

# **Confronting Three Kinds of Reflexivity in Sociology in Japan: *Message to the World***

## **Japan Association for the Study on the History of Sociology**

### **1. Introduction**

The Japan Association for the Study on the History of Sociology (JAHS, hereafter) was established on October 20, 1960 by taking the opportunity of the annual meeting of the Japan Sociological Society held in Rikkyo University, Tokyo, where the general assembly for its establishment was called upon.

The attendants were as follows; SHINMEI Masamichi (Tohoku University), KURAUCHI Kazuta (Kwansei Gakuin University), TAKEDA Ryoza (Waseda University), HAYASE Toshio (Yokohama City University), TOMITA Fujio (Kantogakuin University), SAKURAI Shotaro (Nara Women's University), AONUMA Yoshimatsu (Keio University), NISHIMURA Katsuhiko (Kobe University), ATOJI Yoshio (Nagoya University), SUZUKI Koju (Tokyo Foreign University), SAITO Shoji (Nihon University), AKUTAGAWA Shuichi (Senshu University), and BABA Akio (Nihon University, who was supposed to be here but is actually absent due to sickness).

The names of its directors and secretaries are as follows; Representative Director: Shinmei, Acting Director: Baba, Directors: Kurauchi, Takeda, Hayase, DAIDO Yasujiro (Kwansei Gakuin University), Atoji, SUMIYA Etsuji (Doshisha University), Secretary : Saito, and SADAHIRA Genshiro (Kwansei Gakuin University).

Universities from Tohoku, or the northeastern part of Japan, to Kansai, or the western part of Japan, participated with a balance between state universities (at that time, six) and private universities (seven). It could be said that the names appearing here are the main founding fathers of the Association.

According to ATARASHI Mutsundo (*Studies on the History of Sociology*, Vol. 30, 2008, p.48), the Association has its pre-history, so to speak, from the pre-war period, yet this report confines itself to the Association established in 1960 which has led directly to this day.

The prospectus of the Association reads as follows;

“Since more than 80 years have passed since Japanese sociology started with the introduction of Comte's sociology by NISHI Amane in the first year of the Meiji regime, Japanese sociology has currently established its firm status in the world of academics.

...In the year of the 100th anniversary of the Japan-US Treaty of Amity, we ex integro became keenly aware of the need for the integrative and systematic study of the history of Japanese sociology. We, the fellow scholars of the Study, now come together to establish the Japan Association for the Study on the History of Sociology with the expectation being that it will achieve the aforementioned purpose.” (*Studies on the History of Sociology*, Vol.1, 1961, p.22)

The first president of JAHS was Shinmei. The secretary office was located at the Department of Sociology, College of Humanities and Sciences, Nihon University with which Baba was

affiliated and this location is still its location to this day. The first Annual Meeting was held at the College of Humanities and Sciences, Nihon University as well on June 17, 1961.

The names of the successive presidents of JAHS are as follows: Shinmei, SAITO Shoji, YOKOYAMA Yasuo, AKIMOTO Ritsuro, Atarashi, TOMINAGA Ken'ichi, ONO Michikuni, and MIKAMI Takeshi.

There are currently 260 members of JAHS, and it holds annual meetings and regular workshops a few times a year both in the Kanto as well as Kansai areas of Japan.

The Association issues the *Studies on the History of Sociology* as its official journal annually. In 1961 *Association Report No. 1* was issued whose main content was the news of the Association, yet the volume was already named *Studies on the History of Sociology; Association Report No. 1*. In the next year *Association Report No. 2* was issued. "Twenty years after this in 1981 the journal was issued as *Revived Volume No. 3* in a format clearly defined as an official journal and taking the same design, including the calligraphy, of the *Association Report*, which has continued to this day as the back numbers of the journal" (Ono, *Studies on the History of Sociology*, 2008, p.4).

As of 2013, up to volume No. 35 of the Journal has been issued.

In 2008 this official journal included a special issue celebrating the 30th anniversary and three of the former presidents contributed articles. It can be said that these names are the main figures in the Association who have succeeded the founding fathers as the second generation. These three figures are Tominaga, Aatarashi, and Ono.

In this special issue for the 30th anniversary Ono described the trajectory of the *Studies on the History of Sociology* in four stages. The first stage was the period from 1961-84, the second one was from 1985-93, the third one was from 1994-99, and the fourth one was from 2000-2007. Ono also suggested two points that constitute the basic trends in their content.

The first trend is the transformation from a tone of investigation into understanding sociology by putting it in the past context of historical settings, which is genuinely a type of 'history of sociology', to the underlying tone of a type of 'sociological theory' that evaluates sociology in the theoretical settings of a contemporary context. The second trend is the tendency in which articles of young researchers, especially those of graduate students, have increased (Ono, *ibid.*, p.23).

Now, as it is clearly manifest in the Prospectus of the Association, at least in some parts, and we can see as the foundation of the Association which deals with the history of sociology that there are three kinds of reflexivity that prompted Japanese sociologists to establish the Association.

The first reflexivity is around the relation between Western sociology and Japanese sociology. In the foundation and the development of Japanese sociology, it has been an intrinsic problematique that the influence of Western sociology has taken the form of being built-in from the beginning. There is a problem of import discipline on the one hand, but at the same time the imports still form the central parts of the body of Japanese sociology, and firmly constitute its significant assets, on the other. It is this viewpoint that one should develop one's own sociological investigation while being aware of and relativizing the relationship *per se*.

The second one relates to the way to set up the problematique of the history of sociology, the idea of the problematique itself. That is the mutual prescription of sociological investigation into

history (in the past) and that of the current one, namely an awareness of the reflexivity of the relation between the two. It would be fair to say that the study of the history of sociology fundamentally starts with an awareness of this sense.

The third one concerns an awareness of the reflexive relationship between the *sociological investigation* of the study on the history of sociology and research on the contemporary (the age in which the researchers currently live) *society* per se. Questions of the final reflexive relationship ultimately continue to be consistently posed to sociologists.

In the following sections, this report will examine these three kinds of reflexivity by taking an overview of the articles that appeared in the aforementioned first volume of the *Studies on the History of Sociology* (1961) written by the founding fathers and the articles in the 30th anniversary retrospective volume written by the main figures in the second generation.

## **2. Moon light sociology: Western sociology and Japanese sociology in reflexivity**

The (prefatory) note by the editing committee of the *Studies on the History of Sociology* (1985, version containing Vol.1-6 bound together) contains the following remarks;

“The sociology of this country started first with the introduction of foreign sociological theories. Accordingly, the area of the history of sociological theory occupied the central position in the founding phase of sociology. Therefore, at that period of time, although there were not that many members, almost all of the representatives of the Japanese sociological society were members of it, including the late Shinmei” (*Studies on the History of Sociology*, 1985, no pages indicated).

This expresses the recognition of the necessity of studying Western sociological theory for providing a foundation in Japanese sociology, with this occupying a pivotal position at least in the starting point of the Association. Next it immediately evokes the question of how should one think about the problematique at the present moment of time, yet we shall keep it as the question we will gradually and finally respond to it in the article as a whole.

For example, Shinmei argues as follows;

“As we reflect upon the fact that Japanese sociology per se has been influenced by the advanced Western sociology a great deal in the process of its historical development from its starting point down to this day, in ensuring studies on the history of Japanese sociology it is obvious that we need to refer to Western sociology as well as doing research on its history” (Ibid., p.1).

At the same time, however, he is also aware of the following point.

“Having said that, it is also obvious that the most interesting and the closest object for our historical study on sociology is not foreign sociology, but Japanese sociology. As we live in Japanese society as Japanese and study sociology in it, it is rather a matter of course that we are supposed to and have to devote our energy to the study of the history of sociology in Japan” (Ibid., p.1).

We are ‘supposed’ to do that, but actually it is not the case. Accordingly, “I think that the first task to do for this Association shall be the fulfillment of this academic void” (Ibid., p.2).

For this problem the question of what happened with this task at the present moment of 2013 naturally arises once more. And it is again the point of discussion to which the article as a whole should respond and investigate.

Critical and self-conscious stances towards Japanese sociology as an imported discipline are expressed best in the term “moon-light sociology” coined by Daido.

“Once I described the sociology of Japan as ‘moon-light sociology’ ... This is what I liken to ‘moon-light civilization’ coined by Oswald Spengler in Germany in his book *The Decline of the West* as he described Japanese culture. The moon just reflects the sunlight without shining by itself. It has no power to shine by itself and there is no subjectivity in the moon.

...We have to admit that there exists this aspect of moon-light sociology when we trace the trajectory of the development of Japanese sociology. Yet Japanese sociology cannot be reconciled to remain as moon-light sociology forever. Seeing Japanese sociology flourishing after World War II, especially the energy in the sociology at the present moment, I have high hopes for Japanese sociology to rid itself of its nature of moon-light sociology and demonstrate its originality affirmatively” (Ibid., p.15).

Yet there still remains the question: What kind of state does it mean by the words “demonstrate its originality affirmatively”? Is it by any chance some state of affairs we can achieve by fulfilling the “void” of the “study of history of Japanese sociology” as Shinmei put it?

First it should be clear enough that the configuration of the problematique is not one in which there is a Western sociology to be imported on the one hand, and a Japanese sociology on the other which exists somewhere apart from Western sociology and which has an original light shining on its own. Rather, it may be the case that as we study Japanese sociology more in a historic perspective we see the situation in which Japanese sociology is always and already intrinsically intertwined with Western sociology more. In that case how could we show “affirmatively” the “originality” of Japanese sociology? Instead, perhaps it is the case that the issue can be found in a configuration in which Western sociology is always and already at least a part of the body of Japanese sociology per se, yet for Western sociology this Japanese sociology does not take such a stand.

This is, of course, not simply an issue of the imbalance of import and export, and of the excess of importation. Rather, from a contemporary viewpoint this could be an issue of the globalization of academics. One signification of the globalization of academics lies in the fact that certain theories, viewpoints, and focal points are flowing through and developing in a global arena. As George Herbert MEAD’s theory teaches us, this is a common scholarly consciousness which mutually flows and develops in dialogue.

When Japanese sociologists give a talk in conferences or workshops in Korea for example, we have to organize our talks by reflecting upon what Korean sociologists and audiences could be thinking of. We take the roles of the audiences of Korean people and a measure of our own positions into such considerations, and on that basis we express our remarks. When the subject of the talk touches upon issues like atomic power generation after the 3.11 disaster and even atomic bombs, this process of taking the roles of the others becomes that of including subtle issues. Such

scenes and situations occur everywhere around the world. This can also happen when Korean sociologists come to Japan, or when Swedish or Russian sociologists go to the USA as well, and vice versa. What G. H. Mead termed the “organization of (different) perspectives” through a discourse in a global arena is not quite fictional or a pipe dream nowadays. Is it not the case then, that the original contribution in the global arena could be rather a matter of what we can add to this multi-directional and global flow, or how we can have a chance to more or less redirect the flow? This issue indicates the kind of problematique we are now facing, namely whether it is the problematique constituted by a configuration of moon-light sociology or that of global sociology.

This is just one example, and in the *Studies on the History of Sociology*, Vol. 34, 2012, the journal organized a special issue entitled “On Others; Solidarity and Exclusion” that was profoundly inspired by the aftermath of 3.11. In the discussions centered around this issue in the journal it is responding vis-à-vis the Great East Japan Earthquake that occurred in Japan in its geographical sense, yet the discourses have been developed in the global arena in sociological terms such as solidarity, exclusion and the other. 3.11 is an event which poses a problem that occurred *in* Japan yet also *beyond* Japan. The sociological discourse taking place in that problematique (universe of discourse) is one which is situated in an area that we cannot help to refer to as *beyond* Japan, where we have been involved and are able to change the direction of its global flow of discourse.

### **3. Sociologist or “Sociology-logist”**

Many thinkers have asserted as if with one voice the same wisdom that history is always the one that proceeds from the present.

Studying the history of sociology does not make sense if it ignores the significance and meaning that this holds for present sociology. Needless to say, the most difficult thing is to strike a balance between studying the inherent value of (past) theories and their contemporary signification.

We (meaning most of the scholars of the study on the history of sociology) may not highly evaluate standpoints that are radically inclined towards one pole of the two. Arguments that lack the former stance and analyses on the detailed and inherent value of theories indicate that the arguments themselves are weak in their foundation or even lack grounds. Or it even can be said that there could be cases in which some academic significance lies in the inherent analysis per se. On the other hand, we would not be satisfied with just a detailed scholastic exposition and would like to argue “So what, after all”? It will be an argument which lacks the latter stance, as well as the implications and/or signification for contemporary sociology.

Also we would perhaps neither esteem arguments which lack inherent academic grounds and jump to a hasty problem consciousness for present sociology. Vis-a-vis that kind of arguments we would ask the meaning of it in grounding and developing the issues in connection to studies on the history of sociology.

This subject matter of the significance for contemporary sociology rightfully leads to the issue of what kind of meaning it has in connection with the analysis and understanding of contemporary

*society* itself. Shinmei has already stated it as follows regarding these issues of the second and the third type of reflexivity;

“Researchers on the history of sociology, if things go badly, can easily become a sociology-logist instead of a sociologist. If this is the case, then even if one goes to all the effort of studying the history of sociology this can only claim an antique-like value, and the expected positive contribution to it will be brought to naught. It is a matter of course that the Association’s main purpose is to study the history of sociology, yet at the same time we should connect the purpose to the study of *sociology*, above all that of targeted contemporary society, by promoting the study of the history of sociology, we should simultaneously set our sites on promoting the study of sociology per se.

It actually can be seen that the *raison d’être* of the Association is dependent upon the extent to which we can achieve this aspiration” (Ibid., p.3).

Vis-à-vis this sort of argumentation, ONO in the 30th anniversary volume of the *Studies on the History of Sociology*, put it in a different light as follows;

“We should at the same time be mindful of the possibility of forgetting the historical and societal positioning of sociology per se (a “historicistic” study of the history of sociology), and of reducing it to a ‘vacant knowledge’ that is removed from the reality (of the historical time), by leaning too much towards sociological theory or theoretical sociology (“present-time oriented” study of the history of sociology)” (Op.cit., Vol. 30, 2008, p.24).

In fine, Ono here, referring to YOKOI Toshihide’s paper in the *Studies on the History of Sociology*, Vol. 10, terms the stance of seeking for the relevance with “contemporary significance” as a “present-time oriented” study of the history of sociology and the sociological theory-oriented tendencies, while the stance that stresses the importance of an inherent understanding of theories in the past is defined as a “historicistic” study of the history of sociology.

Then, through a chronological analysis of the articles that appeared in the *Studies on the History of Sociology*, he also found a shift from the latter tendency to the former one. On the basis of this analysis he also pointed out that if the tendency becomes too pronounced it may cause other problems, and so we should attend to this as well.

As a matter of fact, the study of the history of sociology is in the reflexive liaison between inherent / historical research and the issue of what relevance it could have with contemporary sociology. Perhaps what is needed here is an awareness vis-à-vis this reflexivity and methodological control based on this awareness. From the standpoint of the three problems of reflexivity mentioned in the beginning of this article, in the issue of the Shinmei-Ono nexus there actually lies two different kinds of reflexivity. The first one concerns the relation between the methodology of the history of the discipline, namely the historical study of theories in *the past* and *sociology today*, and the second one is about the relation between theoretical studies, including historical studies of theories and *societal reality* per se. These are two problems with the reflexivity here.

As a matter of methodological awareness on the study of the history of sociology in Japan, it is perhaps required for us as our task to commit to studies with an awareness of the three problems

of reflexivity, including the one aforementioned (moon-light sociology or global sociology). It could be the case that the way of setting up the problematique of the study of the (Japanese) history of sociology per se inevitably is fated to be involved in the issues of those three kinds of reflexivity.

Sociology can be understood as an intellectual approach that maintains and renews itself by constant interrogation of its own foundations (Turner, 1994). If so, the fields in sociology such as the sociology of knowledge and social constructionism are actually not just fields in it but expressions of the fundamental methodology of sociology per se that are consciously applied to itself. The field of the history of sociology is then actually an approach to apply the awareness and reflexivity to sociology itself, and thus it is the carrier of the intellectual activities that are so deeply related to its very core.

As in the remarks of the founding fathers, this awareness had already been so sharply conceived that one might understand it as a certain awareness that is inevitably involved in performing sociology in the geopolitical and cultural space called Japan.

Lastly, on the issue of moon-light sociology or global sociology, as Atarashi so vividly described it in the 30th anniversary volume of the Journal, already for the second generation Western sociology has been no more solely a matter of literature but also a matter of face to face human relationships with the persons and scholars who produced this literature. On present showing, it is fair to say that the widening of such tendencies has been developing steadily.

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\*The translations of the titles of the papers into English that appear in the References section are tentative translations attempted by the author of this report and are not related to any kinds of official translations.

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