The Problem of "Kanjinshugi no Shakai [Contextualism Society] Nihon"

Hitoshi Mabuchi

「間人主義の社会日本」にみられる問題点

馬　渕　　　仁

Abstract

Hamaguchi Eshun is regarded as one of the most influential academics who has spoken about Japanese society and culture. His most famous proposition is kanjin-shugi (contextualism), which was presented in the 1980s. While his ideas were evaluated highly by many, some questions and doubts have also been expressed. This paper takes the latter position and criticizes Hamaguchi's idea from four aspects, which provide a significant problem consciousness in the discussion of Japanology, especially as the validity of the so-called Japanese system is under serious exmamination these days.

Key words: collectivism, individualism, contextualism, Japanology

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　濱口恵俊は、日本文化について、現在最も活発に発言をしている研究者のひとりだが、彼のキーアイディアは、『間人主義』である。80年代に提出されて以来、多くの論者が、その概念としての意義を高く評価する一方、同概念に疑念を挟む議論も少なからず展開されてきた。本論では、後者の視点に立ち、当時あまり顧みられなかった論評を紹介しつつ、今なお有効とされる、濱口の概念を4つの角度から批判する。ひいてはそれが、日本型システムの再考を求められている現在、日本型システムそのものが真に存在したのかという『問い』への、答えを提供する糸口に繋がると考えるからである。

キーワード：集団主義、個人主義、間人主義、日本文化論

Although it was written more than a decade ago, *Kanjinshugi no Shakai Nihon* by Hamaguchi Eshun is still regarded as one of the most influential books among Japanology literature. Especially the idea that the author revealed in his book, contextualism, has been used in various papers and books. Recently, Hamaguchi himself promoted his idea again to the public (1993, 1996). As he has become a leading scholar in this field, it is very worthwhile to study his original concept, Kanjinshugi, from the perspective of the current socio-cultural studies. Examining his idea should also provide some useful aspects in comparative sociology.

Before Hamaguchi, Hsu and Kimura took special notice of the relationship among people in Japanese society (1972). Hamaguchi developed their views and brought the concept of *Kanjin*, which literally means between people. He said that people in Western society believe in individualism; in contrast, Japanese people believe in *Kanjinshugi* (contextualism in English according to Hamaguchi). He defined his Kanjinshugi as "Japanese people are aware of themselves only in relationship with others and they regard that relationship as a part of themselves" (pp. 5-6). He criticized Nakane's *vertical society* (1967) and Doi's Amae (1971), saying that they did not grasp Japanese society thoroughly. He also proposed to look at Japanese society from his Kanjinshugi (p.6), which had been called corporatism by Wagatsuma (1986).

Hamaguchi compares Kanjinshugi to Individualism as follows: a Kanjinshugi society has three attributes; they are mutual dependence, mutual reliance, and regard for interpersonal relation as an end in itself. In contrast an Individualism society has different attributes; they are self reliance, ego-centeredness, and regard for interpersonal relations as a means to develop them (Hamaguchi 1977). His idea has been welcomed by various people (Iwata 1982, Sengoku 1982). It is also said that Hamaguchi's writings appear more academic than his predecessors for he studied socio-psychology, thus he succeeded in presenting a new concept and methodology. He seemed to pathfind the new paradigm of Japanology. However, is it really so? In this paper, four distinguishing characteristics of his Kanjinshugi are pointed out and examined.

As his methodology, Hamaguchi proposed etic instead of emic (pp. 227-229). It is rated highly. For instance, Thomae (1979) mentioned "Western middle-class conceptualization cannot be applied to Japanese society", and Yamaguchi and Brinston (1980) said "He used psychometric techniques quite well." Hamaguchi often said that etic, which is provided by people who observe the target society from outside, cannot offer a good standard to examine that society; but that emic, which come from natives of the society, can present good criterion with which people compare one society

to the others (p. 228). However, is emic the best and only tool as he said? In contrast to Thomae above, Mouer and Sugimoto (1986) pointed out that "What Hamaguchi and others are upholding in their exclusion of Western analytic concepts is their right to be themselves as they would like to be seen." Even Hamaguchi himself said that emic contain personal experiences (Sugimoto and Mouer 1987. p. 32). One of the problems is that with sticking with emic, Non-Western people cannot use many sociological concepts, for they mostly developed in Western countries, and people lose the way to express their findings to people in other societies because translation depends on etic rather than emic. It must be recognized that emic and etic both have their merits and limitations. As Befu (1987) said, the important thing is to use both of them properly and critically.

The second character of Hamaguchi's theory is that his comparison is almost always between Japanese society and Western society. [Sometimes Hamaguchi compares Western society to Eastern Asian society, and in this case the country like China is in the same category as Western society (1985).] Kashima and Triandis (1986) supported Hamaguchi and said "This characterization of the Japanese-American contrast has much convincing evidence." We, however, must be careful when Hamaguchi generalized all phenomena too simply, for example, said that Western society is the society of rugged individualism while Japanese is contextual Kanjin society (p. 8). Maruyama (1984) said that many Westerners practice contextual relations, and it is not an entirely alien concept for Westerners. Ueno (1987) claims that we cannot put all Western countries in one category, and Mouer (1987) said that how much societies are individual and contextual is a matter of degree; in other words we can see both of them in any society. In addition, there is a question whether the Japanese can observe Western society just as well as the Japanese do their own society. If Hamaguchi believes this is possible, then it is a contradiction because of what he said about emic and etic.

The next point is that Hamaguchi regards Japanese people as a whole in his book. This is not acceptable. Befu (1987) warned it is dangerous to assume the Japanese are just homogeneous and Sugimoto and Mouer (1982) claim the existence of various classes in Japanese society. Intaratai (1987) said to what extent we can apply the Kanjinshugi model in Japanese society should be different among Japanese historical periods, and Neustupny (1987) pointed out the necessity to see that Japanese society is not stationary but changing. Strangely, even Hamaguchi sometimes admitted that nowadays the youth in Japan are different from older people (p. 113) and that we could find some individualism in Japanese society, although he called it pseudo-individualism (1980).

Finally, Hamaguchi seems to praise the superiority of Kanjinshugi against the individualism. He criticized Benedict's *sin and shame* concept (1967) and rated highly Bendasan's "Nihonkyo = Japanism or peoplism" (1971). Of course, we could correct Benedict's theory, but when Hamaguchi said that Japan does not need Westernization any more (p. 123) and that Japan must export the spirit of "wa = harmony" (p. 56); I cannot help feeling the danger of the impact of what he says especially when so-called Japanese neo-nationalists are provoking the people in Asian countries the wrong way. Hamaguchi also assumes that individualism worked to speed the progress of the disease of civilization, and that Japanese companies succeeded in the USA and UK because of their groupism (p. 129). As there are a lot of completely opposite facts and phenomena reported, I am afraid that Hamaguchi still cannot avoid episodeism altogether.

The idea of Kanjinshugi was examined from four aspects: its methodology, its target nations in his comparison, its holistic view toward Japanese society, and its episodeism. As mentioned at the beginning of the paper, Hamaguchi still actively speaks and writes on Japanology (1995, 1997). It seems that he has tried to respond to those criticism above. To see whether he successively defends his previous ideas or he smartly alters them would be our next task, which requires a more sophisticated analysis based on the current social theories of not only the studies of Japanology but also the postmodernism, and globalization.

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