

Past, Present and Future of Research on Social Problems in Japan: A Message to the World from the Japanese Association of Social Problems

Japanese Association of Social Problems

I. Overview of the Association

1. Overview of the Association's Activities

The Japanese Association of Social Problems is a representative Japanese academic society that studies the phenomena of social problems and social issues. It was established in 1985, with a history that stretches back nearly 30 years. Currently about 200 members have joined the association, consisting of people from a wide range of occupational categories. These include researchers affiliated with universities, research institutes, and technical schools; and staff members from courts, prisons, juvenile corrective institutions, detention centers, and probation offices. The research fields of its members also encompass a variety of different fields and domains, including basic theory and doctrine on social problems and social issues and investigative approaches and research methods for same. Concrete topics include crime, delinquency, and deviance; the family; social welfare and social security; healthcare; education and schools; labor; rural areas; culture and religion; and the problem of discrimination.

Through the publication of its journal entitled the *Journal of Social Problems*, the association has taken the lead with studies on Japanese social problems and social issues in a theoretical and empirical manner. Furthermore, some of the members affiliated with the association have been investigating and researching problem phenomena that have significant repercussions in a social sense, as well as phenomena that have become social issues. Recently, these have included topics like problems such as crime, delinquency, and drugs as well as problems like corporate crime; the problem of suicide across various age groups and regions; bullying, truancy, and other problems stemming from education; domestic violence/abuse, poverty, and other problems facing families and issues pertaining to social policy; problems facing rural communities, such as the various structural problems and regional disparities found in agricultural villages; and problems that have accompanied the changes in employment and hiring structures such as unstable work and homelessness, as examples. They also proactively work to address other topics such as the issue of social prejudices and discrimination seen with issues like homosexuality and the process by which these are structured, and problems brought about by the process through which social issues are structured via media analysis and the like. The association contains a great many members who have contributed in large part to the drafting of practical measures for these issues.

2. Goal with the Establishment of the Association

The association was established with the goal of researching, developing, and disseminating

studies of social problems and striving to achieve research coordination and cooperation between its members. It carries out the following undertakings in order to achieve this goal. (1) Disseminating and promoting studies of social problems, (2) holding research meetings and subcommittee meetings as well as workshops, (3) promoting the research of its members and engaging in joint investigative studies, (4) issuing its journal and other publications, (5) coordinating with related academic associations within Japan and overseas, etc.

3. The Association's Organization

Decision making for and the running of the association are primarily conducted through general meetings and board of directors meetings.

The general meetings are organized so as to include all of the members, where they deliberate over the following matters. (1) Implementing projects, (2) electing officials, (3) approving budgets and accounting, (4) matters related to membership fees, (5) changing the bylaws, etc.

The board of directors meetings establish committees and executive offices to ensure that the association's affairs are carried out, and are also in charge of the following duties. (1) Research, (2) compiling and editing (compiling, editing, and publishing the journal), (3) publicity and public relations, (4) general affairs, and (5) accounting.

4. The Association's Projects, Activities, and Events

The association's major projects, activities, and events include the following.

(1) Meetings

Meetings are held once a year, generally from the end of September to the beginning of October. Their programs are comprised of symposia, theme sessions, round table discussions, free report subcommittee meetings, and more. In recent years, symposia have been held with themes such as "Mechanisms of Social Fragmentation," "The Difficulty of Living in Contemporary Societies," and "Unseen Poverty." In addition, the subcommittee meetings for free reports provide an invaluable opportunity whereby members can freely present the results of their research.

(2) Publishing the association's journal: *Journal of Social Problems*

The journal is published once annually, and as many as 27 volumes have been issued in total. The general public may also purchase copies for 1,500 yen apiece. Its content consists of a preface, special feature papers, freely submitted papers, views from the field, book reviews, and more. The special feature papers are oftentimes compiled and edited in line with the content of the meeting and symposium from the previous year. Moreover, for the free report papers members are free to submit their research results, which are published after first going through a screening (peer-review).

(3) Publishing an Association Newsletter

The association's newsletter is published three times a year and sent out to all members. A wide array of information is published therein, including information on the holding of meetings, solicitations for free reports and freely submitted papers, and solicitations for academic encouragement awards, as well as messages from members and current status reports.

5. Diverse Membership Systems and Members' Privileges

The association's members consist of regular members, honorary members, and lifetime members. The approval of the board of directors is required in order to join as any type of member.

- (1) Regular members: People who approve of the society's aims and have an academic interest in studies of social problems and related fields.
- (2) Honorary members: People who have especially distinguished themselves in the field of studies of social problems.
- (3) Lifetime members: Members who have been regular members for 15 years or longer and who are 70 years old or older.

Regular members can take part in the meetings and functions carried out by the association, and may also receive the publications that it issues (journal, association newsletter). Naturally, they can also offer free reports at meetings, submit their papers to the journal, and apply to be eligible for the academic encouragement awards.

6. Academic Encouragement Awards

The association grants research encouragement awards and publishing encouragement awards, grants for publishing academic books, and assistance with the costs of presenting to the association. This is designed to encourage members to perform studies related to social problems and related fields and stimulate the association's activities.

- (1) Research encouragement award: The research results (books or papers) presented by members who are 35 years old or younger, generally speaking, are eligible.
- (2) Publishing encouragement award: Works by members in the form of single author books compiling academic research results, jointly edited books conforming to these, and compilations that summarize the results of joint research are eligible.
- (3) Grants for publishing academic books: Unpublished works (single author books, jointly edited books, and compilations that summarize the results of joint research) are eligible for publishing grants.
- (4) Assistance with the costs of presenting to the association: Members who are enrolled in graduate school or members who are 35 years old or younger who do not have regular employment are eligible for partial assistance with their travel and lodging expenses when they give reports at the society's meetings and so on.

7. Membership Fees

The annual fees for regular members are 7,000 yen. However, the fees for those members who are enrolled in graduate school are 5,000 yen. Moreover, on account of the lifetime member system those members who are 70 or older who have received approval from the board of directors can maintain their membership eligibility by paying 5,000 yen. Aside from this, in cases where there are special circumstances, such as with the economic circumstances of members who are foreign nationals, these people may have their fees reduced or be exempted from them through deliberations

by the board of directors.

8. Procedures for Joining the Association

The association's Department of Administrative Affairs is always accepting membership applications. Membership application forms can be downloaded from the association's homepage.

(TAJIMA Hiromi)

II. History of the Japanese Association of Social Problems

1. Prior to the Establishment of the Association

The 28th meeting of the Japanese Association of Social Problems was held at Osaka City University on September 29 and 30, 2012. The time is soon approaching when the association could reasonably be described as a "traditional association."

The first meeting was held in the fall of 1985, with a conference by a preparatory committee for establishing the association held immediately prior to this by renting out the Japan Sociological Society's meeting hall. It was there that the final decision was made on the association's name. The conference was held with the participation of roughly 40 people. Opposition over whether to use the phrase "*Shakai Byori* (Social Pathology)" in the name welled up again, but finally in the end they settled on the Japanese Association of *Shakai Byori* in Japanese and the Japanese Association of Social Problems in English for the name owing to the strong urging of OHASHI Kaoru.

As will become apparent from here onwards, those people who studied social problems at the association back in those days were divided into two camps. There were those who studied social problems from American sociology, who were referred to as advocates for the capitalist system or social improvers, as well as those who studied social issues in Marxist sociology, who were referred to as reformers of the capitalist system or social revolutionaries. Neither side engaged in academic exchanges with the other side.

In this manner, most of the people studying social issues in Marxist sociology refrained from joining the Japanese Association of Social Problems, and it got its start as an association consisting primarily of those who studied social problems from American sociology. It was an era in which the schema of international opposition over politics and ideologies went a long way towards powerfully prescribing small groups of researchers as well.

2. The Time of the Association's Establishment

The organizational structure for the association imitated that of the Japanese Association of Sociological Criminology.

In fact, moves to establish the Japanese Association of Social Problems had already gotten underway by the time that the *Unit on Studies in Urban Problems* (four volumes in total; 1973 – 1976, Seishin Shobo) began to be published. The plan was for NASU Soichi, IWAI Hiroaki, Ohashi

Kaoru, and OYABU Juichi to play leading roles as editors of the unit. However, the Japanese Association of Sociological Criminology was established in 1974, and the vast majority of people studying deviance from among those people studying social problems joined as members of the Japanese Association of Sociological Criminology. This served to dampen enthusiasm somewhat, and so as a result its establishment was pushed back. Perhaps if it had been established in the early 1970s the conditions at the time of its establishment would have been different.

Yet having said that, under Chairman Ohashi Kaoru the association got off to a smooth start through the holding of meetings and the publication of the association's journal, the *Journal of Social Problems*. Incidentally, a look at the roster of the association's members from August 1989 reveals the names of people who had joined such as ISOMURA Eiichi, ICHIBANGASE Yasuko, Iwai Hiroaki, Ohashi Kaoru, KANETO Yoshiichi, KITAZAWA Shinji, SASAKI Ayao, TAKAHASHI Shigehiro, TAKENAKA Kazuro, TAMURA Kenji, NAITO Tatsumi, NAKAMOTO Hiromichi, Nasu Soichi, HOSHINO Kanehiro, MOCHIZUKI Takashi, YAMATE Shigeru, IJIMA Nobuko, OMURA Hideaki, Oyabu Juichi, KOSHII Ikuo, SASAKI Kiyozo, SHIKATA Hisao, SHIBANO Shozan, TAKASHIMA Shoji, TOKUOKA Hideo, NAKA Hisao, HOGETSU Makoto, MATSUSHITA Takeshi, MANIWA Mitsuyuki, MOTOMURA Hiroshi, MORITA Yoji, UTSUMI Yoichi, and YOSHII Hiroaki. There were 176 members in total.

To be sure, the association was a gathering of people studying social issues from American sociology, but at the same time a number of people who were inclined towards Marxist sociology had taken part in the association from the time of its establishment despite their disagreements. What is more, it is also clear that people studying social welfare had also taken part from the beginning.

3. The Association's Initial Stage

After a one-year interim period, Ohashi Kaoru served as Chairperson for three three-year terms for a total of ten years. This ten-year period from the fall of 1985 until the fall of 1995 could be described as the association's initial stage.

This ten-year span was a period of major upheavals both within Japan and around the world. In 1985 Mikhail S. GORBACHEV was elected General Secretary of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union and initiated perestroika. In November 1989 the Berlin Wall was torn down, setting off the collapse of East Germany. Then in 1991 it was the Soviet Union that collapsed. These major upheavals profoundly altered Japanese sociology. By this point in time Marxist sociology, namely, studies on overthrowing capitalism and on structural reforms, had been swept aside.

This means that the clear oppositional schema when it came to "social problems" and "social issues," with the former being social issues from American sociology and the latter being social issues from Marxist sociology, had disappeared completely. Since the social issues from American sociology also constituted a "sociology of social issues," a situation arose in which there was no longer a need to use the title "problem" in place of "issue."

Furthermore, with the bursting of the bubble economy in Japan in 1991 the Japanese economy began to slide into recession. It was assumed that this recession would be temporary, but it has

continued on indefinitely thereafter as if it were a massive avalanche.

Unfortunately, the Japanese Association of Social Problems did not harbor any sort of sense of crisis with regards to such epochal changes, and the association was run as it had been since it was initially established. The structure of its Department of Administrative Affairs was fragile, and the situation was such that the Research Division did everything it could to just hold meetings once a year, while the Editorial Division likewise did everything in its power just to put out one journal each year. Time just kept on passing by without the association seeking out new horizons when it came to social problems, or exploring academic responses to problems that Japan would likely be broadsided by in the future.

4. The Association's Intermediate Stage

In the fall of 1995 the chairpersonship passed from Ohashi to Mochizuki Takashi, and as a result of this the association's Department of Administrative Affairs was moved to Taisho University. This was the start of the association's intermediate stage, and was the beginning of its organizational reforms. As its Department of Administrative Affairs built up its capabilities regarding general affairs and accounting, its board of directors also grew more active, as did its research and editorial committees. One tangible outcome of this increased activity was the *Unit of Studies in Social Problems* (total of four volumes; Gakubunsha) that was published between 2003 and 2004. Mochizuki handed the role of Chairperson off to Matsushita Takeshi, after whom the proactive activities of Chairperson YONEKAWA Shigenobu bore fruit. It broke new ground as a smallish association with about 200 members.

Moreover, the association's organization grew stable after its Department of Administrative Affairs was relocated to Shukutoku University. This was because after the relocation Ohashi bestowed it with a donation of more than 10 million yen in total to provide it with funding related to its academic encouragement awards as well as funding for its general accounting and finances that were separate from this. These assets were used to set the management of the association on a stable bearing thereafter.

However, back then the association was faced with significant academic issues with which it had to come to grips. One of these was the question of how the trend of the increasing use of psychology throughout academia should be perceived and how it should be handled. One of the answers to this lay in clinical sociology. As indicated by the fact that the fourth and final volume in the *Unit of Studies in Social Problems* was "Studies in Social Problems and Clinical Sociology," the laying of plans with an awareness of "clinical" aspects came in response to the times.

The second question is how the constructionism theories of social issues in which the conventional functionalist and positivistic studies of social problems have come to the fore should be handled. In response to this question, some were of the opinion that when the unit was issued one more volume should have been added beyond the fourth volume on clinical sociology that incorporated constructionism, but this idea was never adopted.

One other development that occurred at the association in this period that must be mentioned

here is the death of Chairperson Yonekawa. He passed away in the middle of his term, and was succeeded as Chairperson by YAJIMA Masami (myself) for the remainder of his term.

Thus the association's intermediate stage from the fall of 1995 to the fall of 2004 came to an end.

5. The Association's Later Stage

The association's later stage is the period lasting from the fall of 2004 until the present (winter of 2012). After finishing out the remainder of his term, Yajima was reappointed as Chairperson. It was starting from here that Chairperson Yajima began displaying originality (but without doing anything personally), because he appointed Morita Yoji as the Director of the Research Committee and entrusted him with nearly everything in the aim of rejuvenating research.

In response to this, Morita took upon himself the challenge of hosting integrated themes for three years in a row at the meeting's symposia and as the special features for the association's journal, the *Journal of Social Problems*, that came after these. These themes were "Unseen Poverty: From the Perspective of Social Inclusion" (Volume 21, 2006), "Social Upheaval and the New Exclusion: The Paradox of Institutionization" (Volume 22, 2007), and "How Should We Confront Unseen Poverty and the New Exclusion?" (Volume 23, 2008). This led to the issuance of *How Should We Confront the New Exclusion?: The Potential of and Challenges for Social Inclusion* (Morita Yoji (Ed.) Gakubunsha, 2009) by way of the results of this research.

Starting from here the association largely changed course away from micro and clinical perspectives to more macro and structural perspectives, such as getting a feel for the era, the international community, and the circumstances in present-day Japan.

Moreover, under Chairperson Sasaki Kiyozo the association held its second round of integrated themes for three years in a row. The themes were "The Difficulty of Children's Lives: 'Illnesses' Latent in Everyday Life" (Volume 24, 2009), "The Difficulty of Middle and Old-aged Men and Women's Lives: 'Illnesses' Latent in Everyday Life II" (Volume 25, 2010), and "How Should Studies of Social Problems View the Difficulty of Living in Contemporary Society?" (Volume 26, 2011).

Upon becoming Chairperson, Morita suffered from the misfortune of the death of TOKII Satoshi, who was the Director for General Affairs and who served as the linchpin of the Department of Administrative Affairs. This department was hurriedly relocated from Shukutoku University to Kyoto Tachibana University, and the 16th World Congress of the International Society for Criminology from the summer of 2011 was brought to a smooth and successful conclusion.

In this way, currently under Chairperson Morita the Japanese Association of Social Problems is revamping its structure and confronting new social issues through its organizational structure.

Readers are encouraged to consult the discussions by SHINDO Yuzo and YOKOYAMA Minoru for a more detailed account of these matters.

(Yajima Masami)

III. The Association's Present and Future

The globalization of the 1990s, which should be appraised as a major turning point in world history, has led to calls for major transformations in the study of social problems itself in the 21st century. One of the pivotal academic issues with the study of social problems in Japan in this period is the two-fold response to the “social constructivist” approach that was adopted in Japanese sociology through translated works in the 1990s, as well as the “increasing use of psychology” that came to be pronounced in the fields of delinquency, crime, and deviance.

The former of these clearly laid out in a methodological sense the mechanisms by which judgments on an axis from normal to abnormal in and of themselves are socially constructed in response to long-standing problems that carry the burden of value judgments of being saddled with the notion of “pathology.” By doing so it has incisively questioned the very basis for the existence of a discipline for the study of social problems. On the other hand, the latter raised numerous problems that shook the very significance of the sociological perspective of studying social problems at its root in the sense that it brought about increased individualism for problematic phenomena. These two tendencies brought about a state of affairs that could be expressed as a “clinical sociological shift” (Sakiyama 2007) within the Japan Sociological Society and the Japanese Association of Social Problems. While this has accepted the questions posed by constructivism towards the burden of value judgments for studies of social problems, on the other side it was one tendency born out of the confrontation with the relative lack of intentional moves to solve or intervene in problems that had beset constructionism.

In response to this state of affairs, the Japanese Association of Social Problems issued a total of four volumes of the *Unit on Studies in Social Problems* (published by Gakubunsha) from 2003 to 2004 in order to clarify the grounds for the existence of pathological research. The titles for these volumes were “Basic Theories on Social Problems” (Volume 1), “The Avaricious Society: Macro Social Pathology” (Volume 2), “Ailing Relationships: Micro Social Pathology” (Volume 3), and “Studies in Social Problems and Clinical Sociology” (Volume 4). Volume 1 was a compendium of theories that strove to carefully examine, summarize, and develop theoretical approaches unique to the study of social problems. Volume 2 dealt with pathological phenomena brought about by the macro level of social structures—such as industrialization, computerization, hyper consumerization, and urbanization—as well as the problems of poverty and discrimination. Volume 3 was a compendium of applied solutions aimed at pathological phenomena among juvenile boys and girls, such as bullying, social withdrawal, and child prostitution, as well as pathological phenomena at the micro level between couples and parents and children, including domestic violence and child abuse. Volume 4 targeted problematic phenomena such as eating disorders, alcoholism, and elderly abuse, while at the same time being practical in the sense that it attempted to seek out ways of offering support and intervening in such cases. As indicated by the fact that “Studies in Social Problems and Clinical Sociology” was chosen for the title of the final volume, this can be seen as an obvious

indication of this aforementioned “shift.”

However, approaches to the study of social problems cannot cancel out the dimension of merely aiding and supporting interpersonal relationships at the micro level. The methodological stance found throughout all of sociology of getting close to the views and narratives of those involved resonates with the increasing use of psychology in response to the personalization of communities in rural areas. Yet at the same time it has also carried the risk of diluting social structuralist perspectives. Volume 2 demonstrated such a perspective in the sense that it strove to analyze individual phenomena found within the relationships between macro social changes. Backed by the problem of homelessness that became manifest at the end of the 1990s, theories of disparate societies and of social inclusion/exclusion extended their reach to a certain extent within Japan. The fact that studies by the members of the Japanese Association of Social Problems played an important role in this could be taken as an illustration of this point.

One other pivotal issue that cannot be avoided when problematizing trends in studies in social problems in the 21st century is their relationship with criminology. Or to phrase this based around its relationship with sociology, this would be “crime studies after the death of the ‘sociology of deviance’” (Sato 2012). As is commonly known, the concept of social problems that has been based in Emile DURKHEIM was succeeded by the concept of “deviance” in the United States in the latter half of the 20th century. There is no doubt that labeling theory brought about a paradigm shift in conventional, classical criminology. This presented the viewpoint that views of the existence of classical criminology were produced through the interactive and socially interactive relationship of “labeling,” and clearly delineated new research subjects and fields. Yet over the course of the 1970s labeling theory lacked the ability to explain primary deviance (LEMERT), which consequently raised disputes claiming that it lacked validity regarding theories on the origins and prevention of deviance and crime (for practical objectives). There have been reforms to and criticisms of labeling theory, but oddly enough it seems as if these controversies have disappeared from the arena of sociological discussions since then. Then SUMNER somewhat abruptly declared the “death of deviance” in 1994.

This contention is not limited to the study of social problems and its bordering issues of criminology and criminal sociology. The reason for this is because the claim could be made that social constructionism was prepared with respect to the fact that labeling theory, which forms the core of the sociology of deviance, has engendered the perspective that deviance is socially created and generated. This is because the perspective of social construction that equates deviance with social issues could be said to form the foundation for the composition of sociological problems in response to the composition of psychological problems.

In the Japanese intellectual tradition, in recent years the term “social issues” has come to be more closely connected to the Marxist perspective than with the constructivist perspective that originated in the United States. Since the end of the Cold War construct between the east and the west, Japanese society has been exposed to the powerful tide of globalization. Just like with other societies, it must undertake the task of reconstructing problems unique to sociology such as the social construction that equates deviance with social issues amidst a social consciousness and

political inclinations that place the highest priority on public order.

(Shindo Yuzo)

IV. International Activities: Reflections on Attracting the World Congress of the International Society for Criminology to Japan

The Japanese Association of Social Problems made significant contributions when the 16th World Congress of the International Society for Criminology was held in Kobe in August 2011. This section will introduce the association's international activities, with the primary focus being on the contributions it made here.

Activities to attract the International Society for Criminology to Japan were advocated by TANIOKA Ichiro and Morita Yoji (the association's Chairperson), and these got underway with the launch of a conference to attract the society here in May 2008. In July 2008 the 15th World Congress was held in Barcelona, where approval was given for holding the next one in Japan.

Then in September of the same year the Japan Federation of Criminological Associations was formed with the participation of eight academic societies, including this association. Morita Yoji joined the federation as the Organizing Committee's Vice Chairperson, while Yajima Masami (former Chairperson), Sasaki Kiyozo (previous Chairperson), and Hoshino Kanehiro (previous Vice Chairperson) also joined as members of the Organizing Committee. What is more, Yokoyama Minoru (Director in Charge of Public Relations) also joined the Executive Committee as its Vice Chairperson. As this composition of executive officials clearly reveals, the association played an important role in the holding of the 16th World Congress.

The main theme of the World Congress was "Global Socio-Economic Crisis and Crime Control Policies: Regional and National Comparison." This theme gave consideration to the crisis that occurred following the collapse of Lehman Brothers in the fall of 2008. Following this, plenary sessions were held under the themes of "Global Economic Crisis and Criminology" on the first day, "Frontiers of Clinical Criminology" on the second day, "Corporate and Business Crime" on the third day, and "Models of State and Crime Prevention Strategies" on the fourth day.

The association organized three of these sessions under the leadership of some of its young members. TANAKA Tomohito organized a session around the theme of: "Consideration of Openness and Security at School: Focusing on Security for Children in the School Property." HORIKOSHI Naoto analyzed documents like the note written by the perpetrator of the incident at Ikeda Elementary School that occurred in 2001, which involved a break-in at a school and an indiscriminate mass killing. Tanaka Tomohito gave a report on cooperative arrangements between schools, communities, and security services in the aim of preventing break-ins at schools. AKAHANE Yukio performed a verification of how heinous crimes carried out in schools were reported by the students. UEDA Mitsuaki performed a time series analysis using cumulative data on factors causing fluctuations in anxiety over crime.

ASADA Yoshitaka and INAZU Hideki organized a session with the theme of: “Surveillance and the Reorganization of Community.” Inazu Hideki analyzed case examples from the world inhabited by immigrants of Japanese descent from South America who now reside in the vicinity around Kobe. MATSUI Hiroshi analyzed trends in the criminalization of secretly filming people in order to shed light on the process by which surveillance is socially constructed. Asada Yoshitaka discussed the spread of and changes in the notions of safety and security through case examples in which surveillance cameras had been installed in new residential developments in the outskirts of major urban areas.

The third session, entitled “Attempts to Explain Crime and Delinquency” was organized by Ueda Mitsuaki. To start, TAKENAKA Yuji gave a summary report offering an overarching view of the session as a whole. Next, MATSUKAWA Anna performed an analysis and inquiry into the connection between social capital and crime in neighboring regions based upon data collected in and public statistics from Kobe City. Furthermore, three young researchers affiliated with the Institute of Criminology at the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom gave a report on theories on factors that cause crime.

Since the World Congress of the International Society for Criminology ended up turning a profit, a portion of the remaining money was allocated to the association. Therefore, the association decided to establish a fund to provide assistance to research presentations given by young researchers at overseas conferences. The hope is that the reports at the World Congress in Kobe will inspire young researchers who are members of the association to proactively take part in international conferences in the future, especially the Yokohama Congress of ISA.

(Yokoyama Minoru)

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