Japanese Journal of Political Science 13 (2) 191–199
doi:10.1017/S1468109912000035
© Cambridge University Press 2012

Further Reflections on Sociology in Japan

KOSAKU YOSHINO
Professor of Sociology at Sophia University in Tokyo
kosaku.yoshino@nifty.com

Abstract

The aim of this short essay is to further reflect on sociology in Japan by supplementing discussions on the three sociological papers compiled in this volume and adding critical perspectives. Discussions, and arguments, will be provided on the three thematic categories, namely, 'international sociology', sociology of culture as well as language use, and the global academic market, the latter addressing not merely sociology but also other social sciences.

The three sociological papers compiled in this volume provide a useful guideline for understanding the characteristics of sociology in Japan in an objective and critical manner. This short essay is intended to locate sociology in Japan on the sociological map by supplementing discussions in those papers and adding critical perspectives. Points will be made in the three thematic categories, the last one of which addresses not just sociology but other academic disciplines as well.

International sociology (*kokusai shakaigaku*)

It is probably best to start with an aspect of sociology in Japan overlooked in the other papers so that a fairer understanding of it may be achieved.[1] The view is shared by all contributors to this volume that most Japanese sociologists are only interested in Japanese society and that not many study other societies. The perceived parochial propensity of sociology in Japan is largely true when considering the reality that most members of sociology departments of most major Japanese universities tend to conduct research on and within Japanese society. Nonetheless, attention should be given, for the sake of fairness, to a group of Japanese sociologists who have undertaken research on other societies in various parts of the world as well as on social and cultural phenomena

[1] A qualification is first necessary about the category of 'sociology in Japan' because its boundaries are not subject to simple delineation either in terms of membership or content. In this essay, sociology in Japan is understood institutionally as a type of discipline conducted by those who identify themselves or are identified as sociologists and who have studied, taught, or done research at Japanese universities.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1468109912000035 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in transnational and global spheres. These sociologists are regarded as belonging to a particular field called *kokusai shakaigaku* (international sociology).

The development of *kokusai shakaigaku* was initiated by the late Professor Nobuya Bamba in the late 1970s and 1980s. Bamba was originally trained as a historian. His Ph.D. thesis at Berkeley was published as *Japanese Diplomacy in a Dilemma: New Light on Japan's China Policy, 1924–1929* (1972). Following his first teaching post in Canada, he moved to the International Relations Department of Tsuda College and then on to the School of Law of Osaka University. Bamba was probably best known as a scholar of international relations.[2] It should be noted here that, whereas international relations is normally a sub-discipline in political science, the Japanese version of international relations was and still is somewhat different in the sense that it combines political science and sociology as well as area studies. In 1980, Bamba published *Aidentiti no kokusai seijigaku* (literally, 'International Political Science of Identity'), in which he inquired into such sociological topics as identity and identification in history, rebels against state power, separatism and nation state, and nationalism and transnationalism. He pioneered the type of approach that questioned the centrality of the sate in international relations, giving particular attention to plural identities and processes of identification among non-state actors. *Chikyu-bunka no yukue* (Futures of Global Culture), which he published in 1983, is a good example of his insights and foresight. It was such a unique topic in those days that conventional political scientists and sociologists either ignored it or were sceptical of its academic value. Considering that such a subject has now become very popular worldwide, it may be said that Bamba was 30 years ahead of most of us in his thinking.

Bamba was instrumental in creating the field of *kokusai shakaigaku* within sociology in Japan. His non-statist approach to international relations and strong concern with transnationalism 'from below' attracted those sociologists interested in questions of identity and social formation beyond the boundaries of national society as well as those categorised into area studies. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Sociology Department of the University of Tokyo was a centre for sociological training. They represented the mainstream in sociology in Japan in that they were very theoretically oriented and/or empirically preoccupied with Japanese society. The majority of postgraduate students followed such paths. However, a minority of postgraduate students whose interest lay in social and cultural phenomena beyond Japan found collegial support and sympathy from Bamba and scholars close to him. It is in this positive sense of minority that he was influential. He was a catalyst in fostering sociologists such as Takamichi Kajita and Mitsuo Ogura, who had gradually come to be associated with *kokusai shakaigaku* (international sociology).[3]

[2] Bamba was active in the Japanese Association of International Relations, Peace Studies Association of Japan as well as the Japanese Association for Canadian Studies.

[3] Both Kajita and Ogura were junior faculty members at Tsuda College when Bamba was there.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1468109912000035 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Table 1. *Contents from Takamichi Kajita (ed.), Kokusai shakaigaku (International Sociology), 2nd edn. (1992)*

Introduction: What is international sociology?
Part I: Basic Theories of International Sociology
Ch. 1 Sociology of ethnicity
Ch. 2 Sociology of nationalism
Ch. 3 Sociology of immigration and migration
Ch. 4 Ethnicity and Western nation-state
Ch. 5 Comparative sociology of religion and the state
Part II: Subjects and Realities Transcending the State
Ch. 6 Globalization and contemporary social theory
Ch. 7 Globalization and the making of world cities
Ch. 8 Integrated and disintegrated Europe
Ch. 9 Transnational environmental issues and their solutions
Ch.10 NGOs
Part III: Diversities of Ethnicity
Ch.11 Ideals and realities of 'immigrant nation'
Ch.12 Identity and integration in a multicultural society
Ch.13 Issues of languages and education and ethnic groups
Ch.14 Diversification of identity among younger generation Koreans in Japan

Today, 'international sociology' is one of the main fields in sociology in Japan. Annual meetings of the Japan Sociological Society have had sessions on international sociology. Many universities now offer courses called international sociology attended by students of international relations and area studies (who are often from faculties of languages) in addition to sociology. Several textbooks have been published, the most influential one of which is *Kokusai Shakaigaku* edited by Kajita. It was printed in two editions and then a new version has sold over 18,500 copies altogether (according to the publisher, see Table 1). The contents from its second edition should provide an idea of the range of topics covered in the field.

Sociology of culture and cultural studies

Culture is a popular subject in sociology in Japan, as Yoshinori Kamo's quantitative study of *Japanese Sociological Review* articles suggests. Likewise, Yin-wah Chu says that popular culture is a very popular subject in Japanese studies in Hong Kong. While there is nothing wrong about a study of culture, Kamo links this popularity to lack of rigour which he sees as one of the characteristics of JSR articles. The popularity of culture as reflected in JSR may have something to do with the fact that the majority of its contributors are rather junior scholars, or postgraduate students and post-doctoral scholars.

This tendency is also largely related to the popularity of cultural studies among postgraduate students in the 1990s, usually at good universities such as the University of Tokyo (UT). In the 1990s, I was amazed at the speed at which cultural studies moved

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1468109912000035 Published online by Cambridge University Press

into sociology in many parts of the world. One interesting development in this regard is the active participation of literature scholars in this field. In particular, scholars working in English departments at universities in America, Britain, Hong Kong, and Singapore and so on started writing on subjects which previously had been regarded as the domain of sociology and anthropology.[4] These subjects include post-colonialism, nationalism, nation and its minorities, multiculturalism, and so on.

Their approach is characterized by textual criticism because their educational background is literary criticism. Of course, texts – literary, oral, or visual – can be read as part of a wider cultural context. But within this type of cultural studies texts are often read as culture itself, and texts themselves have become a subject of academic inquiry. In other words, texts have often been separated from their lived, embodied social contexts, which the textual critics themselves have not investigated. Sociology – and, for that matter, anthropology, too – is supposed to be conscious of the goals of social sciences, which, ideally, are grounded in rigorous empirical research. This aim is not necessarily shared by literary cultural studies. Cultural studies, or a certain branch of cultural studies, often justifies this lack of empirical study by being explicitly critical of the criteria of 'objectivity'.

Literature scholars have become more sociological in their choice of topics, whereas sociologists have become more attracted to textual, discourse analysis, neglecting empirical inquiry into social contexts. This is a development experienced in many countries, including Hong Kong, Singapore, the USA, Australia, Canada, and Japan. Whereas rigorous sociologists spend years on empirical research even to write a short article, cultural studies scholars often avoid rigorous research or in-depth fieldwork and write papers within a relatively short period of time, often by doing a 'content analysis' of movies, television dramas, manga, and so on. One advantage of this academic style is that they are more capable of producing a quantity of publications. This writing style characteristic of cultural studies is well-suited to the publish-or-perish culture, which has dominated academia for nearly three decades.

The cultural studies boom may be coming to an end probably because writers in the field have exhausted nearly all sociological themes – ranging from popular culture, postcolonialism, ethnicity, and migration, to nationalism and transnationalism. Although cultural studies scholars are skilled in creating and using fashionable notions – which is not surprising for literary scholars – they have not contributed much to theoretical formulation in these subjects. Perhaps because of this, we are under the impression that they have not made a meaningful contribution to sociological knowledge. A new sociology of culture, theoretically deep and empirically rigorous, is much desired not just in Japan but worldwide.

[4] There is a reason for this. Because English departments were targeted by university budget cuts, they had to transform themselves and re-emerge as cultural studies departments.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1468109912000035 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Language use: the globalizing academic market and sociology in Japan

Commenting on the three papers, I am reminded of the presentation I made at a session of the World Congress of Sociology held in Brisbane in 2002. The session was organized by the Japan Sociological Society and was entitled 'Learning to be a sociologist in Asia: problems and potentialities of the globalising academic market'. Given that so many Asian sociologists undertake Ph.D.s at English-speaking universities, typically those in the USA, the UK, and Australia, we attendees drew attention to the kind of impact this global reality might have on the formation of sociologies in Japanese and Asian contexts. One of the central questions raised at the conference was whether sociology in Japan or, for that matter, Japanese universities can play any significant role in the promotion of transnational or global exchange of ideas. It was widely perceived that, unless creative measures are taken, Japan might end up being a loser in the globalization of higher education. This situation may mostly, if not entirely, be reduced to the language factor, or to monolingualism at Japanese universities. There are many reasons why this should be a cause of particular concern.

Postgraduate education

First, the language of academic writing should be on the agenda. Because Japanese is a self-contained and self-sufficient language, scholars will have to depend on another, more international language to reach the wider reading audience. In order to cope with the challenges of globalization, it might be suggested that one write a paper in Japanese for the Japanese audience and then write another version in English for the international audience. To say this is easy; to do it would be extremely time consuming. It is not just a question of handling two very different writing practices, but one has also to deal with access to two totally different publishing worlds, which require different kinds of networking, as well as different publishing practices, which include different patterns of communication with publishers, different refereeing systems, and different concepts of deadlines. Once one had published his or her thesis, one tries to establish contact with fellow academics, who will evaluate his or her worth in job markets and academic associations, and so on. Writing in two languages means having to deal with two different kinds of networks of academics and publishers. The use of English symbolizes a number of other things as well. It indicates, for example, one's capability of writing books and papers that can be used in syllabi of university courses in many countries. Sociology books and papers written in Japanese cannot be used in courses in countries other than Japan (except in advanced Japanese studies courses).

I recall a Hong Kong anthropologist who did a Ph.D. in Japanese at a national university in Japan. While that experience was useful in the sense that he became known as a Japan expert, he said that he had gone through the process of unlearning what he had learned and relearning and reorienting himself to fit into the English-speaking 'global' academic community. In other words, he had to deal with the two

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1468109912000035 Published online by Cambridge University Press

very different kinds of academic and other environments, where expectations were different.

Language use is a highly controversial issue in the teaching of sociology at Japanese universities. Postgraduate students are normally expected to write their theses in Japanese at most Japanese universities, and this is often pointed out as presenting an obstacle in the globalization of Japanese university education. The following debate that I have personally experienced at a departmental meeting at a prestigious Japanese university is symbolic of arguments and counter-arguments about the use of English. There, one professor proposed that we should allow theses to be written in English. Otherwise, he said, we would fail to get students from parts of the world other than China and Korea. We would not be getting students from Europe, America, or even Southeast Asia or South Asia. He cited examples from some non-English speaking countries such as Germany where lectures are given in English and theses can be written in English. To this proposal, another professor reacted and argued that this would mean giving in to English language imperialism. Another professor argued from a differing point of view, stating that the use of English might not cause a major problem in natural sciences and maybe economics and psychology as well, but the thinking processes of sociology, being a study of social and cultural phenomena, are more culturally embedded. Japanese concepts that reflect Japanese realities can only suitably be expressed in Japanese. It was suggested therefore that theses should ideally be written in Japanese. This is an extremely difficult debate, which involves a number of complex issues associated with language use.

Cooperation among East Asian sociologists

The language question is probably one of the most pressing issues confronting sociology in not only Japan but in East Asia in general. Continuing on the language issue and moving on to the next point about cooperation in studies in Japan, China, and Korea, we are faced with the situation where not much interaction has developed among, say, sociological studies of Japan in Japan and in Korea and Japanese studies in Hong Kong. This point has been made most explicitly by Daesong Hyun in his presentation. How do we manage to promote interaction transnationally?

Here, I would like to make known the case of a very meaningful project, namely, the University of Tokyo-Seoul National University (SNU) Sociological Forum started in 2003. It is held every year and in an alternating manner. Faculty members and doctoral students of SNU come to UT and in the following year UT counterparts visit Seoul. When this was started, the first question that had to be dealt with was which language should be used. They decided to use three languages: Japanese, Korean, and English. At the Forum, Japanese presented their papers in Japanese but had Korean versions of the papers ready, translated by their Korean colleagues beforehand. The Korean presenters did the same for the Japanese participants. Following the presentations, they had a discussion session in English, where many attempted to communicate in their less-than-fluent English. At first, the participants were not sure whether

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1468109912000035 Published online by Cambridge University Press

they could communicate with each other, but in the end were convinced that their ideas were indeed communicated to the other side without any problem. It was an extremely educational experience for postgraduate students as it presented a multitude of possibilities. Japanese and Korean scholars were exposed to a multilingual and multicultural environment. Some Japanese students even started studying Korean. This example suggests that the language debate about the globalization of higher education does not have to be the dichotomous either–or of one's national language or English, but that there is a third way. This example offers an alternative approach that could meaningfully be followed by others.[5]

Can Japan continue to attract students from abroad?

The other point that may be raised about language use is the attractiveness or lack thereof of Japanese higher education. For a long time, international migration of students has tended to be regarded in dichotomous terms: one's country of origin and one's destination. Normally, a destination is assumed in the singular. A student goes from country A to country B and goes back to country A. With increasing globalization, however, more attention should be given to a continuing flow of migrating students. A student does not simply go to a particular country and return to where he or she comes from, but quite often moves on to further destinations (C, D, or F). From this point of view, attractive countries will include those that can serve as 'stopover points'. 'Stopover' becomes an integral part of the process of studying abroad. They keep on moving, which is actually a normal thing for any ambitious student to do.

As a destination of a simple round-trip journey, Japan is probably an attractive place. If, for example, a Chinese student wants to study Japanese linguistics or literature, he or she probably wants to come to Japan, master the Japanese language, and write a thesis in Japanese. The student then goes back to China and, if fortunate, becomes a lecturer in Japanese studies. If, on the other hand, somebody from China wants to pursue an academic career in sociology, he or she may come to Japan after having studied Japanese at high school in China. The student undertakes an undergraduate or a Master's program in Japan. The chances are that the student decides to do a Ph.D. in another country, such as the UK or USA. But because the person has done all the courses in Japanese and his or her English is probably not good enough compared with those who have studied in English-speaking countries, the student will find himself or herself at a relative disadvantage in the global academic market.

In this sense, Japanese universities cannot serve as attractive 'stopover' points for overseas students. One might as well go to an English-speaking country from the beginning. That would be a much more rational option. Given the time and money spent on language acquisition, students from China or Korea will face a number of obstacles in moving from, say, Tokyo to Essex or to Chicago compared with their

[5] In subsequent years, they began to use only English in order to avoid a tremendous amount of time and energy on preparation.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1468109912000035 Published online by Cambridge University Press

friends who have gone to Auckland and who find a further move to London or California much easier. Successful countries (such as Australia, the USA, the UK) – successful in obtaining overseas students – have always been 'hubs'. Japan cannot easily become a hub in higher education precisely because of the language factor. Those who study in Japan are likely to be left out of this network of English-speaking universities.

While this is a cause of concern to many who promote bilingualism (or multilingulism), some redefine or reaffirm the traditional role of Japanese universities as that of leading the *kanjibunkaken*, literally, that part of East Asia where the Japanese have traditionally shared the use of Chinese characters – China, Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. The feeling is not necessarily mutual. The reality is that Chinese and Korean scholars, too, want to be competitive in the global academic market and thus are more strongly oriented towards degrees from English-speaking countries.

Concluding remarks

In this short essay, I have addressed three issues pertaining to sociology in Japan. These are all reflections and responses to globalization at different times and in differing manners. Globalization continues to be on the agenda, and there are a number of collective projects aiming to globalize sociology in Japan. For example, the Japan Sociological Society has been organizing English-speaking sessions at its annual meetings for the last several years to promote intellectual exchanges among junior scholars in Asia. Also, as part of an effort to boost globalization of sociology in Japan, JSS will be hosting the International Sociological Association' World Congress of Sociology in 2014, in connection with which various attempts to raise international awareness are being made. JSS has several committees for such aims such as an 'international liaison committee' and an 'internationalization strategy committee'.

While it is one thing for an academic association to globalize, it is quite another for individual sociologists to become able to engage in intellectual activities that have meaningful impacts beyond national and linguistic boundaries. With regard to this point, attention must be drawn to a number of international projects that address some key issues of global importance in areas such as migration, gender, religion, ecology, poverty, and health. These research groups are often constituted not necessarily by sociologists alone, but by multidisciplinary groups of academics. Although this essay and for that matter other papers in this volume have only been concerned with sociology per se – which is a worthwhile effort in itself – we might get a better understanding of the orientations and activities of individual sociologists if we did not cling to a narrow disciplinary framework.

About the author

Kosaku Yoshino is Professor of Sociology at Sophia University in Tokyo and previously Professor at the University of Tokyo. He took a Ph.D. at the London School of Economics and Political Science. His areas of specialization are nationalism and globalization in Japan and Southeast Asia. His best-known books include: *Cultural*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1468109912000035 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Nationalism in Contemporary Japan: A Sociological Enquiry (Routledge, 1992) and *A Sociology of Cultural Nationalism* (Nagoya University Press, 1997). He has also edited and published *Consuming Ethnicity and Nationalism: Asian Experiences* (Curzon Press and the University of Hawaii Press). He is currently writing a book on the impact of the 'Englishization' of higher education in Asia on ethnic relations, nationalism, class relations and other social processes and networks.

References

Bamba, Nobuya (1972), *Japanese Diplomacy in a Dilemma: New Light on Japan's China Policy, 1924–1929*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

Bamba, Nobuya (1980), *Aidentiti no kokusai seijigaku* (International Political Science of Identity), Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press.

Bamba, Nobuya (1983), *Chikyu-bunka no yukue* (Futures of Global Culture), Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press.

Kajita, Takamichi (ed.) (1992), *Kokusai shakaigaku: kokka wo koeru gensho wo do toraeruka?* (International Sociology: How Do We Understand Transnational Phenomena?), 2nd edn., Nagoya: Nagoya University Press.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1468109912000035 Published online by Cambridge University Press