

Sociology from 1.17 to 3.11: Tension between Theory and Reality

Kansai Sociological Association

The Kansai Sociological Association was founded over 60 years ago, principally by sociologists in the Kansai region of Japan. Today, with over 900 members it is one of Japan's top active multidisciplinary academic societies.

History

The first meeting of the Kansai Sociological Association was held at Kyoto University on Sunday, June 11, 1950. Two sociologists were the main contributors to the formation of the association: USUI Jisho of Kyoto University, and KURAUCHI Kazuta of Osaka University. Professor Usui was the association's first representative (later called "Chairperson"), and Professor Kurauchi was its second.

The association's Bylaws were set out and put into effect on May 26, 1956. The rules for board selection were set out and put into effect on October 26, 1957. Initially, the rules for board selection stipulated that the board consist of: one Chairperson (currently called "President"); two members of a managing committee (these are currently called "managing directors"); 18 committee members (currently called "directors"); and two Auditors. From 1974 to 2000, the maximum size of the board was 22 directors. From 2000 until recently, the number was 20 (19 elected directors and one secretary for administrative affairs). As of May 24, 2012, however, the maximum size of the board is 19 members (15 elected directors, and four commissioned directors). In 2011, administrative affairs were contracted to an outside party. The association started in 1956 with 297 members (of whom 76 attended the association's first meeting). By 1974, this number had grown to 388 members, to 835 by 2000, and to over 900 (921) by 2004—a number which has been maintained to the present day.

The association's research activities have grown over the years. The second meeting of the Kansai Sociological Association (held at Doshisha University in 1951) only lasted for one day, and consisted of four sessions and 25 presentations, but the 25th meeting (held at Kagawa University in 1974) lasted for two days, and consisted of six sessions, one symposium, one key session, and 34 presentations. The 50th meeting of the association (held at Kansai University in 1999) lasted for two days and consisted of 14 sessions, one general symposium, four mini-symposia, and 79 presentations. Currently, the 63rd meeting (held at Kogakkan University in 2012) lasted for two days, and consisted of 19 sessions (including two planning sessions for young sociologists), one symposium, and 73 presentations (the symposium format was adopted at the association's tenth meeting, held at Aichi University in 1959). To improve the objectivity of the association's research, it began publication of *Foramu Gendaishakaigaku* (the Kansai Sociological Review) in 2002. The review's 12th issue was published in 2013.

The nature of the association's research has also changed over time. In the 1950s, the

association's theoretical research focused on community theory, social control theory, mass communication theory, theories of Robert M. MacIVER, Max WEBER, George H. MEAD, and Talcott PARSONS, while experience-based research and surveys focused on such topics as rural communities (farming, fishing, and mountain villages), families (the *Ie*), the city, and *hisabetsu-buraku* (discriminated-communities). The topics of the association's first two symposia (held in 1959) were "Community" and "Quantification of Social Phenomena." In the 1960s and 1970s, the focuses of the association's symposia and key sessions were as follows. Theoretical research focused on sociology and adjacent disciplines (geography and anthropology), Weberian sociology, and developments in sociological theory, while the focuses of experience and evidence-based research included social stratification, the modern family, industrialization and changes in local communities, changes in labor, social change and social movements, social pathology, urbanization and social issues, and modern society and religion. The focuses of the association's general presentations during these decades were as follows. Theoretical research focused on such topics as Ralf DAHRENDORF, Alvin GOULDNER, Georges GURVITCH, Alfred SCHUTZ, Alain TOURAINE, functionalism, structuralism, social exchange theory, theories of deviance, and symbols, meaning, and information, while experience-based research focused on such topics as theories of the family (including the traditional family). One unique area of experience-based research is the *Sen'yukai* (a private association of ex-soldiers of the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy).

In the 1980s and 1990s the theoretical topics focused on at the symposia and key sessions included the themes of "Thinking about Sociology" (1984-86) and "Modernity in History" (1993-95), which were each dealt with for three consecutive years, as well as social structure concepts, sociology of literature, sociology of knowledge, sociology of time, sociology of life and death, the body and society, sociological propositions, and points of contention in sociological theories. Experience-based topics include industrialization and families/local communities, the concept of regional spheres, sociology of cities, social change in contemporary Japan, ethnicity, information, and youth problems. In particular, reports were vigorously issued about the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake that occurred on January 17, 1995, including at a symposium (1996), a key session (1998) and at two ordinary sessions (1996). Moreover, in commemoration of the association's 50th meeting (1999) a general symposium entitled "The Applicability of Sociology" was held, as were four mini-symposia [on experiential research on crime, discipline, clinical sociology, and "modernology (study of modern social phenomena)" of knowledge]. General reports have dealt with theories and doctrines by and on Weber, Emile DURKHEIM, Georg SIMMEL, Marcel MAUSS, Georges BATAILLE, Parsons, Schütz, Erving GOFFMAN, Pierre BOURDIEU, Niklas LUHMANN, Jürgen HABERMAS, Michel FOUCAULT, postmodernism, Norbert ELIAS, interaction, labeling theory, and ethnomethodology. Experiences and research that have been dealt with include Toyota surveys, quantitative analyses, social history, religion, family, gender, feminism, the elderly, and bullying.

In the 2000s, theory-based symposia and roundtables have been held on such themes as the Chicago School, clinical sociology, the role of sociology, deductive sociology, contemporary

capitalism, symposia on “Teaching Sociology” that were held for three years in a row, and constructionism. Experience-based themes have included social research, ethnicity, crime, modern families, youth culture, urban culture (Osaka), generational theories, the frontlines of medical care, Japan as a part of Asia, oral history, the meaning of “Being A-bombed”, enviromedia, inclusion and exclusion (ethnic identity), violence, and discrimination in labor. Social researchers’ forums were also held two times (2006 and 2007). For the theories and doctrines in the general reports, issues that have been taken up include Weber, Simmel, Karl MARX, Mauss, Bataille, José ORTEGA y GASSET, Walter BENJAMIN, NAKAI Masakazu, Parsons, Habermas, Luhmann, Anthony GIDDENS, Bourdieu, Goffman, Jeffrey ALEXANDER, Foucault, Zygmunt BAUMAN, Emmanuel LEVINAS, self theory, sociology of the body, body technique, risk society, ethnomethodology, and reflexivity. Issues taken up for experiences and research include social research methods, class, industry and management, cities (earthquake reconstruction), the family (married couples, childcare, foster parents, etc.), social pathology, welfare, the elderly, discrimination, gender, NEETs and freeters, media and communication, the Internet, culture (traditional performing arts, festivals, manga, rock music, ballet, music, film, etc.), religion, historical sociology, and comparative sociology.

Present (Major Concerns)

1. Focus of the Association’s Meetings

The symposia, key sessions, theme sessions, and round tables held over the past 60-some years have been held on 92 themes, of which the most common of these have been related to the **discipline of sociology and its applicability** (24 themes). Such themes include “Sociology and Adjacent Disciplines: Geology and Anthropology” from the 1960s, three consecutive themes under “Thinking about Sociology” from the 1980s (“Measurement, Observation, and Interpretation of Social Phenomena,” “Everyday Experience and Theory,” and “Proposals for Actual Problems”), and “The Applicability of Sociology: What Can Sociology Do?” and “Sociology as Discipline: Its Identity and Capacity” from the 1990s. Then in the 2000s there was “Crises in Contemporary Society and the Role of Sociology: From a Perspective of Simple Sociologism” and a three-year series on “Teaching Sociology,” which namely included the themes of “On Sociology Textbooks,” “On Methods for the Education of Sociology,” and “Imaging Sociology: Its Future.” The association continuously carries out doctrinal and theoretical immanent debates regarding the academic (disciplinary) nature of sociology as well as expansive debates at the social and practical levels over sociology’s applications, meaning, roles, and education to put sociology’s possibilities into perspective.

Second, it has focused attention on themes related to **community** (11 themes). These include the conceptual debate entitled “About Community” from the 1950s; “Urbanization and Social Problems,” “Water and Villages,” and “Transformations of Local Communities” from the 1970s, “The Idea of Regional Spheres and Sociology: Case of the Tokai District” from the 1980s, and “Possibilities of Urban Culture: Osaka as Seen from Cultural Sociology” in the 2000s, among others.

Such studies have been oriented towards attempting to take up the changes and cultures of urban and rural areas in a straightforward manner in regions that are related to the association, such as Shikoku, Kansai, and Tokai.

Third are the themes on **industrialization** (seven themes). The dynamic relationships between industrialization and workers, families, and local communities have been taken up as issues through themes like “Traditional Industry” in the 1960s, “Workers’ Attitudes and Behaviors Accompanying Changes to the Industrial Structure” and “The Task of Industrial Sociology” in the 1970s, and “Family Pathology and Family Social Welfare Accompanying Industrialization: From International Comparisons” and “Industry and Local Community” in the 1980s.

Fourth are the themes pertaining to **ethnicity, family, and kinship** (four to five themes). These include themes from three years in a row under “Japanese Society and Ethnicity” in the 1990s (“Rethinking Japan in the Borderless Age” from the second year and “Toward a Sociology of Ethnicity in Japan” from the third year); “Sociology of Ethnicity” in the 2000s; “Contemporary Japanese Family Trends,” “Family Problems and Family Sociology,” and “The Dozoku Village in Korea: Case of Naegok-ri Gyeongsangnam-do” in the 1960s-70s, as well as “Fluctuations in the Modern Family and Parent-Child Relationships” in the 2000s. Through these the association has analyzed the social, economic, and cultural circumstances of foreign workers, Koreans in Japan, *nikkei* Brazilians (Brazilians of Japanese descent), and other groups within Japanese society. It has also debated such topics as family problems, the transformation of families, parent-child relationships, reproductive techniques, and children’s human rights.

And finally, of course, there is the theme of the **Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake**. “The Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake: The Real Image Seen by Sociologists” (1996), “The Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake” I and II (general reports; 1996), and “The Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake III: What Was Seen after Three Years” (1998), and other themes were intensively debated (refer to “Initiatives since 3.11” below).

2. The Accreditation System for Social Researchers and the Kansai Sociological Association

Social researcher is a qualification bestowed by the Japanese Association for Social Research. It is given to people who are acknowledged as having both research and analytical capabilities related to qualitative and quantitative social research, as well as the ability to accurately point out problems with existing research and propose measures for improving upon these.

This section will clearly delineate the significant role played by the Kansai Sociological Association and the universities with which its members are affiliated in the establishment of the Japanese Certification Board for Social Researcher, which was the predecessor to the Japanese Association for Social Research that currently turns out social researchers in large numbers. In fact, the Kansai Sociological Association and the universities with which its members are affiliated played a leading role in the history leading up to the establishment of the qualification program for social researchers in Japan. It would not be going too far to say that the idea for social researcher qualifications originated from Kansai.

At the Kansai Sociological Association’s Board of Directors’ Meeting held on May 27, 2000 a

report entitled “Review Report on Social Researcher Programs (1)” was submitted by the committee to review programs for social researchers and credit transfer system. To begin with, the report pointed out that starting from around the middle of the 1990s the universities with which members of the Kansai Sociological Association were associated had begun establishing social researcher programs one after the other. The first ones to institute these in FY1995 were the School of Sociology at Kwansei Gakuin University and the Faculty of Sociology at Nara University. Spurred on by these pioneering attempts, the next year in FY1996 the Faculty of Sociology at St. Andrew’s University, the Faculty of Sociology at Shikoku Gakuin University, and the School of Human Sciences at Osaka University launched researcher programs. Afterwards, by FY2000 such programs had been launched one after another by the College of Social Sciences at Ritsumeikan University, the Faculty of Sociology at Ryukoku University, and the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Nagoya City University.

Next, the report introduced the accreditation procedures at these universities. Though some degree of discrepancies was observed with these depending on the university, these demonstrated the commonalities in their underlying frameworks in the sense that they combined lectures with practice related to both quantitative and qualitative research and had the researchers prepare research papers. It clearly specified that this formed the foundation for the social researcher program of today. As this demonstrates, the universities with which the members of the Kansai Sociological Association are affiliated devised and implemented researcher programs that were unique to each individual university, with the Kansai Sociological Association serving as the stage from which their experiences were mutually shared as improvements were repeatedly made to these. The Japan Sociological Society also held debates on numerous occasions with a view toward launching such a program, but Kansai was quick to put this idea into practice and amassed invaluable experience. This in turn contributed enormously to the reviews by the special committee of the Japan Sociological Society that were carried out starting from 2001.

In addition, this report also mentions the response to these programs from the Japan Sociological Society from back then as well as the Kansai Sociological Association’s position in response to this. According to the report, even though there had been an emerging awareness of the need for such a program in the Japan Sociological Society back then in 2000, it reveals that there was little in the way of proactive approval for this at the time, and in fact there were even dissenting opinions against it. For this reason, two courses of action that the Kansai Sociological Association could potentially take were laid out. Based on a determination that the situation regarding the review by the Japan Sociological Society was fluid, the Kansai Sociological Association considered plans for two scenarios: one in which the Japan Sociological Society responded quickly and one in which it responded slowly. In other words, if the Japan Sociological Society had moved to launch an accreditation program for social researchers with urgency then the association would have abided by this program, but the Kansai Sociological Association indicated its resolve to take the lead in launching its own program should the society not move on this. This hints at the association’s ardent desire to strive to provide accreditation so as to ensure that this program did not just end with its separate implementation at the universities with which the society members were affiliated, but that

it be elevated to the level where it would gain recognition throughout society. In actuality a synopsis of the Kansai Sociological Association accreditation program for social researchers was reported in specific terms with regard to the curriculum, accreditation methods and the procedures required in order to establish the program.

As this indicates, the Kansai Sociological Association showed exceptionally proactive efforts towards the establishment of an accreditation program for social researchers. The feeling is that this ultimately served as one of the factors that prompted the Japan Sociological Society to rapidly move forward with a review starting from the latter half of the year 2000. What is more, because they had experience with these sorts of pioneering trial runs, the sociology faculties and sociology departments at the universities in Kansai did not hesitate when it came time to launch a nationwide program, but rather were able to merge their own programs in with this.

Messages to the World

In this section the Kansai Sociological Association would like to present the messages that have originated through its activities in conjunction with the themes of its recent symposia. One of these is a disciplinary message that pertains to elucidating theoretical issues with sociology and refining methods of sociological research, which can be seen in its themes of “‘Restitution’ of Deductive Sociology” (2009) and “Survey Research and Data Archives” (2011).

Other serious, global messages that it attempts to convey relate to overall systems, cultural conditions, the actual state of labor and employment, as well as experience, the body, and emotions. Examples of these messages include “A New Sociological Perspective for Understanding Capitalism Today: In Search of another *Economy and Society*” (2011), “The Aporia of Inclusion and Exclusion: Ethnic Identities in Multicultural Society” (2009), “Discrimination and Exclusion in the Field of Employment,” “How should We Think about ‘Being A-bombed’ Now?: From the Perspective of the Sociology of War-Experience”(2008), “ Violence and Human Beings”(2010), and others.

How should we think about the unique characteristics of sociology as a discipline? This is a difficult question. However, the association has presented the issue in the form of a “deductive sociology.” Sociology does not consist merely of simple descriptions of social phenomena, but rather it is an endeavor to analyze and explain phenomena based upon postulated presuppositions of one form or another. It does not make a show of offering commentary in a smart (intriguing) manner for the myriad topics that come welling up one after another through the use of ad hoc notions. As Durkheim once said, sociology can only derive its authority as a discipline once it has been refined through strict methodologies, conceptual equipment, and logical procedures, rather than being extravagantly praised by the masses. Simply put, whether sociology is causal, functional, or structural, it must provide “explanations.” As opposed to the assertions made by this deductive sociology, there is also a form of sociology that emphasizes “interpretations” of its practitioners’ subjective meanings, the intentions of those involved, and historical and cultural meanings at the macro social level. Some also take the stance that it is sociology’s straightforward task to offer

“thick description,” so to speak, which thoroughly explores social phenomena, even going so far as to delve in-depth into their underlying contexts. The message that the Kansai Sociological Association would like to convey is that reflection on the tension and opposition between “explanation” and “interpretation,” and between the “autonomous development of logic” and the “continuous observation and description of facts” is what prompts sociology’s dynamic evolution. Therefore, in this case there are high expectations being placed on both of these stances when it comes to enhancing systems for collecting, storing, publicizing, and utilizing basic data. The Kansai Sociological Association was ahead of its time in conveying this fact (refer to the “accreditation program for social researchers” mentioned above).

Sociology must not only be deeply involved in theoretical sculpting and polishing, but must also be channeled towards analyzing and resolving practical challenges related to changes in society and its various aspects. We have transitioned from modern-day industrial capitalism to a post-industrial capitalism (or financial capitalism), and as such labor, consumption and employment have turned more into sociological concepts than economic ones. The risks contingent upon finance and consumption have permeated out to every aspect of our daily lives, with instability in employment also emerging. Solutions are being pursued particularly to issues like the exclusion of and discrimination against the working poor and temporary workers in the workplace as urgent *sociological* problems that must be addressed.

Furthermore, sociologists are being called upon to solve the so-called concrete, physical, experiential, as well as cultural and semantic problem. This includes inclusion and exclusion between ethnic groups in multicultural circumstances, the experiences of the *hibakusha* (A-bomb survivors), violence at various different levels and in different spheres and circumstances, such as interpersonal violence, family and group violence, and also wars and riots. The Kansai Sociological Association has actively faced up to these sorts of actual challenges and is coming to grips with them head-on.

The Kansai Sociological Association’s Initiatives since 3.11

The Great East Japan Earthquake not only featured damage at an extensive scale over a wide-ranging stricken region but also caused a nuclear disaster, on top of which prospects for recovering from the disaster have still not come clearly into focus. This has raised questions about whether there is anything that sociology can do under such circumstances.

In fact, similar questions had already been raised by the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake that occurred in 1995. This incident prompted a fundamental re-think of Japanese post-war society itself through the current state of restoration and reconstruction following the earthquake. What is more, new problem areas in sociology came to be recognized through the experience of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake.

“Hanshin” refers to an area interposed between the two major cities of Osaka and Kobe, which contains numerous universities such as Kobe University, Kwansai Gakuin University, and Konan University. Accordingly, a large number of teaching faculty and graduate school students and the

like from universities that were damaged by the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake are found among the members of the Kansai Sociological Association. Because university students and teaching faculty members had fallen victim to the earthquake, these stricken universities threw themselves into earthquake research wholeheartedly. In response to this, the Kansai Sociological Association held three rounds of symposia related to the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake over three years beginning in 1996. The themes of these respective symposia were “The Real Image Seen by Sociologists,” “How Were People Evacuated and Rescued?” and “What Was Seen After Three Years (Since the Earthquake)”. Furthermore, while this is not directly related to the association’s activities, a total of three volumes of *Hanshin-Awaji Daishinsai no Shakaigaku* (Sociology of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, Showado 1999) were published based on the results of these.

New perspectives in sociology were produced out of these sorts of activities, on the basis of which research subjects were also constructed.

To begin with, new volunteer undertakings are receiving attention and people have started exploring ways of structuring new forms of social solidarity in contemporary societies, while the phrase “multicultural coexistence” has come to be used as a keyword that guides and shapes this new solidarity. Furthermore, since the disaster destroyed spaces and the environment, it gave rise to debates concerning how best to go about regenerating public spaces. As such, it has illuminated the issue of how earthquakes should be remembered.

The Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake also provided an opportunity to firmly entrench the term “risk” within sociology. Solidarity that fears of risk produce conceals fundamental, underlying disparities. The very development that has been promoted in Japan in the post-war era has inherently been a process of restructuring disparities between regions and classes, and the nuclear accident at the Fukushima Dai-Ichi Nuclear Reactor can be thought of as a consequence of this. This demonstrates the fact that solidarity in and of itself is difficult in modern societies. Moreover, it hints at the danger of having disaster reconstruction serve as a process for newly validating regional disparities through the state’s leadership.

In 2012 the association held a symposium entitled “Sociology of ‘Prior to March 11’: From the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake to the Great Tohoku Earthquake” based upon the Great East Japan Earthquake that occurred in 2011. The reason why the association ventured to title it “Prior to March 11” and not “After March 11” derives from an awareness of issues that posits that knowledge for reading closely into the period “After March 11” exists among the sociological research from “Prior to March 11.” To be specific, the symposium reaffirmed the new problem areas that were clearly recognized at the time of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. Based upon this, it then attempted to pose sociological questions regarding the relationship between disasters and contemporary society from the two issues of the transformation of social systems in Japan and new research subjects and theoretical ideas in sociology.

The report from the symposium was published in Volume 12 of *the Kansai Sociological Review* (2013), the debate from which can be summarized in the two points below.

1. Transformation of social systems in Japan: As social systems change, so too do modalities for reconstruction when disasters occur. The transformation of social systems and its relationship

with disasters will be taken up along both macro and micro dimensions.

On the micro dimension, as there were no “socio-cultural devices” to reference with regard to the tsunami, how the affected areas were responding was taken up. Next, on the macro dimension, there have been clear qualitative changes in the problems caused by a disaster, from the perspective that by 2000, Japan had formed a society based on sophisticated systems that operate over wide areas.

2. New topics of research and conceptualization of theory in sociology: Changes in Japan’s social systems have created awareness of new topics of study for sociology. There is also an urgent need to build new theories in order to recognize reality.

The loss of communities gives rise countless “lost souls.” In place of religious rituals, there has been a construction rush for memorial facilities. There have been advances in research that takes this up as a field called “Sociology of Memory.” The preservation of disaster wreckage, from the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake to the Great East Japan Earthquake, has been taken up from the perspective of Sociology of Memory.

There has been recent debate on the concept of risk, and the concept of a “safe and secure society” as used in government and other quarters. These concepts have hidden the collapse of modern society and hindered building a theoretical framework for analyzing social change. Researchers have observed how disasters have been incorporated into sociological theory by focusing not on the “symbolic,” which creates solidarity, but rather on the “diabolic,” which promotes division.

The road to recovery in the areas affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake will be long and difficult. New questions are arising about how sociology should approach this. The Kansai Sociological Association remains deeply committed to finding answers to these questions.

As described above, the Kansai Sociological Association has built upon its history to develop new fields of research through its academic conferences, and act as a driving force in the creation of the accreditation system for social researchers. The Kansai Sociological Association will build upon the foundation of its achievements, communicating forward-looking messages on sociological theory and practice, and identifying the challenges in the post-3/11 world from the sociological experiences of 1/17.

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