal, inclusive society.

One of the tasks to be tackled by welfare sociology in Japan is to analyze the damage from the earthquake and to try to find a way to reconstruct the Japanese welfare system.

2. Vulnerabilities of Japanese society revealed by the Great East Japan Earthquake

While natural disasters are "accidental" in the sense that they are not man-made, the damage caused by them are not accidental because it occurs according to the pattern of sociocultural vulnerability. The characteristics of the damage from the Great East Japan Earthquake is that the problems in Japanese society were magnified in it. Here I will explore the risks caused by the earthquake by focusing on four concepts that are concerned with "space": public space, housing, region, and community.

The first concept is vulnerability in public space. The mortality rate from this earthquake was particularly high among the elderly and persons with disabilities; for instance, the mortality rate of persons with disabilities was twice as high as that of persons without disabilities. This can be explained by the fact that the physical environment and the early warning systems of the damaged cities were designed for persons without disabilities, and they hindered the quick evacuation of physically disabled persons and visually and hearing impaired persons. Moreover, in some cases physically disabled persons and the elderly found it hard to evacuate to public facilities because there were many barriers such as grade differences in them. Just as the welfare system in Japan was designed on the assumption that regular employees are the "standard", so too is public space in Japan designed on the assumption that persons without disabilities are the "standard;" thus it is not easily accessible to those who do not conform to this standard. In order to include socially vulnerable people into society, public space itself must also be universal, not only income and the provision of social service.

The second concept is vulnerability in housing. Many people have lost their housing due to the tsunami and radioactive contamination. Many victims are still compelled to stay in temporary dwellings, and the risk of death in isolation (*kodokushi*) is particularly high among the elderly in those dwellings. The government is trying to redevelop damaged areas using vast sums of money and time, but the reconstruction of housing is still underway. In the meantime, non-damaged properties on high ground are being bought by real estate companies at high prices, and this is making reconstruction even more difficult. Evacuees from the contaminated areas in Fukushima are forced to live inconvenient lives outside their communities or go back to their communities at the risk of low-level radiation. In the background of this situation is the characteristic of the Japanese welfare system in which secure personal space or housing is regarded as a "private good," not a "public good" to be provided by the government. However, on top of the large number of evacuees, we are facing an increasing number of people who cannot live in safe dwellings because of insecure employment. This requires that we reevaluate the right of residence as being an important social right.

The third concept is the different levels of vulnerability of regions. The regions that suffered the most from this earthquake had not only already been suffering from depopulation and population ageing, but the number of employees who work at local governments and social welfare councils had

slimmed down because of the reduction of public work and local grant-tax initiated by neoliberal reforms. The degradation of social capital is also remarkable across such examples as public transport and local hospitals, resulting in delays in support for victims and reconstruction. In devastated regions anti-nuclear actions are likely to be restrained, because nuclear power plants are major providers of employment in regions without notable industries and jobs. In order for adequate local welfare to be secured in every region not only must we provide an environment in which every citizen can access welfare and medical services, but we must also confront the difficult challenge of creating region-based employment opportunities.

The fourth concept is the different levels of vulnerability of communities. The mass media praised the existence of orderly mutual support even in the case of emergencies as a virtue of the Japanese, but this is attributable to the abundant social capital of local communities. The amount of social capital affects the quality of actions intended to prevent death in isolation and to increase the victims' quality of life. If this is the case, in urban areas where community-based activities are very modest, urban residents will face a tremendous risk from the absence of social order and support activities when disasters occur. We must investigate how and what we can substitute for the function of social capital.

Thus far I have examined four different types of vulnerability that the earthquake revealed. The vulnerabilities described here are those which replicate the vulnerabilities and fluctuations of the Japanese welfare system. This means that the reconstruction of the welfare system will lead to the reconstruction of Japanese society itself.

Japan is a country noted for its high frequency of natural disasters and its rapid ageing of the population. How can we share the risks of disasters in a hyper-aged society and construct an alternative system of solidarity in Japan? This question might be one of the important research issues which Japanese welfare sociology must send out to the world.

(NIHEI Norihiro)

REFERENCES

Dacin, P.A., Dacin, T., and Matear, M., 2010, "Social entrepreneurship: Why we don't need a new theory and how we move forward from here." *The Academy of Management Perspectives*, Vol. 24, No. 3: 37–56.

Deal, W.E. & Whitehouse, P.F., 2000, "Concept of personhood in Alzheimer's disease: Considering Japanese notions of a relational self." In, S. O. Long (ed.), *Caring for the elderly in Japan and the U.S.: Practices and policies* (pp. 318–333). New York: Routledge.

Fraser, N., 1990, "Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy." *Social Text*, No. 25/26, pp. 56–80.

Habermas, J., 1987, *The theory of communicative action, volume two. Lifeworld and system: A critique of functionalist reason*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Habermas, J., 1962, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gasellshaft*. Luchterhand. (Translated into Japanese by: Hosoya, S. & Yamada, M. (1973) as *Kokyo-sei no kozo tenkan*. Mirai-sha.)

Nakamura, S., 2002, "Kindai shiso-shi kenkyu to kokyo-ken ron." *Problématique*, No.3, pp.13–26.

Suda, Y., & Guo, B., 2011, "Dynamics between nonprofit and for-profit providers operating under the Long-Term Care Insurance system in Japan." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *40(1)*, 79–106.

Pekkanen, R., 2006, *Japan's dual civil society: Members without advocates*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Japan Welfare Sociology Association Office

Japan University CO-OP Support Center for Academic Societies

Wada 3-30-22, Suginami-ku, Tokyo 166-8532, Japan

E-mail: ws@univcoop.or.jp

Official Website: http://www.jws-assoc.jp/