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## Talcott Parsons and theoretical sociology in Japan: The Social System Theory and its Influence on Japanese Sociologists

### 1. Introduction

It is clear that Talcott Parsons and his work has had a very strong and long-standing influence on not only the field of sociology, but also various other fields of the social sciences in Japan after World War II. It is safe to say that his ideas and theories which have been reflectively accepted by some of the most important Japanese sociologists and social scientists from the 1960s to the 1970s, had changed the character of sociology and the social sciences in this country. The aim of this article is to put forth the primary characteristics of the processes of acceptance of Talcott Parsons' theories in Japan.

### 2. A Characteristic Configuration of the Social Sciences in Japan

It is true that the social scientists who were involved in efforts towards cultural and academic exchanges between Japan and the United States were not few in number. However, it is equally true that the social sciences in Japan were for a long time closely related to the social sciences in Europe, and particularly in Germany. Even if the reader were already aware of this, I would still have to explain in detail another very characteristic problem or background of the Japanese social sciences. In Japan the 1920s were, in spite of the nationalistic and militaristic period before the World War II, indeed a limited but rather democratic and liberal-period in which liberal or democratic ideas had been imported and transplanted from Western countries. It is historically characterized as the main period of the so-called Taishō Democracy<sup>1</sup>. Of course, this was one of the primary reasons for the temporary receding of European countries from Asia during World War I and corresponding to this for the enlargement of Japanese capitalism into Asia resulting in a boom in the domestic life of Japan.

1 The "Taishō Era" refers to the reign of Emperor Taishō (1912-1926).

Now, it is also true that most of Marx's or Marxian-like works were continuously censored in those days. Even the fairly mild books (from the standpoint of so-called Marxist-Leninism) by the 'opportunistic' socialists such as Max Adler were severely censored. Adler's famous book *Die Staatsauffassung des Marxismus* (The Marxian View of State, 1922)<sup>2</sup> was indeed translated into Japanese and published at one of the most famous libraries *The Kaizō Library*<sup>3</sup>. However, if you take this old book in hand out of a library, you can still see the great deal of censored passages and words. The censored words, such as 'revolution', 'dictatorship', 'class conflict', and even the title *The Communist Manifesto* by Marx and Engels are represented by a series of x's.

It seems apparent that the suppression of all sorts of ideas, even during the relatively liberal period of the Taishō Democracy and then lasting until the end of the Pacific War, would obviously lead to a very peculiar orientation of Japanese social scientists after the War. Because various studies of Marx and Marxism had been severely regulated before World War II and because the ban on various socialistic ideas had been removed quite suddenly right after the war, the social sciences in post-war Japan were at first generally influenced by Marx and Marxism. Moreover, the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union then rendered it possible to continue discussing, both theoretically and practically, the validity of a socialistic revolution in Japan. However, it seems to me that there was a great difference between such Japanese disputes over Marxism and those in West Germany.

In West Germany, the studies on Marx and Marxism after World War II began in a very academic fashion. In other words, in Germany and Austria, the social democrats had previously put their ideas into practice in the 1920's. Because Marx and Marxism had at that time obviously fallen into a dead end before the rise of Fascism, the study of those theories after World War II started off with some theoretical reflections on past practices. In Japan, however, since various studies and practices of these theories had been severely and totally suppressed both in the 1920s and thereafter, postwar studies of them began with much more than a pure theoretical acceptance. Hence, for example, the difficulties with which Max Adler had been confronted in the 1930's in Austria, the themes which Herbert Marcuse took up for discussion just after the publication of the *Pariser Manuskripte* (The Manuscripts of the Critique of Political Economy), and the peculiar pains which Max Horkheimer and Theodore W. Adorno experienced in the 1940's in the United States were not carried over to Japanese social scientists in the

2 Max Adler, *Die Staatsauffassung des Marxismus* – Ein Beitrag zur Unterscheidung von soziologischer und juristischer Methode, Wien 1922. The Japanese version (translated by Yamamoto Koto) was published under the title: *Marukis-hizumu no kokka-kan* in 1929.

3 *The Kaizō Library* was, next to the Iwanami Library, the most famous library in Japan. It is well-known that this library is modeled after the Reclam Library (Reclams Universal-Bibliothek), and that its publishing company Kaizō provided an important dissemination of social scientific publications for scholars in Japan before World War II.

same form which these theorists themselves experienced within their original historical situation. More specifically, Austro-Marxism, the early works of Karl Marx, the critical theories of the Frankfurt School and so forth were only later transported, and then, in a very different form by Japanese social scientists<sup>4</sup>.

Therefore, it is perhaps understandable that after World War II the Japanese social sciences began with a very orthodox reception and attempted development of the works of Marx and Marxism, particularly regarding the practice of a socialistic revolution and theorizing about it. Of course, Japanese social scientists at this time amassed a great deal of materials by Marx and concerning Marxism, and it was a most opportune time for studying precisely Marx. However, this characteristic state of affairs naturally created some peculiar tendencies concerning the study of other European social theorists. Although Max Weber's works had been received and the study of them had already attained a certain standard before World War II, the title *Marx and Weber* now became very common and was frequently hackneyed. On the other hand, while Parsons was not in every sense a successor of Weber, he was primarily interpreted as being opposed to Marx and Marxism within this theoretical configuration. In fact, Parsons' work provided a common theoretical background for many conservative and 'liberal' theorists in postwar Japan.

Marxian Economics and modern economics in Japan had stood for a long time in opposition to one another and in sociology a similar theoretical antagonism existed. Taking into consideration that economics after World War II and particularly in the United States assumed its position as one of the so-called "normal sciences", it might not seem so unusual that the new theoretical interests of young Japanese sociologists who were opposed to Marxist sociology were not orientated towards the work of Weber, but rather to Parsons. Of course, the term "modern economics" may mean a great many things and in Japan it primarily referred to the theories and interpretations of Marshall, Pigou and Keynes, and to Warlas, Pareto and Schumpeter. Admittedly, the ideas of these individuals are each respectively in an original way related to Marx and Marxism such that if you want to understand the general relationship between Marx and modern economics, you must also naturally study each of these complicated relationships.

It was in regard to these non-Marxian economists that Parsons was scientifically more attractive to the young non-Marxian sociologists of those days in Japan than the historian Weber. Parsons had in fact referred to many of the above-mentioned scholars in his brilliant work *The Structure of Social Action*. More specifically, he dealt with Marshall and Pareto most exhaustively on the theoretical level. Taking into consideration that throughout the history of modern economics up until today the positions of Marx and Parsons are treated in-

4 For example, the -critique of the manuscripts composing the *Deutsche Ideologie* (German Ideology) which was carried out by Hiromatsu Wataru is a most brilliant work, even in relationship to those carried out in German-speaking countries.

dependently, and, furthermore, that in his book Parsons did not view Marx as particularly important, you can understand how Parsons' work was most suitable for young Japanese sociologists who were in search of non-Marxian theoretical ideas in the social sciences. Moreover, if one takes into consideration that Keynes, after his exacting consideration of the possibility of applying scientific methods in economics, had pointed towards the more human elements which economics as a science could not deal with in his famous book *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, and that Parsons intensively discusses Marshall in *The Structure of Social Action*, it can be said that both Keynes (as a student of Marshall) and Parsons (who had theorized about the residual problems left by Marshall) no doubt possess similar theoretical interests concerning the social-economic problems of that time.

In general, it is first important to understand this rough constellation involving the history of the social sciences in Japan for what follows. We have emphasized that Parsons' work particularly in *The Structure of Social Action*, served as a bridgehead against the strong stream of Marx and Marxism which first influenced postwar sociology in Japan. For it was in Parsons' work that the demand for a truly scientific approach to sociology was first carried out. Economics had already finished before the 1930's with its preparations for its own 'scientific' systematization modeled after mechanics. Parsons wanted to find a similar 'scientific' systematization for the residual territory left behind by economics. The young Japanese sociologists of the 1960's who were interested in non-Marxian social science were easily able to take up this idea.

The expression 'theoretical sociology' or 'modern sociology' in those days even intimated a similar process to that which occurred in systematizing economics as 'science'.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, however, how the fundamental concept of 'social system' would be translated into Japanese would be hotly debated.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Japanese Versions of Structural-functionalism

In *The Structure of Social Action*, Parsons found a starting point for constructing sociology as a systematic science. He knew very well that econom-

5 For example, Yoshida Tamito (the former president of the Japan Sociologist Society), who was one of the most important Japanese 'theoretical sociologists' after the World War II, even dared to use the expression 'modern sociology' against 'Marxian sociology'.

6 Shimei Masamichi (1898-1984) used '*shakai-taitei*' which designates the meaning of 'social system' in a rather neutral way, while Takeda Ryōzō (1898-1987) used '*shakai taitei*' which further carries the meaning of a 'social or political institution'. Although they were both very important commentators on Talcott Parsons in Japan, the latter Japanese equivalent of 'social system' did not take a firm hold among the Japanese social scientists.

ics had succeeded in formalizing its main concepts by modeling itself after mechanics which involved, as we know, expressing the utility function. This success of analytical formalization implied the following.

"Economics has directly followed the methodological model of analytical mechanics and has been able to do so because, uniquely among social disciplines, it can deal primarily with numerically quantitative continuums as variables. Hence most actual working economic analysis has had to fall back on more 'primitive' analytical methods, and use the system of differential equations only as a methodological model. But even more serious than this limitation has been the difficulty of fitting economic theory into the broader context of the social system as a whole." (Parsons 1949: 224f.)

Indeed, the sociologists who believed that sociology should be formalized in a similar manner were not few in number. However Parsons was not one of them. It was sociology as a systematic science which was his sought after goal.

"A science of physics without higher mathematics would be the real equivalent of the empiricist' ideal for social science. This shows quite clearly that what we need is not a science purified of theoretical infection but one with the nearest possible approach to an equivalent of the role of mathematical analysis in physics." (Parsons 1949: 224)

Parsons wanted to systematize sociology as such an equivalent, and it can be said that he developed this equivalent in ever more detail over the following 30 years. He had at first called the equivalent a "structural-functional system".

"The logical type of generalized theoretical system under discussion may thus be called a 'structural-functional system' as distinguished from an analytical system." (Parsons 1949: 218)

Interestingly enough these statements by Parsons were understood in a peculiar manner in Japan. In reading *The Structure of Social Action* it is easily realized that Parsons maintains that an analytical systematization which is modeled after mechanics is not possible in sociology to the extent to which it is in economics. Parsons reveals this important point above all in his studies on Marshall and Pareto. Pareto's sociology was extremely important for Parsons because, although Pareto created elegant mathematical expressions for logical action and provided the foundations for contemporary economics, he could not avoid constructing his sociology without inductively enumerating various cases of non-logical action and extracting essences of residues and justifications of derivations. Parsons wanted to overcome this method of inductive enumeration in Pareto's sociology. He began his systematization of sociology not within further pursuing the inductively enumerated and extracted typology of residues and derivations, but rather in search of the theoretical relationships between them. Parsons called these relationships "analytical".

We could point a similar sort of logical tendency in Parsons' critical interpretation of Weber's method of ideal types out.

"His (Weber's) 'pluralism' tends, by hypostatization of ideal types, to break up, in a sense not inherent in analysis as such, the organic unity both of concrete historical individuals and of the historic process. In its reification phase it issues in what may be called a 'mosaic' theory of culture and society, conceiving them to be made up of disparate atoms." (Parsons 1937: 607)

This quite famous critical comment by Parsons is directly related to his interpretation of Pareto. Weber's method of ideal types is construed as only a method for a non-scientific and extremely empirical enumeration or typology similar to Pareto's study of non-logical actions in *Traité de sociologie générale*. In short, Parsons viewed Weber's work based upon ideal types as a kind of mosaic theory. However, he also pointed out that there was an analytical tendency to be found within Weber's theory of ideal types.

Parsons clearly proposed a theoretical viewpoint based upon a structural-functional system as can be seen from all of the above. If further acquainted with his theoretical development from the pattern-variables to the AGIL-Schema, it becomes even clearer that Parsons would not use the mathematical modeling of the economic theories of Pareto, Edgeworth or Marshall for scientific systematizing sociology as some Japanese sociologists have maintained. If anything, his goal was to find precisely another logic.

Although Japanese followers of Parsons were well-acquainted with Parsons' general work in the area of economics, they tried to interpret Parsons' theory in a peculiar way, and in terms of their own specific context of a 'modern sociology' as opposed to Marxian sociology.

### 3.1 Theory of Social Change

If we could mention only one of the most important sociologists that introduced Talcott Parsons and his systematic theory to Japan, we would have to mention the person and work of Tominaga Ken'ichi. His doctoral dissertation *Shakai hendô riron* (The Theory of Social Change, 1965) shows us still now a detailed plan of the acceptance and development of systematic sociology which Parsons would work out in connection with Pareto and Weber.<sup>7</sup> However, this acceptance and development had a special meaning in the peculiar context of social sciences in those days in Japan.

According to him, a person has an intellectual disposition of desiring to order and classify past events in order to be able to predict the future objec-

7 I also argue on the development and transformation of Parsons' sociology in my book (Mori 1995).

8 Tominaga himself explains his theoretical acceptance of Parsons' theories in details (Tominaga 1976). Just before Parsons' death in May 1979 in Heidelberg Tominaga had discussed with him about a formative process of Parsonian social system theory (cf., Parsons/Tominaga 1979). As visiting professor, Parsons had given lectures at Kansei gakuhin University in Nishinomiya (between Osaka and Kobe) in the second half of 1978.

tively, while he has a moral tendency to desire to be saved in the future from the present evil and unhappiness. The former is "knowledge" (*Erkenntnis*) which makes "science" possible and the latter is "value" (*Wert*) which makes "vision" possible. "The theory of social change" needs these two moments. But the "illusion" inherent in a vision have often hindered the former function of science. As Tominaga points out, we can easily see such difficulties in the work of early social scientists, namely Smith, Malthus, Saint-Simon, Comte and Marx. And we still inevitably meet with these difficulties. In spite of such difficulties, Tominaga explains the necessity of constructing a new theory of social change and points out two prerequisites for constructing such a theory.

Firstly, according to him, the postwar Japanese sociologists generally tend to only see empirical studies based on so-called firsthand data as a genuine sociological study. On the other hand, they had treated theoretical studies negatively, seeing the as merely "speculative". Tominaga wanted to say with special emphasis that Japanese sociologists must also learn the scientific way of thinking. This view is closely related to Parsons definition of sociology, given in his book *The Structure of Social Action* (1937), as the action frame of reference. Tominaga emphasizes,

"Without a rule in the way of thinking, we would theoretically have no reference schema, even if we possessed a great deal of fragmentary pieces of knowledge." (1965: iv)

Tominaga introduced to Japanese social scientists many of the most advanced theories of the social sciences in his day from the United States and West Germany. In fact, it was he who translated such famous works as Parsons' *Economy and Society* and Dahrendorf's *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*. In taking into consideration such new theoretical tendencies in the United States and Europe, while carefully observing industrialization and other social changes in Japan, he would put forth a theory of social change as a new fundamental theory in sociology in Japan.

Tominaga's attempts at constructing a general theoretical sociology certainly influenced generations of sociologists in Japan. However, there is an other obvious goal in his book. Already in the first chapter one learns of his interest in the "capitalism vs. socialism" dichotomy. Tominaga wanted to enter Parsons' theory into this antagonistic binary scheme. It seems to me that he is more anti-Marxist than Parsons himself. Dahrendorf's early work indeed theoretically criticized Parsons, but it simultaneously offsetted Parsons' static theory with a European Social Democratic tradition which began in the 1920's. Although, we can say that Tominaga's work, as well as the other conservative-liberal social scientists in Japan was obstinately directed against Marxism, needless to say, I don't think that he is to blame for this. If anything, it is more important to understand the configuration of the social sciences in Japan in those days as has been laid out in the above.

In general, Tominaga defines the concept of social change as follows.

"A social change is a change of social structure. Well, a social structure is a continuous set of personnel and possessive allocations under an institutionalized norm. Therefore, social change should be defined as follows. Social change is the process which renders change in the personnel and possessive allocations under an institutionalized norm." (1965: 255)

Obviously, he here defines social change under the theoretical influence of Parsons. However, he not only defined it upon the basis of a theoretical adoption of Parsons, but also upon the basis of his own primarily empirical studies. He would empirically and theoretically carry out research on the configuration of personnel and possessive allocations in Japan. In fact, as I will briefly go into later, it is this topic which he has continuously researched throughout his life.

However, I would at first like to discuss an even more theoretical development of Parsons' idea in Japan. Komuro Naoki was one of the most well-known theorists who contributed to a construction of "scientific" sociology modeled on analytical mechanics. He defined its fundamental framework as follows.

"Structural-functional analysis is (1) an interactional analysis, (2) a controlled analysis, (3) a structural analysis, and (4) a general analytical frame of reference which involves the structural-functional change axiom." (Komuro 1974: 16)

His definition is indeed much simpler than Parsons, but it is derived from the same viewpoint on science. Komuro insisted on the necessity of an interactional analysis, because the traditional theories of sociology had fallen into a tendency of basing explanations upon predominant causes. He wanted to overcome this tendency and to rescue sociology as science from it. We saw a similar position by Parsons in his critical comments to Weber's theory based on the ideal type mentioned above. Although Weber refused the linear causal analysis of economic determinism in the orthodox interpretation of Marxism and always revealed the specific relationship between a complex of ideas and economic activities, Parsons further emphasized that his ideal type method must be rendered into a more 'analytical' form. Komuro himself wanted to express this idea at a much more general level. He points out, on the one hand, the error in disregarding multifarious elements through focussing upon only one linear causal relationship, and, on the other hand, the error in disregarding feed-back, so that even if we were to take the multifarious elements into account, an outright oversight of the interactive relationship among them (or a confusion between two elements on the same level) would result. Therefore, he insists that the first requisite of a structural-functional analysis is an analysis of interaction.

Komuro answered those well-known critics who maintained that structural-functional analysis was nothing more than a new version of the old-fashioned organicist and static model of society, and essentially a teleological theory based upon the part-whole scheme like, for example, in Othmar Spann. With his concept of a controlled analysis, he explained how structural-functional analysis was philosophically related to a notion of 'teleology'.

Komuro mentions, to begin with, that structural-functional analysis is an interactional analysis under the logic of teleological explanation. However he adds that "the 'teleology' mentioned here means that the elements which constitute a social system must be considered under the functioning which the social system itself is carrying out." (Komuro 1974: 34) Many of Komuro's ingenious critics could not understand the genuine meaning of this explanation. Yet, we can today understand this explanation of teleology as simply meaning that the social system is produced through an interaction among the elements that the social system itself produces.

Of course, this explanation is related to a structural analysis. Komuro defines the concept of structure as follows. "A structure is the function (or the form of function) which relates social variables" (Komuro 1974: 58). He explains this through the consumption function. The latter can be illustrated as  $C = aY + b$  where 'C' represents the number of units of consumption, 'Y' is income, 'a' is the marginal propensity to consume, and 'b' is the minimum cost of living. The value of this consumption function depends upon the values of the two constants 'a' and 'b'. They refer to the parameters of a 'structure'. Moreover, Komuro then illustrates the case of interaction between an actor A and actor B. Here an action 'a' depends upon an action 'b', while the latter simultaneously depends upon the former. It can be shown through a system of simultaneous equations  $a = f(b)$  and  $b = g(a)$ , where these 'f' and 'g' respectively refer to each 'structure' of this interaction.

If we understand the concept of a social system quite formally, these two examples can be very instructive. A more complex society can then be seen as a more complicated system of simultaneous equations where a certain 'structure' is not only shown within the systems composed of various simultaneous equations, but can be further expressed as various constants and functions.

Just like many of the economists in the United States who were former mathematicians, Komuro also had studied mathematics at the University of Kyoto. Afterwards he studied economics and then wanted to achieve that very lofty academic goal of changing a 'scientifically backward and old-fashioned social sciences' into one of the new modern sciences. He did not want to work as a member of a university institution, many intelligent graduate students particularly at the University of Tokyo were enrolled in his private seminar.

Many of them went on to further develop structural-functional analysis in Japan, yet, ironically a good number came to the following conclusion.

"Structural-functional analysis cannot exist theoretically. Moreover, structural-functional analysis since Parsons has been inappropriate. It should not be used as a social theory" (Hashizume et al. 1984: 2).

Now, this attitude may be peculiar to Japanese sociology. Because Parsons indeed always wanted a scientifically systematized sociology. But he did not attempt to model sociology upon a general equilibrium theory as Komuro and

his young students had. In recognizing that these young sociologists essentially re-theorized structural-functional analysis by modeling it on a general equilibrium theory and later on upon game theory as was done in the work of Kenneth Arrow, it becomes even clearer that their theorizing ultimately had totally different theoretical roots than that of Parsons. Although Parsons had showed a deep understanding of Pareto in *The Structure of Social Action*, and had referred to the problem of a dynamic equilibrium and the idea of an economic system by Raif W. Souter in his controversy with Lionel Robbins (Parsons 1937: 511-545), he himself would not have advanced a general equilibrium theory and would not have used the theoretical concepts which had been highly developed by economists in the United States after World War II. In this sense, many of the sociologists who had accepted and developed structural-functional analysis in Japan were not loyal to Parsons. In short, many of them wanted to develop structural-functional analysis in a very different and peculiar direction which was probably based upon a belief that economics is more scientific than the sociology.

### 3.2 The Development of the Theory of Social Stratification

After the validity of structural-functional analysis was essentially rejected in this fashion in Japan, Parsons' work was no longer studied as a general theory, but rather only as ideas within the history of sociology. Nevertheless, we must pay special attention to the fact that many of the sociologists who accepted and developed Parsonian ideas in Japan greatly contributed to the theoretical problems of social class and social stratification by dealing with them in confrontation with the Marxian social sciences. Although Japanese studies on social stratification and social mobility did not always directly derive from Parsons' works, the long-term research on social stratification and mobility in Japan can be traced back to problems connected with the theoretical acceptance of Parsons' works. This long-term research may be understood as founded in certain basic theoretical works such as Tominaga's *Shikai hendô no ron* (The Theory of Social Change, 1965).

Now, insofar as there is a direct relationship between empirical studies and the theoretically defined concept of 'structure', empirical studies on social stratification and mobility must and were based upon theoretically defined concepts. Since 1952 a series of empirical research projects on social stratification and mobility have been carried out in Japan.<sup>9</sup> With reference to Parsons' theory, Naoi Akira (a disciple of Tominaga) conceptualized the components which constitute a social structure, in order to empirically re-

9 This series of empirical researches projects is well-known in Japan under the general label of the SSM-research project. Carried out for the first time in 1952, it has been continuously carried out every ten years since 1955. The results of this continuous researches illustrate the great changes in social structure during the period of high economic growth in Japan (cf. Tominaga in this volume).

search and analyze social structures. According to him, "the smallest component of a social structure is a normally regulated complex of actions whose agent participates during the course of social interaction. It is generally referred as a 'role'." (Naoi 1974: 152) Here Naoi conceptualizes a fundamental node for theoretical and empirical analysis within the structural analysis of a social system. In this definition the concept of social action which Weber put forth in his article "Soziologische Grundbegriffe" and, moreover, the concept of unit act (or social system as an action system composed of the unit acts) which Parsons put forth in *The Structure of Social Action* are both used. This idea is well-known in Japan as a model in which an agent acts in a situation and is, thereby, always related to a course of interactions which are inevitably regulated by certain values or by a normative orientation as an emergent property. However, more important than this development was the fact that Tominaga and Naoi incorporated the wide-ranging contributions to the studies on social stratification which had been done in the United States and further developed the Parsonian theoretical ideas for such empirical studies as well, while, very carefully decomposing Parsons' theoretical corpus into empirically available variables, so as to administer research questionnaires. They believed that they could empirically comprehend a social structure as a complex of roles and collectivities by following the theory of their conceptual teacher Parsons, who understood social structure in the context of a hierarchical control of value → norm → collectivity → role (Parsons 1966: 18-20; cf. Naoi 1974: 155). Here, each member in a societal community must perform a certain role within the community, in order to attain a goal. At the same time, however, a certain amount of social resources must be available as a means of this goal-attainment (Tominaga 1965: 247-251; Tominaga 1979: 20-24). Such social resources are institutionalized as 'wealth', 'authority' - 'prestige', and 'knowledge'. In order to be able to grasp these three resources, the following operative variables were designated: (1) occupation (classification of occupations); (2) education (educational career); (3) income; (4) property; (5) life-style; (6) social power, and so forth (Tominaga 1979: 20-26).

The first research project on social stratification and mobility in Japan was carried out in 1952 by Odaka Kunio, Nishihira Yoshishige, and others who administered a survey aimed at investigating the social stratification within the six metropolises which existed in those days in Japan. Since 1955 this kind of research has been conducted every 10 years. Tominaga, Naoi, and their collaborators played important roles in all of these research projects. In 1995 the fifth research project was carried out. In examining the results from these research projects, one sees the great social change in Japanese social structure beginning with the high economic growth rate to the depression of today.

In sum, the idea of role structure which was conceptualized for the Japanese analyses of social structure is grounded in a theoretical position. This theoretical position assumes that the social existence of a human being must

be defined not only in relationship to his or her material possessions, but also in relationship to his or her cultural resources and social relational resources. Social existence in this sense could then be interpreted not only in terms of a Marxian monistic theory of social classes but also in terms of more multiple theoretical devices composed of many operative values. From this theoretical perspective, Tominaga and other Japanese sociologists like him have tried to scientifically analyze the complexly stratified social structure of Japan upon the basis of concrete data from very well-organized and refined social research projects.

### 3.3 The Development of a Historical Theory of Civilization and Japanese Society

The active development of social stratification studies in Japan quite coincidentally contributed to further developments in more general social theory. Here one must mention the name of Murakami Yasusuke who is one of the most important Japanese economists after World War II. His "social economics" is partially related to the results of the social stratification studies by Tominaga and his colleagues (cf. Imada/Hara 1978: 161-197). Murakami's now famous book *The Age of the New Middle Mass*, clearly demonstrates that his basic theoretical position is the same as that of Tominaga. According to Murakami, as long as social class is defined as a configuration of only two or three strata exhibiting obvious differences, we cannot comprehend the new middle class which Emil Lederer had formalized in the 1920's and which may be redefined for Japan as the "new middle mass".

The "new middle mass" refers to a complex of features which has characterized Japanese society up to the present time. On the one hand, according to a report of the European Community under which Murakami published his book, the average Japanese lives in houses as small as rabbit hutches. On the other hand, according to public opinion polls carried out by the Economic Planning Agency, ninety percent of Japanese feel that they are "above average" in social status. The relationship between these two contradictory facts is represented by the term the 'new middle mass' which cannot be taken to mean simply 'middle class'. This is because (1) they do not have a large amount of income and property; (2) they do not have the highly polished intelligence and management skills which are indispensable performing roles of a high reputation in an industrial society such as an administrative office, business, or community; and (3) they are not highly educated so as to continue to choose their own life-styles. Murakami thought that what most of this 'new middle mass' then desired within the Japanese high economic growth-orientated society was very simple, namely, only to enjoy themselves in this economic dimension, or capitalistic institution coordinated and organized by the government and its bureaucracy. Here most of the main Japanese industries had always been controlled and coordinated by governmental im-

peratives, while businessmen and laborers wished to be promoted to a more important post only if it occurred inside a firm in which they could always continue to work for the rest of their lives. The innovative entrepreneurs were not much different. All this illustrates that in regard to the allocation of resources and chances this 'new middle mass' always tended to be politically uniform and an egalitarian distribution. In short, it contradicted any original bourgeois mentality.

As proof of this theory of a 'new middle mass' in Japan, Murakami cited the research on social stratification done by Tominaga and others. However, the even more general significance of Murakami's work consists in his attempt to situate the historical individuality of Japanese industrial society after World War II within a general historical theory of civilization. He interdisciplinarily opened up a new stage in the theorizing on Japanese society, namely, a civilization theory of Japan. *Bunmei toshite no ie-shakai* (The ie-Society as Civilization) by Murakami, and his collaborators Kumon Shunpei and Satō Seizaburō is indeed very different from the theoretical and historical studies based upon the Parsonian theory of the social system. It is, perhaps, one of the most important works in the social sciences since World War II. Their 'multi-lineal' theory of civilization was clearly intended as an argument against those two most famous types of unilinear theories, namely, the historical materialism by Marx and its various versions by Marxists, and the comparative sociology of religion by Max Weber. Although they wanted to overcome these two grand theoretical frameworks through using Parsons' basic terms, they went well beyond the Parsonian theory of evolution and offered a multi-lineal history of civilization through looking at the unique problems of Japan squarely in the eye.<sup>10</sup>

### 3.4 Conclusion: The End of Ideology and Epigone

Unfortunately, it can not be said that we have here reviewed all the main aspects of the acceptance of Parsonian social theory and its development in Japan.<sup>11</sup> However, it can be ascertained from the above that many Japanese sociologists commonly referred to Parsons from the mid-1960s until the late-1970s, and that many of them devoted themselves to the reading and interpretation certain aspects of his grand theory and thought, while further introducing him to others. However, such references to Parsons slowly vanished as the phenomenological sociology of Alfred Schütz, the ethnomethodology

<sup>10</sup> Murakami was one of the most important conservative theorists in the Liberal Democratic Party. He was well-known as a brain trustee of the ex-premier Nakasone.

<sup>11</sup> For example, we could not forget the work of Robert Bellah (1957). He was a student of Parsons and at the same time a student Edwin Reischauer, who was a pioneer of the Japanese studies in the USA and had been the US-ambassador in Japan. In this relation of comparative sociology of culture we must mention a work by Sakuta Ken'ichi (1972), in which he also analyzes the Japanese society by Parsonian frameworks.

by Garfinkel, the work of Habermas and Luhmann and other new theoretical movements began to attract a great deal of attention among Japanese sociologists. It seems to me that in the world of Japanese sociologists at least the social stratification research and the multi-linear history of civilization which involve a theoretical acceptance of Parsons still today continue to maintain a general scientific relevance<sup>12</sup>.

The Japanese sociologists who were the forerunners in studying Parsons and introducing his work, and who have been examined above took their start from the relatively early work of Parsons written before the mid-1960's. This brilliant early work by Parsons had had an extremely provocative effect providing those young Japanese sociologists of that day with a motivation to start constructing their own original works. Parsons' work after the mid-1960s has not received as much attention and many of these scholars even developed a critical attitude towards Parsons' evolutionary theory (cf. Parsons 1966, 1967, 1969). Moreover, his last work *A Paradigm of Human Conditions* has not even been thoroughly discussed in Japan. Far from it, many of the new Japanese theorists were only concerned with introducing the new tendencies coming from the United States and Europe, and simply were not interested in this new theory of Parsons. They were increasingly interested in Schütz, Habermas and Luhmann. In this new lacking concern for Parsons, Japanese sociology itself may be quite different from German sociology (cf. Luhmann 1980, 1988; Habermas 1981).

Social scientific knowledge is always and deeply rooted within the culture and social life in which we live. Language has always played a very important role in constructing social scientific knowledge. Japanese is, in this regard, very peculiar. Most of the books by Parsons, Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, as well as by Habermas and Luhmann, have already been translated into Japanese. And one can find a great deal of secondary studies on them. However, most of these are written in Japanese, and remain isolated from the rest of the world. Is this fortune, fate, or is there a way out?

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12 The SSM-research project was also further carried out in 1995. Murakami died in 1995 unfortunately for Japanese social sciences. However, even his last work *The Anticlassical Political Economics* had a strong impact upon the social sciences in Japan.

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