

CHAPTER 5 TOWARD CULTURALLY 'INDEPENDENT' SOCIAL SCIENCE: THE ISSUE OF INDIGENIZATION IN EAST ASIA

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Prologue

Even in the heyday of dependency and/or world system theories, the development discourses, even those related to cultural imperialism, have rarely taken up the very issue of academic dependency especially involving the status of the social science in the so-called Third World (Alatas 1972; Altbach 1977).

As far as the intellectual history of the modern world is concerned, any ideas or theoretical discourses developed outside the Western metropolis have generally been localized and remain unattended to by the world social science community, no matter how significant and original they may be. In order to gain global recognition, therefore, social scientists of the Third World have to strive to meet the standards and qualifications set by those of the Western core nations. Some even have alluded to the pathetic adherence to such standards by Third World social scientists as symptoms of 'captive mind' (Alatas 1972).

One could raise the question of why the standards set by a community of social scientists in the Western metropolis should be *the* standards universally applicable and why they should monopolize the decision-making processes involving such standard-setting. Another perhaps more serious issue has to do with universality and relevance of Western-originated theories, methodologies, and research techniques, and whether they really provide meaningful accounts for all the categories and classes of people around the world.

In light of such doubts and questions, I should like to raise the issue of indigenization of social science (Alatas 1981), with a view to creating perhaps culturally 'independent' social science in today's world. I shall offer some concrete examples of how we should go about indigenizing social science to help create no longer culturally dependent and hence more universally meaningful social science for the coming new millenium, mainly drawig upon examples from the cultural stock of East Asia, and particularly of Korea.

The Significance of Indigenization

Essentially, indigenization of social science entails the following.

First, with respect to the epistemological, ontological, and axiological issues of social science, we should look for some meaningful cultural resources that may help us develop social science which is not dependent solely on the Western intellectual sources.

Second, we could now try to develop theories of human society based on ideas and concepts indigenous to the culture, which then could be more relevant and meaningful in describing and explaining phenomena of interest to the people of the society as well as the social scientist studying them.

Third, one could also invent or develop concrete methods and techniques of observation and research originated in the cultural resources and experiences of the people of the society.

The ultimate purpose of indigenization, of course, is to create social science free of cultural dependency or ethnocentrism. When we say culturally 'independent' social science, we mean that social science no longer is a monopoly of the Western core and culture-based social science is possible in all other societies around the world. And it is important that everyone recognize the significance of such culturally 'independent' social science without any ethnocentric bias or preoccupation.

Only after these conditions are met, then our final objective would be to make any significant effort at indigenization of concepts, theories, and methods truly reflect the fundamental and universal tendencies and characteristics of human social behavior. This is the criterion of universality.

Moreover, we can envisage much more enriched social science when we have indigenization, free from the narrow view of the world of human social life conceived in the Western images and biases, and couched in the Western languages and discourses. Indigenization could lead us out of the monotonous and rigidly rationalized Western intellectual color and flavor into a world of much more fun-ridden, colorful, and scintillating social science.

A more immediate contribution of indigenized social science would be with respect to relevance. This issue has been discussed widely since the 1970s in the field of sociology (Alatas 1995), and I would simply reiterate my earlier point that indigenized social science theories and concepts should make much better sense, and hence be more meaningful, to the people of that particular society. Moreover, in the realm of practical applications of social science research and ideas in policy-making and other social action programs, indigenized social science can help develop more practically relevant policy ideas and recommendations for public action or other social movements, directly reflecting the life experience of the people.

Indigenization of Social Science: Examples from East Asia

The examples given here are chiefly from Korean experience with some additional information from classical Chinese thought. The main sources of ideas or examples are 1) classical thought of China and Korea, and 2) concepts widely used and practices frequently found in everyday life of the Korean people (Chan Wing-tsit, 1973; Fung Yu-lan, 1983; Schwartz, 1985). Detailed description of each example is not attempted due to the space limit, and only limited illustrations are provided.

Ontological Assumptions

In the area of metatheoretical assumptions relevant to sociology, we find virtually no abstract concepts equivalent to society, structure, organization, state and the like, in Chinese and Korean classical thought.

First, human collective life is conceived in terms of concrete forms of relations, typically dyadic in form, such as the classical five-fold Confucian canonical relationships between 1) parent and child, 2) ruler and subject, 3) man and wife, 4) elders and juniors, and 5) friends. Other relations are extensions of these five, with family and kinship relations standing out over others.

Second, human relationships are defined mostly in a hierarchical framework and the status of each person in the relationship is not only clearly delimited but is to be strictly defended.

Third, collectivities in the traditional Confucian thought are also conceived in concrete types of groups, such as the family, kin group or clan, village community, town, and the national family, that is, the state.

Fourth, one of the most prominent and influential ideas found in the Chinese classical thought is the binary conception of the universe in terms of *Yin* and *Yang* elements or forces. Everything in the universe has its opposite. *Yang* being the positive element is the productive force, while *Yin* as the negative is the nurturing force, and the interaction of these two creates and develops the universe, and causes change incessantly. Implied in this binary worldview is the status-consciousness and the hierarchical nature of human social relations.

In addition, this *Yin-Yang* framework is also widely employed in the study of change, including social, historical change, and I have already attempted to formulate rudimentary theories or principles of social change using these ideas of *Yin-Yang* dialectic (Kim 1991, 1994). Essentially, it is a variety of dialectical conceptions of change, involving both cyclical and developmental mechanisms of change. The *Yin-Yang* interaction produces things in the world and promotes change and development. Since the two forces comprise a closed system of the universe, the moving equilibrium of the two forces

requires the system to maintain maximum flexibility so that it can continue to produce useful change and development.

Fifth, man or human being is conceived to be born with both human mind-and-heart and moral mind-and-heart. The human mind-and-heart full of desires and emotions drives man to act like an animal. But with sufficient training, education, and discipline, man can control them and emit proper action in accordance with the moral mind-and-heart of the *Way(Tao)* of Heaven, the universe or nature, which is the morally righteous way. Here, too, find we the dialectical tension between the human side and moral side of mind-and-heart both of which are natural to humans. And the proper behavior of a person is defined by the relational and status context in that he/she is to conduct him/herself by playing out the role assigned by the group norms upon the status occupied in the relationship.

Epistemology and Axiological Orientations

One of the distinctive features of the conception of knowledge originated in ancient China is that it combines both naturalistic and moralistic orientations in the theory of knowledge. Epistemology is not independent from axiology. Knowledge is meaningless unless it is useful and is actually put into practice. There is this dialectical one-ness of knowledge and action. In addition, to know something correctly requires a proper and correct state of mind, for knowledge comes from a combination of experience and intuition. It is called 'experiential' epistemology, involving both empirical observation and intuitive understanding of the nature of natural and human affairs.

To become one with the universe or nature is the ultimate goal of persons aspiring to be sages. In this state of mind, one merely experiences what the state of affairs is like, and by such immediate experience by body and mind one gains true knowledge. To be one with the universe so that one acquires true knowledge, however, requires moral rectitude of the highest standard possible. Moral rectitude requires in the minimum expressions of four natural inclinations of compassion, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom. Achievement of moral rectitude results from painfully diligent and meticulous training to purify one's mind-and-heart and from sincere observance of the proper conduct appropriate to the social status and position in the relationship.

In terms of concrete methods of studying physical matters and social affairs, classical Chinese thought stresses two things. First, for whatever objects of study, clear and purified mind-and-heart is a must, devoid of any unnecessary elements polluting the effective working of the consciousness. This is usually done by various techniques of meditation and similar ways of disciplining and training the mind. Moreover, purifying the mind-and-heart helps one attain moral rectitude, as well.

Second, one has to make sure the words and names one uses to designate certain objects and ideas are clearly defined so as not to be confused with other words and names and so that understanding on the part of the people may not be distorted. One is also to morally rectify the names by performing sincerely the roles assigned to the status with a certain name and by behaving correctly and properly in accordance with the relational obligations implied in the name.

Utilizing Indigenous Concepts and Ideas for Theory Development

Let me now turn to more concrete examples of utility of certain concepts and ideas that are widely used in the society. For this purpose, I will confine my discussion to the cases of Korean society, with two categories of examples: one about the social dynamics on the macro-level, and the other touching upon day-to-day interactions on the micro-level (Kim 1988 1994).

1. Macro-Dynamics of Economic Growth Explained. In order to furnish an explanation for the remarkable achievement in Korea in terms of economic growth in a limited span of time, that makes better sense to the Korean people, I have utilized a couple of concepts that are drawn directly from the vocabulary of the ordinary people in their daily life. And they are *Han*(reads haan or hahn; and *Ki*.

Han is an extremely complicated psychological complex or emotional state which is usually caused by severe frustration or some unjust wrongs done to you, which therefore involves an acute sense of regrets, remorse, hatred, revengefulness, and which can be expressed in actual revenge on the person(s) responsible for the harm inflicted upon you, resignation and fatalistic acceptance of the consequence with the regrettable emotional feelings still intact, or may be in some positive achievement of some social consequence as a detour to the actual revenge, a sort of sublimated form of revenge. At any rate, there is a very popular saying in Korea which in essence says, "a woman's *han* can cause frost in the middle of summer". Its effect can be that strong and extreme.

Individually or collectively, the Korean people have been accumulating and intensifying the nationalistic *Han* complex for centuries of turbulent history, and once a channel has been furnished to release this enormous psychological energy, the Koreans have worked to achieve the goal set by the national elite of the 1960s under the leadership of President Park Chung Hee.

Ki, originally meant vapor or steam of boiling rice, thus implying life element. Later, it was taken on a philosophical meaning of vital energy or material force, materialized in *Yin* and *Yang* forces. This *Ki* energy as a vital force is pervasive throughout nature, existing in a stream of energy moving through in all life forms and in the inanimate part of nature. In order for *Ki* to

give life, it has to be sufficiently amassed in concentration, for once it is dissipated life is also gone.

As Korea has gone through the historical suffering of external battering and internal turbulence, the people have not only accumulated the emotions of *Han*, but have also had no chance to dissipate and use up the collective *Ki* energy as a nation. Thus, much of the *Ki* energy so accumulated found an outlet and a channel to unleash so that the envisaged national goals of economic growth may be materialized.

Once a certain level of economic growth and increase of living standards had been attained, the Korean people began to show signs of fatigue and the inclination to go easy on the front of economic achievement. Not only the *Han* emotions have been released causing the intensely revengeful feelings to disappear, but also the national *Ki* energy has been dissipated in the course of development. This may mean that Korea from now on needs a new source of national drive to motivate the people to restore some of the past zeal for work and saving, to replace the old *Han* emotions, and new measures to revitalize national energy or *Ki* to push for sustained growth.

2. Macro-Dynamics of Democratization and Political Culture. Korea happens to be looked upon by the world society as sort of a success case in terms both of economic take-off and democratic transition. In order to understand the true nature of democratization in East Asia, however, one must examine the political culture more carefully, watching out for the limitations of Western social science theories of democracy and democratization.

While institutional adoption of democracy may be accomplished in due course in East Asia, this does not guarantee true democratization in its ideal-type form and substance. And we even hear a strong voice contending that East Asians can and must establish their own form of democracy, instead of simple emulation of the Western version. My sense is that in East Asian societies, it is going to take a much longer time and greater effort to successfully consolidate ideal-type democratic political institutions and processes, due mainly to the very political culture that goes against such standards as set by the founders of modern democracy in the West.

I would simply remind that the culturally embedded hierarchical status-oriented principle of organization in East Asia, even in the language system in Korea and Japan, can easily breed authoritarian mentality and behavior and keen competition for power positions, notably in politics but also in other social realms. It is in this sense that some fundamental change in the political culture is a must for true democratization in these societies. Otherwise, any claim for modified democracy simply is an excuse for another version of authoritarian rule.

3. Micro-Principles of Social Organization and Interaction Processes. Let me now turn to some outstanding examples of common usages depicting and

characterizing the major principle of social organization and interaction processes. I shall, however, confine myself to a few cases for the sake of space.

- *Emotionalism* Emotion takes an unusually important place and plays a heavy role in personal relations and social interaction in Korean society. I would even call this tendency *emotionalism*. Short temper and frequent collective action, as demonstrated in the long history of the student movement, are major examples. With this kind of emotionalism, regulated, conciliatory, or rationally negotiated resolution of conflict is not easy, enabling true democracy to take root in this society.

- *Injong*. One very outstanding way of expressing this emotionalism is found in what we call *personalism* or *Injonjui*. *Injong* stands for human compassion or kindness. But when it comes to social relations, it tends to push for personalizing everything, demanding emotional involvement from others and inciting emotional intervention in others' affairs. Contractual interaction is uncomfortable and hence shunned if at all possible, and effort is made to make any business relationship as personal as can be.

- *Yon'go* or *Yonjul* The tendency to personalize relationships is closely linked to another cultural inclination among the Koreans, namely *connectionism*. To establish, cultivate, increase, seek out, and fully utilize personal connections happens to be one of the central strategies of survival and success in Korean society. The main sources of connections include, above all, blood relations or kinship ties, the locality of origin, the school attended, other social groups joined, and the workplace cohort. Once a connection is established and identified, then one endeavors to make it as emotionally intimate and personalized as possible so that the connection may not become insignificant. Once personally involved, then the person in the connection network can be utilized for personal purposes in a variety of ways to achieve certain goals in life. Both personalism and connectionism could breed favoritism, nepotism and corruption in official contexts.

- *Myongbun* Conduct appropriate to the name, this is what literally translates *myongbun*. Recall the Confucian epistemology that stressed the proper conduct required to meeting the moral standards of each name or status so named. Name, title, status, and honor attached to them are so important in this culture. And to keep the name intact, one has to behave oneself properly and expects to be treated as such. Otherwise, one loses face, honor tainted, and the person is ashamed. Oftentimes, however, in order to keep honor or *myongbun*, one might have to sacrifice practical interest. Also, *myongbun* is offered as an incentive to tempt somebody to do certain things or accept certain conditions under very difficult decision-making circumstances. If *myongbun* is clearly defined and is good enough, one even risks one's life. Even when someone needs to be induced to do certain illegal

or illegitimate things, a good *myongbun* could be used as an excuse for the illicit action.

- *Nunch'i* This term is very hard to translate into English. To begin with, it has three overlapping but separate meanings. First, in order to make successful adaptation, one should learn to readily sense which way the wind blows. And if one has great agility in reading the mind of the people, he is called a man of swift *nunch'i* in Korea. The opposite case of a man of slow *nuch'i* or little sense of where the wind blows would ordinarily be looked down upon or reprimanded for acting stupidly without the proper sense of the world around him. Nevertheless, while man of quick *nunch'i* may easily succeed in worldly matters, he could be regarded as a man of no principles only seeking success and may be despised as too clever a man to be decent.

Secondly, in pretty much the same vein, individuals and organizations make comparisons with others and act accordingly. This kind of referring to other competing individuals or organizations is called whatching out for *nunch'i*.

Third, if a person is in a subordinate position, or is indebted to somebody, then he is expected to be always alert to the whims of the superior or the creditor, to be sensitive to the state of their mind. The superior or creditor is also expected not to show unwarranted *nunch'i* to the other party who has to live with the need to watch out for the other's *nunch'i*.

Epilogue

These illustrations may still look very strange and hollow to many Western social scientists or even those non-Western academics who have been deeply immersed in the Western scholarship. How then are we to make them 'universalized' so that such concepts and ideas may take on a globally meaningful sense? The first and probably the ultimate goal of such universalization would entail adopting those ideas and concepts in all societies and applying them in the description and explanation of each society transcending cultural boundaries.

A more modest goal would be to grant cultural independence to social science in each society to rely on such ideas and concepts indigenous to each culture for their own endeavor to provide reasonable characterization and explanation of social-cultural phenomena found in each society. This at least guarantees social science free of distortions caused by blind adoption of alien theories and concepts, primarily developed in the West, which may be of little relevance both academically and policywise to the society under study.

Once they are proven useful and relevant and approved as such by the social science community of each society, one now could share them with those of other societies. This would certainly enrich social science of the societies involved. From that point on, one then could try to see if some of

those ideas and concepts may have greater universal applicability than others. Through this type of inductive strategy, we will may expect some day that we will have much richer social science theories and vocabulary.

My objective in this presentation has not been to argue for cultural particularism or isolationism of social science in each society. Rather, I have attempted to show by illustration that indigenization of social science may be one of the ways whereby social science today could escape the cul-de-sac in which it has been stranded.

In order to make this indigenization work, then, two sides must cooperate. On one hand, the Western social scientists should open their mind and readily invite their non-Western counterparts to present their cases in the major global media of social science discourse. Social scientists in the non-Western world, on the other, have to put greater effort into this type of indigenization. This requires creativity and originality. And, of course, they ought to be able to communicate their ideas in languages that are globally understood.

All these propositions are made in the spirit of making social science more humane and meaningful, saving it from the doldrums of recent decades. In this age of drastic globalization, genuine indigenization may be the right path towards true globalization of social science.

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CHAPTER 6 WESTERN THEORY, EAST ASIAN REALITIES AND THE SOCIAL

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Introduction

This paper aims to present a concise account of attempts to create alternative social scientific traditions in East Asia. I begin with a note on the formative phase of the social sciences in the region and then proceed to a discussion of prescriptions to indigenise and nationalise the social sciences. Here I note that for the most part, these prescriptions have a vague conception of what would constitute the alternative social science theory, methods and practice they are seeking. In conclusion, I suggest that the quest for alternatives should look to the East Asian philosophical tradition as well as popular discourse as a source of original ideas for the social sciences.

The Western Origins of the Social Sciences and the Question of Relevance

Many social sciences were introduced in China in the last century. Sociology began its career in China in the form of a translation of two chapters of Spencer's *Principles of Sociology* by Yen Fu, with a complete translation appearing in 1902 (Hsu 1931, pp.284, Huang 1987 pp.111-112). Chinese sociology can be divided into its Marxist (Maoist) variant in the People's Republic of China and American sociology in Taiwan after the communist takeover (Huang 1987, Maykovich 1987, Schmutz, 1989, pp. 7).

The social sciences were implanted in Japan from the West during the Meiji period (1868-1912) (Watanuki 1984, pp. 283) and had been profoundly influenced by both German and American sociology. In fact, a persistent characteristic of Japanese sociology today is defined by *nihonjinron* (theories of Japanese people) which are constituted by essentialised views on Japan, emphasising cultural homogeneity and historical continuity. Such culturally deterministic theories of society continued the tradition of Western scholarship on Japan in the tradition of auto-Orientalism (Lie 1996, pp.5) so characteristic of non-Western social science. In Korea in the 1970s, scholars were "awakened" to the need to establish a more creative Korean sociology (Shin 1994) (1). Nevertheless, for all the justifiable attacks against the ethnocentrism