

Contemporary Social Changes from the Perspective of the Sociological Society of West Japan: The Society's Message to the World

Sociological Society of West Japan

1. Current Status of the Sociological Society of West Japan and its Characteristics

1.1 Overview of Its Organization and Activities

Launched in 1946 as a sociological association for Western Japan, the Sociological Society for West Japan currently consists of 212 members (as of 2012) and is composed of sociology researchers from universities and research institutes primarily in Kyushu, Okinawa, Yamaguchi, and Hiroshima Prefectures. But its members can be found spread all around the country, including in the Chugoku, Shikoku, Kinki, and Kanto Regions. Its current organizational structure consists of one chairperson (TOKUNO Sadao, Kumamoto University), two executive directors (YAMAMOTO Tsutomu, Prefectural University of Hiroshima and TAKANO Kazuyoshi, Kyushu University), and six directors. It levies annual membership dues of 5,000 yen.

The objective of the society is to work to promote, develop, and disseminate sociological research through the mutual cooperation of its members. The Department of Administrative Affairs of the Sociological Society of West Japan has been set up within the Department of Sociological Research in the School of Letters, Kyushu University in order to execute its affairs.

The society carries out the following sorts of activities for the sake of achieving the objective stated above. (1) Holding meetings: Meetings are held once a year, and consist of theme sessions that have been set for each year as well as free reports. (2) Issuing publications: The Journal of the Sociological Society of West Japan is issued once a year (300 copies/printing), and is currently on its tenth edition. The Sociological Society of West Japan Newsletter is issued three times a year (250 copies/printing), and is currently on its 139th edition, and the society has also published the Roster of Members of the Sociological Society of West Japan. (3) Holding seminars, lectures, and other functions. (4) Joint investigative research: The society is currently implementing "the Survey of Member Attitudes towards the Great East Japan Earthquake" for 3.11 as of 2011. (5) Other activities that the society deems appropriate.

1.2 Characteristics of the Society

The characteristics of the society can be broadly divided up into two traits. The first is its characteristic of grounding its research fields in local areas. Since its members frequently work in sections of Western Japan based primarily around Kyushu, much of its research subject matters are based on the social phenomena and social events that occur in the Western Japan area where the members' research interests and research subjects lie. Of course, there are also members who incisively delve into research on sociological issues taking place all around Japan or at the global level, as well as into sociological theories and social research methods. But oftentimes members affiliated with societies that are based in local areas such as the Sociological Society of West Japan

conduct research that consciously or unconsciously is focused on local areas.

In addition, many of the research fields noted from the free reports at the society's meetings and publications of individual's research papers deal with social phenomena related to changes in the social structures of local communities. These include research on: (1) regional transformations and changes in the structures of the daily lives of residents, such as depopulation and the aging of the populations in rural villages in the Kyushu and Chugoku Regions, (2) welfare issues for the elderly and support with child rearing following in the wake of the aging of the populations and declining birthrates in the Kyushu and Chugoku Regions, (3) changes in the structures of people's daily lives following in the wake of community formation and relocation in regional cities in the Kyushu and Chugoku Regions, (4) issues with social stratification and homelessness in provincial cities, (5) issues with race and ethnicity in cities, (6) issues with local communities in Okinawa, (7) local pollution and environmental issues centered around Minamata disease, and (8) volunteer and NPO activities in local communities.

The second characteristic of the society is that many of its researchers employ research methods that have an exceptionally strong methodologically positivistic bent to them. Many of them are involved in the local nature of the aforementioned research fields, and strive to construct mid-range theories by adopting empirical research methods based around field studies. This methodological characteristic could be described as a traditional feature of the Sociological Society of West Japan. The claim could be made that this is because the research methods that were set up by the society's senior members have been passed down to their disciples, and their disciples' disciples. This tendency is particularly pronounced among researchers who were influenced by SUZUKI Hiroshi, who is an honorary member of the society. Yet even as it works to pass down excellent traditional methodologies the society also makes great efforts in order to voraciously absorb new ones. Excellent case examples of research results are already being seen from researchers in mathematical sociology and temporal sociology.

The above issues have been integrated within the special feature themes in the *Journal of the Sociological Society of West Japan*, which is the society's journal (as well as in the theme sessions at its meetings). The special feature themes from each year of the *Journal of the Sociological Society of West Japan* are listed below. The themes were "Family and Welfare" in its initial edition in 2003, "Sociological Approaches to Norms" in the second edition in 2004, "Professionalism in Social Research and Sociological Theory" in the third edition in 2005, "Natural and Urban Environment" in the fourth edition in 2006, "Aging Society Analyses in Japanese Society: New Developments" in the fifth edition in 2006, "Disparities in Society and Social Connections" in the sixth edition in 2008, "Risk and Social Capital" in the seventh edition in 2009, "Sociology for the 'New' Social Problems" in the eighth edition in 2010, "Approaches to Modern Society Through Sociology of Time" in the ninth edition in 2011, and "The Present Situation of 'New' Towns and Villages" in the tenth edition in 2012.

1.3 The Society's Contributions to Society

Many of the society's researchers specialize in sociology that is connected to the fields of local

challenges and social problems. As a result, they frequently collaborate, cooperate, and perform joint research and so forth with local municipalities and local grassroots groups that are working to address local challenges and social problems. The results from this are actively consulted for reports in the mass media. What is more, the society's members contribute to society to an outstanding degree by taking part in a variety of committees held at various different levels of government as chairperson and members. Welfare-related researchers in particular have been strengthening their partnerships with regional social welfare councils and have played a central role in the formulation of regional welfare plans at the prefectural and municipal levels. Moreover, just like with the members researching social problems, there are numerous members who are involved in formulating regional development plans in different areas. What is more, some of the members also play a leading role in launching local grassroots groups and active organizations in the aim of combining research with practical activities. Examples of this include taking part in a practical group that supports the homeless in Kitakyushu City, as well as support for organic farming and a movement to ship produce straight from the farm in Kyushu.

As this demonstrates, for many of the society's members the gap between social practice and sociological research is an extremely narrow one. In this sense, the society could be described as a sociological association that is forging a real connection with the real world of society.

(TOKUNO Sadao)

2. History of the Sociological Society of West Japan

As can be understood from its name, the Sociological Society of West Japan is a regional academic society for sociology that takes Western Japan as its area of operations. The society currently consists of 212 members, and it is a regional academic society from Japan that has held more than 70 meetings. It boasts the longest running history of any such regional academic society.

The society was established immediately after World War II in 1946. Two people who played a leading role in its establishment were KURAUCHI Kazuta, who taught intellectual sociology and cultural sociology from before the war at Kyushu Imperial University, as well as AKIBA Takashi, who lectured at Kyushu University back in those days. Nor can the efforts of UEDA Kazuo and KISHIKAWA Yasuharu, who were pupils of Kurauchi's, towards this end be overlooked either. A preparatory committee was launched in August 1946 by the four men, and the first meeting of the Western Sociological Society was held on October 24, 1946 at Kyushu University. In addition to people affiliated with Kyushu University at the time, others who took part included DOCHOKU Isamu, TOKUNAGA Shintaro, CHIKAZAWA Keiichi, and NAKAI Toraichi, who worked as teachers in Kumamoto, Nagasaki, Miyazaki, and Hiroshima, respectively. Kurauchi served as the society's first chairperson. The number of members came to 22 people in total, of which participation by university professors, graduate students, lawyers, newspaper reporters, members of the House of Peers, prefectural government workers, and high school teachers was seen. At first the holding of the annual meetings was overseen every other year by Kyushu University, but as the participating members increased in number these came to be frequently held in regions outside of

Fukuoka Prefecture.

But as a result of reforms to the School Education Act through the educational system reforms from 1947, national and public educational institutions such as national universities were organized as universities under the new system. This ushered in the first major turning point for the society. This is because a state of affairs came about wherein the increase in the number of posts for sociology professors that resulted from the establishment of universities under the new system led to influential members of the committee being transferred out to other regions one after another. At this time members like Tokunaga moved to Kyushu University, Chikazawa and Ueda moved to Yamaguchi University, and Kurauchi (who occupied a leadership role), Akiba, Dochoku, and others moved to Osaka University, Aichi University, Yokohama National University. Back when the meetings were initially being held they were convened twice a year in spring and autumn, but from the tenth meeting in 1952 onward these came to be held once a year in May.

KITANO Seichi, who performed research on the family and agricultural villages, was appointed to Kyushu University to serve as Kurauchi's successor. Kitano also played a central role as Kurauchi's successor in terms of his activities at the society, where he cultivated numerous followers. Moreover, in 1954 he initiated the first publication of the society's journal *Research Correspondence*, which had been pending for many years. The first mimeograph-printed edition included articles such as the "Message on the Start of Publication" by Kitano, "Mourning the Late Dr. Akiba" by Kurauchi, "Thoughts of the Society" by IWAMA Iwao, "My Aspirations" by Chikazawa, "Notes from Research on Human Relations" by WATASE Hiroshi, "Outlines of Various Research Methods" by NAITO Kanji, and "The Present State of Sociological Research Departments" by OYAMA Hikoichi. In this endeavor Kitano gained the members' appreciation for enhancing the journal's content even as he pointed out the financial challenges in doing so. Afterwards, the issuance of one issue of *Research Correspondence* a year was steadily promoted up through 1972 under the oversight of the university that hosted the meeting for that year. In addition, FURUNO Kiyoto, whose major field of study was religious sociology, took up a position at Kyushu University in 1949 as Akiba's successor. He had an impact on religious and ethnic studies at the society and played an active role as a member under Chairperson Kitano. As for people not affiliated with Kyushu University, Chikazawa from Yamaguchi University, Oyama from Kagoshima University, TAKAKURA Mataji from the University of Miyazaki, and others also made significant contributions as driving forces pushing the society's activities forward. In 1951 Naito, who had done research on French sociology at Kobe University, took up his post as Akiba's successor at Kyushu University.

Kitano, who had been chairperson in 1956, was transferred to Osaka University, and so Naito took over this role thereafter. Since Naito's tenure at Kyushu University lasted until he retired, the period in which he served as chairperson lasted for a long time. However, the Naito period was one in which generations of sociologists who had studied in the prewar and postwar periods were both active together. On top of this, it was also an era in which realistic research was vigorously carried out because it was an age beset with problems such as juvenile delinquency, depopulation, urban issues, pollution, atomic bomb victims, Minamata disease, and others that came about through the social restoration following Japan's defeat in the war and its post-war industrialization. In a sense

this was the society's initial developmental stage. This was also a period in which the society brimmed with dynamism as a regional academic society through the involvement of sociologists like NAKAMURA Masao, HARA Hiroshi, YAMAMOTO Yozo, Suzuki, KOMORI Tetsuo, YAGI Saichi, NOGUCHI Takashi, KINOSHITA Kenji, and MARUYAMA Masami. It produced outstanding research representative of Japan, such as Oyama's Research on Family Structures in the Nansei Islands (1960), Noguchi's A Study of the Sociology of Gurvitch (1961), YAMAOKA Eiichi's Study on Sociology in Fishing Villages (1965), Suzuki's Urban World (1970), and Chikazawa's Studies on Suicide (1972).

But the 28th meeting that was held in May 1970 amidst the throes of a student movement was a time of crisis for the Western Sociological Society. This arose out of dissatisfaction with Chairperson Naito's lengthy tenure. At this meeting the chairperson's term of office became an issue, and Chairperson Naito announced his intention to resign. This served as a springboard for the establishment of "the Preparatory Committee for Reform Issues for the Society", and the establishment in the following year of "the Special Committee to Revise the Society's Regulations" led by Committee Chair Yamaoka. At the 30th general meeting in 1972 the Western Sociological Society's bylaws were revised extensively and its name was changed from the Western Sociological Society to the Sociological Society of West Japan. At this time, Chikazawa, who had enthusiastically supported the society since its days as the Western Sociological Society, was selected to serve as its new chairperson. Next year's meeting held at Fukuoka University was the first held as the Sociological Society of West Japan. The publication of Research Correspondence, which had continued for 19 years concurrently with this, was discontinued as of its 24th edition. Since Research Correspondence combined both research notes and society reports it had the shortcoming that it did not function well as an outlet for news. After it was discontinued, the once-annual Collection of Presentation Abstracts and the twice-annual Sociological Society of West Japan News were published.

The society began interacting with sociologists from within Okinawa Prefecture as a result of the reversion of Okinawa in 1972, and its 33rd meeting in 1975 was held at the University of the Ryukyus. Researchers from the University of the Ryukyus and Okinawa International University joined the society, making it a society with members spread across five prefectures in the Chugoku Region and eight prefectures in the Kyushu and Okinawa Regions. In this period graduate students from prewar generations and postwar generations, particularly the baby boom generation, had joined as members, thereby raising the number of members to more than 150 people.

From the latter half of the 1970s until the latter half of the 1990s the society was primarily led by Suzuki, who took up a position at Kyushu University as Kitano's successor. Suzuki served as its chairperson for six years starting in 1981, then again for another four years from 1996. He excelled in both theory and investigation, and moved forward with his studies by advocating for his own "middle range theory." Not only did he write Urban World (1970) and Studies in Urbanization (1986), but he also fostered a great many adherents who in turn have come to serve as core members underpinning the current society. In this sense it would have to be said that the mark left by Suzuki was enormous.

By the year 2000 there had been long-standing pent-up demand for a journal ever since the publication of *Research Correspondence* had been discontinued. So in 2003 an editorial board was organized under Chairperson OGAWA Takeo that published a long-awaited, full-fledged academic journal entitled the *Journal of the Sociological Society of West Japan*. The first edition contained five papers that formed a special feature entitled “Families and Welfare”, as well as five contributed papers, two “Reports from Local Governments”, and two “Reports from Fields”. This Journal has passed down the Sociological Society of West Japan’s tradition of placing emphasis on both theory-based studies and experimental studies. At present, ten editions have been published thus far by adhering to this fundamental policy.

(TSUJI Shoji)

3. Assets that the Sociological Society of West Japan Can Share with Sociologists around the World

As indicated above, research by the members of the Sociological Society of West Japan covers a wide range of interests. Of which, two facets should be set forth as being assets that the Sociological Society of West Japan can share, particularly with sociologists around the world. These are: (1) clarifications of certain universal social problems that have arisen along with industrialization, and (2) analyses of the social problems and familial and regional structures unique to the regions of West Japan that have historically taken shape. Such research can most certainly be further enriched by being shared with sociologists around the world and being subjected to comparative studies.

In regards to the first phenomenon (social problems arising along with industrialization), the positioning of the West Japan Region has been deeply connected with Japan’s process of industrialization. Throughout the modernization that took place starting from the Meiji Period, this region—along with Tohoku, Hokuriku, and Hokkaido—has constituted a “peripheral” area that has supplied Japan’s “core” areas with various different resources. The West Japan Region serves as a “pool” of labor and the food that sustains this labor force. Additionally, it has also continuously supplied the three major metropolitan regions that constitute the “core” of Japan (Tokyo Metropolitan Region, Osaka Metropolitan Region, and Nagoya Metropolitan Region) with coal as a source of energy and iron, chemicals, and other goods that serve as raw materials for industry.

This positioning as a “peripheral” area in the course of Japan’s industrialization was behind the depopulation of the agricultural villages and the decline of local communities in West Japan. Moreover, this rapid industrialization gave rise to various urban problems, while also causing problems with the environment and social exclusion as symbolized by Minamata disease. The energy revolution in which petroleum was substituted in place of coal was directly tied in with problems of poverty in coal mining regions, while the rapid advances of deindustrialization and globalization brought about problems of poverty and social exclusion in industrial cities that produced raw materials. The members of the Sociological Society of West Japan have analyzed the extents of these problems and their constituent mechanisms through experimental studies that

conducted fieldwork in rural villages and cities in the search for clues to resolving these problems. We believe that this experience carries significance not only for sociologists in countries and regions that are in the process of industrializing, but also for sociologists in advanced regions that have been exposed to the waves of deindustrialization and globalization. As such, we are seeking to promote exchanges of research.

The second phenomenon consists of analyses of factors that are unique to the West Japan Region. This distinctiveness is significant in two ways. The first is in the sense of the unique principles of social construction that have formed society's substructure that have taken shape since the Meiji Period despite fluctuations over the course of modernization. Just like with the other regions of Japan, characteristic principles of social construction (familial structures, community structures, religious ceremonies, etc.) exist within the West Japan Region—which includes Okinawa. Studies in such domains serve as reaffirmations of the diversity of Japanese society, and are something that we should convey to the world. This is surely to be of great interest to sociologists from around the world whose interests are drawn to Japanese society.

The other distinctive quality involves historical experiences—especially the personal experiences consequent upon warfare—as well as the post-war social problems that these entail. Symbols of this include Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and also Okinawa. All of these are within the Sociological Society of West Japan's area. As such, issues like the significance of people's personal experiences of being bombed, the discrimination and social exclusion suffered by bomb victims, and the social problems caused by the presence of military bases continue to be research subjects that warrant analysis by the sociologists of West Japan. At the same time, the society must also give thought to universal solutions to problems that go above and beyond this historical distinctiveness. These will be further improved by exchanging research with sociologists from around the world, and will serve as an asset to humanity.

4. Considerations based upon the Great East Japan Earthquake (3.11)

The Great East Japan Earthquake was a complex disaster of an unprecedented scale that involved overlapping earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear power plant disasters. While the Great East Japan Earthquake is a historical phenomenon, it is also an occurrence that has presented us with problems in the “peripheral” and “core” areas, as well as universal problems that surpass the region's geographical or historical distinctiveness.

The disaster dramatically laid bare social contradictions that had been concealed. Just like with wars and recessions, the risks from disasters are not necessarily evenly distributed. The risks from the disaster and life in evacuation shelters weighed heavily on those people who are referred to as the “socially vulnerable.” This designation includes elderly people with poor mobility, children, people with physical disabilities, homeless people who had been living in abandoned vehicles next to embankments, foreigners who are not proficient in Japanese, and sick people with chronic illnesses that had to evacuate.

Such injustices and inequalities do not represent phenomena that manifested themselves only at

the individual level. Problems such as radioactive contamination and the loss of hometowns in which people were accustomed to living as a result of the nuclear power plant accident also brought injustices and inequalities at the regional level out into the light of day. The accident at the nuclear power plant dealt considerable damage everywhere across Tohoku, but particularly in Fukushima Prefecture. Yet it was the Tokyo Metropolitan Region that consumed the electricity produced at this nuclear power plant.

The unfair relationships in a regional sense between “peripheral” and “core” areas are linked with the problem of the exclusion of the socially vulnerable at the individual level. This most certainly overlaps with inferences that we have deduced from our analyses of social problems in the West Japan Region to date. The depopulation of rural districts, the impoverishment of communities, disparities between urban and rural regions, problems with pollution and the suffering and hardship this forces onto some people, the exposure to radiation that resulted from the systematic violence that is warfare and the social exclusion that bomb victims have faced, the concealment of structures of exclusion, and other such issues differ in terms of whether they are “chronic” or “acute.” The numerous sets of sociological problems that have occurred in the West Japan Region are sure to have many aspects that display structural similarities with 3.11 and Fukushima. In this sense, 3.11 and Fukushima are connected to Minamata, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Okinawa in that these function as symbols.

MUTO Ruiko, a victim of the Great East Japan Earthquake, commented that, “We are ogres of the Tohoku, quietly burning flames of wrath,” which she followed up with the statement below (<http://hairoaction.com/?p=774>).

We need to imagine the world existing on the other side of the outlet that we casually insert our plug into. Think about how our convenience and prosperity are built on discrimination and sacrifice. Nuclear power plants exist on the other side.

3.11 appears to have made us recognize anew the regional structural problems between “peripheral” and “core” areas, the problem of social exclusion that is interlinked with this, and the structures that conceal this. In actuality, 3.11 had an enormous impact on the way members of the Sociological Society of West Japan lived their lives, as well as on their research interests. We will bring this paper to a close by introducing some of the data demonstrating this.

The Sociological Society of West Japan carried out “the Questionnaire on the Great East Japan Earthquake and the Accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant” with the goal of revealing what types of behavior 3.11 produced in its members and what sorts of interests they adopted as a result. The survey period lasted from May to June 2012, with responses received from 90 people (for a valid response rate of 42.5%).

According to the survey, only 7.8% of the members had once lived in the stricken regions. Members with family or close friends who suffered damage from the earthquake or accident at the nuclear power plant amounted to 28.9%. The majority of the society’s members live in West Japan. What is more, Fukuoka City, where the society’s Office of General Affairs is situated, is located

more than 1,000 km away from the stricken region. The members experienced the event as a “far-off occurrence.”

But 3.11 had an impact on their “awareness” and “behavior”. For example, in response to the question “Did 3.11 change the way you live your life?” 8.9% responded that this “Changed significantly” and 54.4% that it “Changed somewhat”, meaning that 63.3% responded that it changed how they live their lives. Yet not many of them had performed studies or provided assistance onsite in the stricken regions, with 24.4% of them doing so in relation to the earthquake or tsunami disasters and 8.9% of them doing so in relation to the accident at and damage from the nuclear power plant. This is perhaps connected to the fact that many of the members have not directly carried out research on natural disasters or in relation to nuclear power. When it comes to experience with research on disasters prior to 3.11, a mere 1.1% replied “I have performed research on both natural disasters and in relation to nuclear power”, while 13.3% replied “I have performed research on natural disasters” and 3.3% said “I have performed research related to nuclear power”, At 82.2%, the vast majority of respondents replied “I have not done either”.

But at the time of the survey members who said that they “are interested in performing research” demonstrated high levels for both “This earthquake and tsunami disaster” at 80.0% and “The accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant” at 83.4%. This is a clear indication of the fact that 3.11 stirred up interest in doing research in many of the society’s members.

The assistance for the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of 1995 dramatically raised social recognition of “volunteers”, and this year later came to be known as the “first year of the volunteer era”. Perhaps 3.11 and Fukushima will serve as an opportunity to change “how we live our lives and our interests” in the aim of overhauling the social structures that thus far have stipulated how society should function and how we go about our day to day lives. Those of us who study sociology in West Japan hope that this will be the case, and are taking action on our own. Moreover, it is our intention to share this with sociologists around the world.

(3 & 4: INAZUKI Tadashi and KAKU Kazunori)

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