

## **What is the Use of the Japanese Sociology?**

The Vol. 53, Issue 1 of *\_Shakaigaku Hyoron\_* (Sociological Review) in 2002 (pages 2-12) published Professor Shiobara Tsutomu's presidential address "What Can Sociology Do for the 21st Century?" in the 2002 Japanese Sociological Association. Shiobara expressed deep concerns regarding the Japanese Sociology's current situation and its future development.

Japanese sociologists are productive. From *\_Sociological Review\_*, the leading Japanese Sociological professional organ, readers can read various subjects covering Japanese and the world societies as "Spontaneous Order and Individualistic Order: Hayek's Theory of Spontaneous Order and the Normative Problem of Order", "Trends in Ethnic Theories in the United States: Theoretical Overview about Ethnic Stratification" or "The Relationship between Support Networks and "Connectedness-oriented" Role in Late-middle-aged Japanese Men: From the Viewpoint of Gender Role".

However, to assess the contribution of the Japanese Sociology as a social science, we have to review theoretically as well as practically: Does it provide new material, ideas or interpretation of the Japanese society to other sciences in Japan or international Sociological society? Does it provide any unique knowledge or skill to the Japanese public? In a word, is Sociology useful for Japan? Shiobara especially introduced Applied Sociology (Social Survey) as a new occupational career for Japanese students to select Sociology as their choice. However, in this regard, first, most Japanese Sociology students lack enough mathematics/statistics background; second, survey methodology has been widely developed and utilized in other sciences such as Economics (which is the main force to drive methodology development), Political Science or Psychology. As one of the few leading Japanese sociologists for three decades and the President of the Japanese Sociological Association, Shiobara could hardly resist revealing the crisis consciousness: what is the use of Sociology in Japan?

This is a serious inquiry. What should the Japanese sociological society act about this?

First, a large amount of published Sociological papers can be categorized to what should be called "Foreign Studies" or "Regional Studies" field. It is useful to translate or interpret foreign societies. However, since the Japanese Sociological translators or interpreters themselves do not have enough knowledge relevant to the foreign subject, their selections and interpretations may not be appropriate or accurate. Sometimes they caused illusion (mostly to themselves) that they are introducing something important in a foreign country's Sociology even though the subject is trivial in both that foreign country and Japan. With the risk of subjectivity, I guess that one fourth of Japanese Sociological papers belong to this category and there is no need for them to be published in Sociology magazines. With more and more colleges being closed due to economic recession and population reduction, it is beneficial to the Japanese society to close one fourth or one third of departments/courses/positions under the name of Sociology with its current contents.

Second, the Japanese Sociology needs a round of restructure (as have been experienced by all other Japanese organizations). This does not mean unilaterally reduction of sociological resources/forces. In fact, the Japanese Sociology is desperately lacking new talents in some important fields. For example, rather than letting Americans with little Japanese knowledge (such as Lester Thurow or Paul Krugman) guessing the elements of Japanese industry policy, Japanese sociologists should provide the international academic world profound knowledge of their own industrial development. Regrettably, one Japanese Sociologist (Mannari Hiroshi)'s introductory work three decades ago is still leading the field of Industry Sociology in Japan. In the other field of Social Class, the SSM (Social Stratification and Mobility) cult dominated the study with its narrow frame setting and some absurd methodology. I confess that I once belonged to the academic cult for five-six years in the center before being expelled from it.

Third, the Japanese Sociology should develop new directions or fields corresponding to new social issues domestically as well internationally. For example, there are trends in some American and Japanese universities (such as Chicago, Keio and Chuo universities) establishing Public Policy departments but most of them are limited on narrow interests from economy or politics. Public Policy is perfectly a new (and old) filed of Sociology, backing up to the Sociology founders of Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim and Karl Marx. Another perfect to-do subject for the Japanese Sociology is the worldwide Globalization and the Japanese Internationalization, which should be studied by sociologists, rather than to be dominated by economists.

Last and most importantly, to reform the Japanese sociological society. This includes, but not limited, to become independent from governmental personnel and budgetary control, to open sociological positions to all sociologists regardless their graduation connection (gakubatsu) or national identification. As I iterated in other articles, during the Cold War period, the Japanese academic world, including the sociological society, had the independent "sociological imagination" with the physical existence of alternative societies. Sociology was useful, was sometimes powerful in Japan. However, in today's world, without an alternative to the stock-driven American capitalism, with academic fields being dominated by more and more goyo gakusha's (official scholars), the very reason of the existence of the Japanese Sociology becomes a question.

Professor Shiobara's concern is unfortunately true and realistic: the Japanese Sociology is at the crossroads.

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April 2003