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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **SOCIOLOGY FROM AN EAST ASIAN PERSPECTIVE**

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#### **Introductory Remarks**

Sociology is a study of social change. Social change is inevitable. It follows then that sociology itself should change constantly. However, the history of the discipline demonstrates that it has generally tended to resist change. That is quite understandable because an institution cannot be easily changed. This does not mean that sociology as a discipline has not developed over time. Quite to the contrary! Practitioners of sociology all over the world have made remarkable achievements in terms of social analysis and theory construction. The irony is that our achievements, both quantitative and qualitative, have been a major obstacle to the deep transformation of sociology, which the contemporary social world demands and which some of its practitioners call for in a variety of ways.

Sociology is now under strain for at least two reasons. First, developments in social theory in recent decades have been significant enough to press sociologists to conceive a paradigmatic shift. Many of the fundamental premises which have buttressed European (and North American) sociology have been questioned. Second, profound changes in the modern social world, the very object of sociological analysis, have occurred. These changes have pushed sociologists to reflect upon the character of their discipline and its epistemological foundations.

Generally speaking, the complexity that the twentieth century world presents could not be properly approached by nineteenth century European sociology. Sociology had to change, and change greatly. If we recognize that sociology is a very historic and social form of knowledge in the sense that it was the outcome of a need for a new science that could discern the nature of rapid social change in nineteenth century Europe, it is paramount at this juncture for us to seek ways for reconstructing sociology. As much as the politics of the world-system and its geoculture have been transformed in the late twentieth century, sociology must "overcome the Eurocentric heritage which has distorted its analyses and its capacity to deal with the problems of the contemporary world" (Wallerstein 1996, p.3) in order to make progress in the twenty-first century.

Social change, we note here, is not simple but very complex and involves diverse factors. This is not the place to elaborate on these. Rather, as our objective is to reflect upon sociology from an East Asian perspective, we will examine the rise of East Asia in the world-economy and its significance for changes to the power configuration of the world-system. The earlier reference to the transformation of the politics of the world-system and its geoculture is a direct result of the rise of East Asia and its geocultural consequences.

Since sociology became institutionalized while Europe dominated the world-system, it has been very Eurocentric. Eurocentrism became more consolidated during the period of U.S. world hegemony in the post World War Two era. Now, world power has shifted notably to East Asia. The more recent discourse on "East Asia" in academic communities in at least three countries (Japan, South Korea, and China) appears to have a lot to do with the accumulation of wealth in the region. In this vein, the questioning of the validity of Western sociology in explaining East Asian realities, discussion of issues regarding relevancy, the call for indigenization, and finally the quest for an East Asian scholarly identity are both understandable and justifiable. The discourse on academic dependency and indigenization is by no means new. A body of literature on those issues already exists (Alatas 1972, Alatas 1993, 1996, Altbach, 1977, Kim 1996). What seems noteworthy is the fact that the discourse on these issues in East Asian countries has recently unfolded rather intensively. What should explain this phenomenon? Perhaps it is an expression of self-confidence, warranted or not, on the part of East Asians. Or it may be the outcome of a collective self-reflection by academic communities in the region. In either case, the phenomenon raises a broad range of issues which are pertinent to an East Asian perspective on sociology.

### **The Implantation of Western Sociology in East Asia**

The intellectual tradition of East Asia is known to have been very rich in the areas of humanities, and social and political thought. Neo-Confucianism, which today is much lauded as the prime cultural source of the "East Asian miracle" by both Western analysts and by local scholars, represents simply one stream of East Asian traditional thought. There are many other streams of thought and ideas as well. Because of the actual abundance of social knowledge and a long tradition of social respect for scholarship, East Asia has been very capable of developing its own system of social knowledge.

The critical blow to the indigenous formation of sociology in East Asia was the seventeenth century scientific revolution in Western Europe and its influence on the emergence of "social science" in Europe. The application of "science" to the study "social" issues had enormous and far-reaching consequences (Wallerstein 1991). More than anything else, what Europeans did in the name

of social science gained unquestionable status in the scholarly world. Almost simultaneously, all other forms of social knowledge in non-Western societies were downgraded as "non-scientific" and thereby something to be eliminated as soon and as totally as possible. Most non-Western forms of social knowledge were delegitimized or demoralized. Suddenly, the rich and abundant social knowledge of East Asia which has existed for centuries was relegated to a category of thought which should be discarded or replaced by "social science." Needless to say, at the center of this entire process lay the dominance of Europe in the capitalist world-economy.

Indeed, Western social sciences were introduced or implanted in East Asian societies like most other Third World societies. This process of introduction or implantation of social sciences including sociology was by no means a smooth process. East Asians took an ambivalent posture toward what the Europeans represented. Of course, the three East Asian countries were not exactly the same in terms of their posture or their attitude toward accepting ideas from outside. The basic view of European (including North American) civilization held by East Asians was that it represented advanced technology symbolized by gun-boats. East Asians believed in their superiority in the sphere of scholarship (or in their own words, "spirit"). Insofar as they believed in their spiritual superiority, the compromise, which once again was no smooth process, with European civilization (represented by technology or to borrow directly from Asians' terminology "utility" or "tool") was not a painfully ashamed solution. The fallacy of Asians was that through gun-boats they saw only Western technology not Western social science. Perhaps they did not want to recognize the latter because such recognition would have made their inevitable compromise very difficult.

After all, the asymmetrical meeting of East Asians with Europeans during the last decades of the nineteenth century ended with a practical and political compromise coined "Eastern Way and Western Technology" or "Chinese Body and Western Utility". It may be noted that among the three nations in East Asia, China and Japan both demonstrated a more flexible and pragmatic attitude towards what Europe represented, while Korea was more reluctant to compromise with the West. It is widely recognized that China, historically the central country in the region, has always been flexible. This flexibility was exercised to a degree that helped it gain self-asserted centrality. This flexibility and pragmatism has once again been demonstrated by Deng Xiaoping's "Socialist Body and Capitalist Utility" to invent and justify the unfriendly hybrid phrase called "socialist market economy." Why and how Japan showed a similar attitude is another subject to be studied. The successful Meiji Revolution (1868) might be a factor. In any case, Japan went to extremes in dealing with Western civilization. Unlike China and Chosun (today's Korea), Japan swiftly transformed its policy position "Away from Asia and Toward Europe". The Meiji Restoration

and this speedy switch enabled Japan to later take a ultra-nationalist and militarist path, and eventually becoming a non-Western colonial power, the consequences of which were disastrous for neighboring Asians as well as masses of Japanese nationals. Some analysts trace the economic success of Japan today back to the Meiji period, paying particular attention to how Japan responded to the European capitalist civilization. The relevance of this remains open to question but the path that the Japanese elites took to construct a complex regional structure was full of contradictions and subsequently left irrevocable psychological damage to Asians.

It is no surprise that in East Asia, Japan was the first country where Western sociology was implanted in the early Meiji period (Watanuki 1984). As early as 1878, sociological lectures were given at Tokyo Imperial University. In the case of China, sociology was first implanted in 1903 through a translation (by Yen Fu) of Herbert Spencer's *Principles of Sociology*. The first sociology course was offered at St. John University in Shanghai in circa 1905 (Ma 1996, p. 71). In Korea, it was during the last years of the 1880s, after the country was forced to open its ports by Western and Japanese imperial powers, that sociology was introduced as "the study of groups" (Park 1996, p. 41). But it was not until the liberation from the Japanese colonial rule that sociology was institutionalized within the university system. Interestingly, in Korea too Spencer's sociology was the predominant text in Korean sociology's formative years. Japan was no exception for when the official Chair of sociology within the Faculty of Letters at Tokyo Imperial University was established in 1893, Toyama Masakazu also taught Spencer's sociology (Shoji 1996, p. 55).

Why Spencer and not Comte or any of the other founding figures of sociology in Europe? We can suggest three possible reasons: the hegemonic position of Great Britain in the eyes of Asians; their aspiration to modernize their nation into a strong country like the Western powers through social evolution; and their belief in social order in the midst of political turmoil and democratic change.

### Issues of Irrelevancy/Relevancy

The fact that sociology emerged in Europe and that it was implanted in East Asia presented many problems and raised a number of issues. One of the key issues we would like to discuss is the question of irrelevancy. Implanted sociology inevitably raises the issue of irrelevancy as a consequence of the encounter between Western theory and East Asian realities. The epistemology of the "invaders" is something to be questioned in terms of its applicability, pertinence and attunement to East Asian political and cultural contexts. The issue of irrelevancy concerns not simply the discordance between implanted sociology and local/national/regional realities, but the chronic lack of creativity

and originality in sociology in East Asia. To overcome the lack of creativity and originality is an enormous task but more than anything else presupposes the construction of a relevant sociology. Before we move on to specific ways to construct a relevant sociology, it is imperative we discuss the issues of relevancy/irrelevancy (Alatas 1996) in the context of East Asia.

Sociology in East Asia had to be responsive to social reality and history (Park 1983). History in this context is not necessarily temporal. Thus, it does not have to be limited to the past. History in this context becomes synonymous with social reality. Even if one studies contemporary social phenomena, if he/she puts it into the pressing historical context, we can say the study is responsive to history and social reality. For example, if sociology in Korea were not responsive to historical social realities, it should be regarded as "irrelevant." When it lost its relevancy to historical social realities, it was questioned and pressed for transformation.

In essence, our discipline is about social change. To say that social change is eternal and normal is a cliché. We all recognize the constancy and normalcy of social change. What this implies in terms of our practice as sociologists is that we ought to capture changing social realities with our epistemology. Social change precedes our ability to decipher and place it in a systematic mode which makes sense. The gap or lag is almost inevitable. The question is how wide or narrow the gap is in reality. The wider it is, the greater the extent to which social science departs from (historical) reality. When the gap is somehow bridged, we may say that we are practicing a history-relevant sociology.

As a subfield of social science, sociology in East Asia also aspired to become a science, although it never succeeded in coming close to being "scientific". Science means different things to different scholars. But in general, science has often been interpreted to mean construction of law-like theories. Theory-building, many argued, requires elegance and parsimony. Detailed descriptions are detrimental to theory-building. In-depth research, which in reality is actually very rare, is encouraged, but the way in which such research is presented ought to be concise. Data should be "processed" as much as possible, which after all represents a reduction of materials. Richness must be sacrificed for the sake of a succinct explanation.

One of the negative outcomes of the emphasis on theory-building is that in East Asian sociology, history has never been a serious matter of concern or interest in spite of the fact that East Asia has a long and rich history which has been relatively well-documented. History presents an excellent opportunity to sociologists whose main interests are social change. This is not to assert that history has been entirely outside the realm of sociological research. Indeed, Korean sociologists for instance, albeit few in number, have used history as their object of research. In the 1980s, Korea saw a surge in sociologists of social history. Nevertheless, legitimate historical sociology is a very difficult

subfield to practice. One has to have a special skill, i.e., the ability to decipher Chinese, which requires an enormous input on the part of sociologists. Contemporary Chinese sociologists are no exception.

History which was used in sociological analysis in the case of Korea was limited to the past. This means they used historical materials as their primary sources of analysis. In a sense, time was not at the center of sociological analysis. Time has not been treated as "highly fluid social creations", which are "critical to the understanding of social structure and historical transformation" (Wallerstein 1991, p. 3). Time is an entity of multiplicity. Some historians deal with the future (Wagar 1992). The present too, is one such multiplicity. Sociologists tend to pay attention to the present. After all, this tendency has been one of the key factors causing us to divert from history. But if we look at the present from a slightly different angle, it has a lot to do with history. History-relevant sociology is more than taking the past as our subject of research. Ultimately, it concerns a historically conscientious understanding of social reality.

The gap between social change and sociology is not limited to a time dimension alone. Social change brings about a wide range of societal pressures, by which we mean new social problems, needs, demands, conflicts, opportunities, etc. The reality-relevant sociology which we will elaborate in the following paragraphs ought to respond to these social demands from both an academic perspective and a practical point of view.

Increasing social pressures which were derived from social change impose other burdens on sociologists besides the problem of irrelevancy. First, they tend to encourage fragmentation of research and knowledge. To put it nicely, it is diversification and perhaps even specialization. Diversification of research interests is a virtue we commonly praise. For through such diversification we may be in a better position to carry out "concrete" analyses, thereby practicing reality-relevant sociology. Specialty is also a keyword in science to which we all aspire, regardless of how far away we are in our every day academic practice. Generality is equivalent to ambiguity and should be avoided.

However, diversification and specialization themselves do not guarantee the advancement of scholarship. The pitfalls are many. One of the most dangerous is fragmentation--fragmentation of the social world, fragmentation of our interests, and the fragmentation of our knowledge. Fragmentation creates barriers between fragmented sectors. The barriers negate communication and dialogue amongst such sectors. It ultimately blurs our vision of the social world. While we diversify and specialize ourselves, we gradually take distance unconsciously from the underlying assumptions (which must change constantly as society undergoes change) of our discipline and the meaning of what we do. This ultimately has to do with the issue of morality. Morality here does not refer to a moribund call for moralism. It concerns itself with social justice and equity.

Sociology in East Asia has never aspired to be social engineering. Quite to the contrary. It has always aspired to be a moral science in the sense that it has tried to unveil the deep social structural problems of our societies and cast moral questions with the ultimate goal of constructing morally sound societies. Second, increasing societal pressures tend to demand "socially useful knowledge" from sociologists. The tragic antinomy of "pure" versus "applied" sociology evolves from this issue. Aside from the question of how "pure" or how "applied" we speak of it, the antinomy and prolonged debate is unfortunate. The debate has taken us nowhere. Practicality is a virtue over which no sociologist will quibble. We all say theory and practice must be dialectically combined into one. In this context, practicality means something different. Vulgar practicality may lead to an unintended consequence, that is, undermining the disciplinary identity. Sociologists are not obliged to provide society or those who control society with "practical knowledge" (Note that this is equal to specialty narrowly defined).

Another danger which is inherent in so called "applied" sociology might be what we like to call the "secularization of sociology." Sociology from its inception concerned itself with residues (often called civil society) after political scientists claimed power (the state) and economists claimed the market as their territories respectively. Sociology is closest to lay people and to the lay world. In other words, sociology is very secular. Of course all social sciences are secular, but sociology is more so than other disciplines. Paradoxically, sociology is one of the most misunderstood disciplines. As sociology is close to the public, and communication and exchange between sociologists and the public are frequent, the understanding of sociology by the public should be generally proper. Ironically, the reality is to the contrary. The general public do not simply misunderstand our discipline but tend to look down upon it. Sociology is not a lay form of knowledge. It is an institutionalized form of knowledge with a long history and epistemological foundations and tradition. The call for "opening social sciences" and for reconstructing them (Gulbenkian Commission 1996) is quite different from the secularization with which we are concerned here. Are we not undermining our *raison d'être* through secularization? Should we not maintain our authority and dignity?

Relevancy cannot be obtained by providing "socially useful knowledge". Sociological responses to such social demands can make the issue of relevancy irrelevant or tertiary to what we sociologists should do and aspire to do in essence.

It is important to note that East Asian countries are deeply integrated into the world market. Japan and South Korea are frequently referred to as trading states. Since 1978, China has been rapidly incorporated in the world market through its neo-mercantilist policies. As such, they are vulnerable to the vicissitudes of the world market. The vulnerability is quite visible in our everyday

life. Let us take South Korea for example. In 1996, Koreans vividly experienced how deeply Korea (North as well as South) has been dependent upon the capitalist world-market. In early summer, journalists and economic commentators (including some academics) expressed their worry about the Korean economy, highlighting the rapidly increasing trade deficit. Soon this worry expanded and leveled out to become a discourse on "economic crisis," the meaning of which is always ambiguous. The trade deficit was due to a sizeable price fall in one single commodity, i.e. semiconductor chips in the world commodity market. This is a critical feature of the "miraculous" Korean economy.

The point is that without relevancy to the world-system, Korean sociology can be relegated to a narrow epistemology, lacking pertinence to the holistic reality. Korea has been so deeply placed in the capitalist world-system, both in economic and in political terms. This will continue to be so. In this regard, Japan is no different from South Korea. And now China appears to follow the footsteps of its neighbours. Thus, in East Asia as a whole, sociology should be sensitive and relevant to the dynamics of the world-system.

### The Rise of the Indigenization Discourse

Relevancy is closely interconnected with indigenization. When we speak of a relevant sociology in East Asia, another critical issue ought to be discussed. It is the issue of "East Asian" (indigenous) sociology. One can easily discard this issue because what East Asian sociologists do as scholars is East Asian and because East Asian sociology is and should be East Asian. Note that this is already a sort of tautology. Discussion of the issue can be endless and thereby takes us nowhere. But it is not that simple.

More than anything else, the question of what we mean by the phrase, "East Asian", arises. It does not refer to a combination of the characteristics of the three societies. It should be used to refer to some unique identity which is very fluid and ever transformative. In East Asia, identity seems to be very elusive. When someone claims to have captured the "East Asian" identity, they have generally left out many important elements of East Asia. This has a lot to do with the nature of the East Asian regional structure which is very complex because of the contradictory nature of its history of formation. Of course, no region in the world has a simple structure, but we believe that in East Asia the regional structure is much more complex than the case of Africa or Latin America.

In East Asia, nationalistic sentiment is very strong and it stands against the search for an East Asian identity. The critical blow to the East Asian Sinitic world order came around the seventeenth century with the two major wars waged on the Korean peninsula, first the Japanese invasion (1592) and second, the "Manchu Invasion" (1636). Following these wars, there were great

changes in the East Asian regional order (Choi 1996, p. 198). In Japan, the Tokugawa Shogunate rose and in China the Ch'ing dynasty replaced the Ming dynasty. But the Chosun dynasty on the Korean peninsula stood firm without any significant change. The ruling elites in Chosun were successful in keeping the emerging democratic energy under control. In any event, the two wars did irrevocable psychological damage to the Korean people. In addition, the Japanese colonial rule during the first half of this century humiliated the Korean people once more. The scar left in the Korean psyche by these humiliations cannot be easily masked. It is not surprising that nationalism is very strong in Korea.

Interestingly, in China and Japan too, nationalism is very strong. China always claimed its centrality in the world. Chinese have always kept their centrist point of view. A continental center's nationalism is unwarranted. As an interesting aside, the Chinese centrism now seems to have been groundless with the recent findings of East Asian archeology that reveal the fact that the construction of the Chinese civilization was the collective outcome of very diverse "groups" who resided in the territory. The thesis arguing the Chinese origin of the East Asian civilization is now under serious question. Nationalism in China stems from the Japanese invasions and domination over some parts of the Chinese territory in this century. How then can we explain Japanese nationalism? Is nationalism not an ideology of the oppressed? How should one explain the strong nationalism of invaders and oppressors? Are they not supposed to be more benign towards neighboring victims of their aggression in the past? Japan once tried to sever its membership in the Asian region altogether and to join the European imperialist circle. In fact, Japan is the only non-Western colonial power to dominate its neighbors and attempt to reconstruct East Asia under its hegemonic leadership. Should Japanese nationalism be explained by opening forced at the gunpoint by Commodore Perry in 1854 and/or by their emperor's humiliation in front of General McArthur in the summer of 1945?

The collision between the expanding European world-economy and the East Asian regional system involved fierce resistance and violence. The treaties Japan and China had to sign with Europeans were all unequal. But Korea vehemently sustained its closed-door policy and resisted incorporation into the capitalist world-economy. A squadron of three ships from the French naval fleet based in the Pacific was defeated by Koreans in 1866. Koreans burnt down the American armed commercial ship "General Sherman" and fought against American troops in 1871. Oddly, it was Japan that forced Korea to open up its port in 1876. How was it that the same Korea that was so firm in its policy towards the Europeans and actually defeated French and American forces knelt down to the "barbaric" Japan so easily? Perhaps some of the reformist Korean elites saw Japan as a possible model to be emulated, that is, the Japan that absorbed the European shock while making significant domestic reform (Choi 1996, p. 192). Of course, this turned out to be a

misperception. Japan was not at all different from the other foreign powers. What course of action Japan took in the ensuing years needs not be repeated.

We believe that at this moment it is naive to conceptualize an "East Asian" sociology, for there is no kind of regional identity which we can define as "East Asian." Today's regional geopolitical and geoeconomic situation in East Asia very much resembles the situation a century or so ago. All that exists, now and into the foreseeable future, are national sociologies.

This grim diagnosis should not keep us from seeking an East Asian sociology. Because of the lack of the regional identity, there is ample opportunity to pursue a collective identity and build a collective social epistemology. Here we are not talking about parochialism. Quite the contrary. The call for "East Asian" sociology goes beyond constructing a narrow and parochial knowledge. There may be elements of nationalism/regionalism and self-centerism embued in the call. But who can blame us for that? French sociology has elements of "French" (whatever that may imply), and American sociology has elements of "American". It is inevitable. Nonetheless, sociologists in East Asian countries have aspired to be universal. They have aspired to advance theory. And they have aspired to make a unique contribution to our discipline.

With that premise in mind, let us discuss the rise of the indigenization discourse in East Asia. As we analyzed earlier, there is no such thing as "East Asian sociology". Therefore the indigenization discourse should not be discussed in a unitary way. In this paper, we focus on the case of Korea to illustrate the rise of indigenization discourse in the region.

Amongst the community of Korean sociologists, the word "Korean" denotes tension and perhaps animosity in the community. It is a complex, which some Korean sociologists have attempted to disentangle and others have tried to ignore. A struggle amongst Korean sociologists has been waged, in a few isolated instances explicitly but in other instances silently, over the prevailing epistemology (once again we are not arguing this has been unitary) of Korean sociology. Obviously, power and control have been at the bottom of this struggle. Perhaps a more important element involved in the struggle was a struggle against Korean sociologists themselves. In a way, it was a collective reflection or self-criticism on what they do and should do. They have constantly rethought what they have done in the name of sociology. Both the struggle between different epistemologies and the inner struggle were most acute in the 1980s in Korea.

The essence of this issue is about indigenization or, more accurately, about decolonization (this latter term was not used prior the 1990s). Note that the issue of indigenization is very closely related to the issues of relevancy--relevancy to social reality and relevancy to history--which we have already discussed in some length.

In the Korean sociological community, the issue of indigenization has long received its share of attention. For instance, as early as the 1972 Korean

Sociological Association annual meeting, the issue of indigenization was a focal theme. The consensus reportedly drawn from the meeting was that a "methodological and epistemological transformation" was necessary for the indigenization of Korean sociology. In the 1970s the epistemological dependence of Korean sociology on Western (more often than not equivalent to American) sociology began to be seriously questioned. Since then, the issue of indigenization has persisted as one of the most critical issues in the Korean sociological community.

We cannot and should not extrapolate the Korean case to Japan or China, but the context within which a similar kind of indigenization discourse could emerge in Japan and China can be identified. In fact, efforts to nationalize sociology in China can be found since 1930s. The nationalization of sociology in China took the form of "sinicization" which involves the distinctive characteristics of Chinese society, being incorporated into sociology as a discipline. Here, the characteristics of Chinese society should not be reduced to neo-Confucianist terms. Rather, the nationalization of sociology should be based on the "whole range of the national culture of the PRC, which included traditional, modern, national and foreign elements" (Alatas 1996, p. 21). In a related vein, it is interesting to note that the nationalization debate occurred in Taiwan in the 1980s. Sociology in Taiwan was American sociology. Taiwanese sociologists were receptive to the indigenization debate which made its way into most parts of the Third World. Interestingly, Taiwanese sociologists also used the term "sinicization" to define their movement.

In a way, sociology in East Asia is analogous to a child born without labor. It never underwent the painful process of endogenous development. There were no battles over the institutionalization of sociology in East Asia. It was an entity introduced from the outside as we emphasized earlier. Precisely because of the nature of its birth, sociology in East Asia was bound to be distant, and neither indigenous or endogenous. Inevitably, sociology in East Asia had to imitate foreign sociology, be it European or American. Imitating the sociology of others per se represents no major problem. Afterall, knowledge is accumulated through learning. Learning is basically imitating. Creative minds can be cultivated by imitation. So why does imitating Western/American sociology represent a major block in the advancement of indigenous sociology?

Once again in the case of Korea, those who raised questions about the wholesale uncritical adoption of Western ideas and methods (in sum, American sociology) were concerned with "copying" it. Copying leaves no space or opportunity for thinking and reflection. Copying does not allow the development of a "creative mind". It only permits the reproduction of a "captive mind" (Alatas 1972). Worse, it prevents creative minds from emerging and asserting their presence. The problem of copying is the production of a captive mind or, in other words, the eradication of creative minds and the destruction of the potential for originality.

In the case of China, a similar issue and the debate dates back to the 1940s according to the writing of a Chinese sociologist by the name of Fei Hsio-t'ung. He described sociological debates in Chinese universities as "being between pedants showing off their knowledge" and noted that they were based on "facts and theories derived from Western sociology". Because these theoretical debates were divorced from Chinese social reality, arguments were grounded in logic rather than an appeal to facts and did not lead to new questions or new avenues for observation (Alatas 1996, p. 6).

Some obviously consider the call for indigenization to be marginal and unimportant. They quest decolonization. To them, the Third World is an academic colony where Western social science is practiced. Colonial social science is a crucial cultural instrument for facilitating colonialism. The quest for decolonization is thereby the quest for liberating Third World social science from imperial domination. Areas including metatheory, methodology, theory building, empirical research, interpretation, writing, and policy formulation, etc. ought to be liberated.

In addition to the dependence on ideas and theories that are derived from the West, academic dependency has a lot to do with the lack of material wealth and political power. Why sociology emerged in Western Europe in the 19th century, why it consolidated itself in the United States after World War Two, and why sociology in East Asian societies has been inundated with Western (American) discourse can not be appropriately understood unless we take the historical evolution of the world-system and the way in which East Asia has been incorporated into it. This is not the place for a thorough discussion of this issue. At least, we would like to point out that sociology in East Asia has never taken a serious posture or taken concrete steps toward bringing this issue to the center of our analysis. In recent years, there have been a few analysts who took the world-systemic factor into account. But it was always treated as an external factor which somehow had some impact on the internal processes in question.

Dependency reversal is not an easy task for East Asian sociologists. They still tend to utilize ideas and theories which originated from the European countries or the United States. Technological dimensions of academic dependency should not be ignored. Japan may be an exception in this regard, but in the cases of Korea and China little innovation in the development of curricula and instructional materials is reality. Decent textbooks that are locally developed are difficult to come by. Investment in higher education is incomparable to the situation in Europe and North America. The research environment in East Asian universities is dismal compared to that of American and European universities. A few Japanese universities may enjoy an advanced level in terms of research and teaching. It is no surprise therefore that the production of ideas and theoretical models continue to be the activities of sociologists working at research and teaching institutions located in the core of the world-system and that sociologists in East Asia continue to be importers

of them. As Alatas aptly states, there is "a core-periphery relationship in the world social science" (Alatas 1996, p. 12).

### The Quest for the East Asian Identity

History tells us that the great economic powers are also the great social science powers. In the modern world, European (including North American) societies have been the centers of social science. In our introductory remarks, we noted the rise of East Asia in the capitalist world-economy since the 1970s. East Asia as a whole has already entered the semiperipheral zone of the capitalist world-economy. Some argue that at the turn of the century the region will move up to the core of the world-economy. The acquisition of a new status on the ladder of the world economic power hierarchy by East Asian states has many implications, one of which concerns the quest for an East Asian identity. Let us not lose our focus on social knowledge, in particular, sociology.

After its coerced incorporation into the expanding European world-economy, East Asia has taken the path of modernization. To East Asians, modernization meant Westernization. The modernity they have tried to achieve was the modernity of technology, not the modernity of liberation (Wallerstein 1995, chapter 7). In the process, social science was implanted as a superior form of social knowledge. Consequently, rich and long-lasting indigenous forms of social thought were ignored. Historical experiences and cultural practices were relegated to the realm of "non-science." Social and political contexts were treated in a similar way. Thus, the poor fit between Western theory and East Asian realities was inherent. Thereafter sociology in East Asia has unfolded in the form and content of irrelevancy and academic dependency. Irrelevant sociology kept East Asian sociologists from developing ideas and theories that fit local/national/regional realities. Academic dependency forced East Asian sociologists to rely upon ideas that were produced in the European world.

The contemporary call for indigenization in East Asia is a call to overcome irrelevancy and to reverse academic dependency. The call is to decolonize the much Westernized sociological discourse in the region and subsequently to practice relevant sociology. The call for indigenization is a call for creativity and originality.

More than anything else, the call involves the collective quest for an East Asian identity. As we argued earlier, the quest is the outcome of self-reflection rather than self-confidence. Self-reflection was possible because of their economic achievements.

Once again, we run into the very difficult issue of what we mean by "East Asian". East Asia is an amorphous entity. It is a loose category. Its boundary is fuzzy and its composition is very complex. For instance, does Vietnam belong to East Asia? Vietnam used to be part of the perimeter of the Chinese world

order, but today Vietnam is a member of ASEAN which has maintained very different cultural and political orientations in modern times.

At the beginning of the modern era, it is known that China, Korea and Japan interacted very little in terms of commerce or culture (Koh, 1993). It was only after Europeans came to East Asia that the interaction among the three societies increased. East Asia has been deeply influenced by European ideas and culture. Therefore, in the phrase "East Asian", many elements of Europe are imbued. And then there are nationalistic thrusts and underpinnings. "East Asian" is a very elusive phrase. Nevertheless, East Asians are eager to search for an East Asian identity.

There appears to be one strategy (or academic practice) that emerges amongst the proponents of the East Asian identity construction. It is the strategy of revisiting or reinterpreting the East Asian tradition and culture. Proponents of this strategy try to pinpoint useful traits and attributes in traditional Asian concepts and ideas and to reinterpret them. They argue that East Asian indigenous concepts and ideas can be sources of modern theory development (Kim, 1996). Their call is not a call for a return to tradition. Rather, they emphasize the critical accommodation of the East Asian tradition to enrich the contemporary social and human sciences, and examine ways to tie East Asian cultural elements to the modern social world. The increasingly popular neo-Confucianist discourse in the West and in East Asia is a case in point.

The quest for an East Asian identity involves a complex task because what we mean by "East Asian" is never straightforward. As much as East Asia as a region is a complex historical construct, the concept "East Asian" cannot be single-handedly defined. So sociologists in East Asia who advocate the call to indigenization and relevant sociology should always be alert to these issues in their academic activities. They should be constantly aware of the pitfalls that the very concept of indigenization contains. They should realize that indigenization is ultimately about the universalization of sociology. We know that the universalization of sociology in the past meant the universalization of European sociology. Universalism has been Eurocentric. Sociologists in East Asia can make a contribution to universalize sociology only by being indigenous. Indigenization does not collide with the universalization of social science. They are one and the same project. What is required on the part of practitioners of sociology is "openness" (Gulbenkian Commission 1996).

Even though the future has never been entirely alien to sociology, it has generally eluded serious sociological research throughout much of the history of the discipline. Nevertheless, concern with the future is very close to the heart of many people in East Asia, including sociologists. In fact, the hopes and fears of the people in East Asia hinge so much upon the prospects of the coming century that the students of sociology in this region may well share this concern. The pride that East Asians take in their economic and political achievements

should be respected. But East Asians must guard themselves from becoming arrogant and self-complacent. The emerging discourse on "Asianism" should be very carefully approached in order not to repeat the catastrophic path that Japan has taken. The spectre of early twentieth century Asianism, advocated by Japanese elites, is very alive in the consciousness of contemporary Asians. We must be aware that Asianism has many pitfalls. The return to Asia should not be confused with an expanded view of nationalism. We must guard ourselves against any vision and idea, suggested by Asians, that has even a remote chance of turning itself into an expansionist, hegemonic, or supremacy-seeking project. Before sociologists in East Asia embark on any academic or practical project now and in the next century, they must first maintain an attitude of humility (the age-old virtue of East Asian scholars) and self-reflection. With this in mind, sociologists in East Asia ought to critically and objectively assess the past achievements of East Asian countries and to realize potentialities and limitations of East Asia in constructing an humane and prosperous world order.

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## PART 1 INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF SOCIOLOGY IN EAST ASIA