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Considering Contemporary Forms and Meanings of the Social : The Anthropology of Europe

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Considering Contemporary Forms and Meanings of the Social: The Anthropology of Europe

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This volume has been compiled as a result of an international workshop, ‘The Anthropology of Europe and its Extending Horizons’, held on January 29, 2011 at the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka. Prior to this workshop, an inter-university research project titled ‘What It Means to Be “Social”: A Study of the Anthropology of Europe’ was held and most of the members of that project participated in this workshop¹⁾.

In the workshop we considered contemporary forms of social bonds and concepts of ‘social’ in the anthropological study of Europe. The present volume aims to seek a new epistemological approach for this topic and also a new way of thinking about contemporary society. We can see that the advance of globalization has brought about a shift in the framework of our ways of life, which means that today’s society needs new conceptual frameworks.

In this introduction, I will first explain how the current anthropology of Europe is placed in the discipline of anthropology, and how it has developed in Japan up to the present. I will then explain how the concept of ‘social’ became the focus of our interest and the subject of this volume.

1. Europe and anthropological studies

In the field of modern classical anthropology after Malinowski, Europe was not regarded as an ‘anthropological’ research field. Susan Parman wrote in *Europe in the Anthropological Imagination*, a volume compiled mainly for younger students in 1998:

The phrase “anthropology of Europe” is considered by many to be an oxymoron, or self-contradictory. Anthropologists are supposed to study the exotic other [...] This other, the object of anthropological study, is conceived of, implicitly or explicitly, as the non-West. To study Europe is considered problematic as an anthropological project [...] (Parman 1998: 1)

Under such circumstances anthropological studies of Europe gradually accumulated from the 1950s through the 1970s. But in the mid-1980s, these studies of Europe were recognized as forming a sub-field in the discipline of anthropology. This, of course, was not unrelated to the trends of thought of those days. In the 1970s anthropologists began

to take an active interest in world-system issues. This trend resonated with the situation of the world condition at that time. Many formerly colonized countries had become independent and new political and economical relations were beginning to take form, including those newly independent countries.

As a corollary, anthropology was forced to face this new situation and redefine the objects of its study. The people that anthropologists went to research were no longer the exotic Other, but belonged to the same world as the researchers. At this moment, a turning point in the discipline, the anthropological study of Europe was recognized as a sub-field of the discipline. In this regard, 1986 was a notable year as it was in this year that the Society for the Anthropology of Europe was established as a sub-unit of the American Anthropological Association. In the same year, two epoch-making volumes in the future course of anthropological studies were published: *Writing Culture*, edited by James Clifford and George Marcus, and *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, edited by George Marcus and Michael Fischer.

Discussions inspired by the two volumes lasted some ten years among anthropologists and scholars of the related disciplines of human and social sciences. One of the subjects was the hegemonic relation of the researcher to the researched. Hierarchy had always imposed on the relationship of the researcher and the researched, and the hegemonic position was always attributed to the West. It was noted that the three elements of researcher, self and Western were bound as the subject which formed a triad that contrasted with another triad—that of the researched, other, and non-Western. The two sets together created a binary opposition which strongly bolstered the position of the Western category. This very structure has long underlain anthropological studies and has continued, at least in part, up to the present.

Throughout the 1990s anthropologists argued heatedly over post-colonialism. Scholars engaged in European studies also took part in these discussions, and pointed out that anthropological studies have unconsciously created and developed the Western conception (see ex. Asad *et al.* 1997). Anthropology has, in other words, played a role as a cultural device to conceptualize ‘otherness’ in Western culture for most of its history (Parman 1998: 2).

We need to overcome this rigid frame of anthropology. For this purpose we should recognize that the two sets of triads do not create a binary opposition, but that each of the three pairs have their own significance. This recognition leads us to call into question the classical anthropological standpoint—one based on the premise that the research object is far removed from the researcher and should be researched using a holistic approach.

How did anthropologists of the past study Europe? If we look back at early anthropological studies of Europe, we see there are certain tendencies in classical anthropological thought. Two features were apparent, especially in European studies, until the 1970s: first, the preferred research areas were small communities located far from urban areas; second, the Mediterranean was a preferred research area for research on Europe. One could say that these studies searched for otherness in Europe and found it, not in urban industrial areas, but in rural idyllic areas, where anthropological fieldwork

was carried out. However, such research resulted in seeking more and more peripheral areas of Europe and focusing only on the rural aspects of Europe.

Jeremy Boissevain referred to this tendency as the ‘tribalization of Europe’, and pointed out that we should take up the very complexity of Europe as our subject since it is Europe’s complexity that is precisely what makes it a fascinating and important area of research (Boissevain 1974; 1975).

Since the 1970s, issues concerning the world-system and the field of political economy as subjects of research have increasingly drawn the attention of anthropologists. Additionally, there is ‘the growing awareness that anthropology is the study of all mankind, not just of primitive, tropical or non-Western man’ (Boissevain 1975: 11). Following such interests, anthropologists entered into arguments over critical theories of ethnographical description and post-colonialism. In the course of the post-colonial discussions, anthropologists have commenced to rethink others as their object of study. The others of the contemporary world are no longer people who live far away and have nothing to do with us; we now share a common world.

Now the anthropology of the contemporary world is becoming quite different from classical anthropology. The issue is not only complexity. Since people of different backgrounds co-exist and pursue different lifestyles, anthropologists cannot regard their objects of research as a fully integrated cultural whole. Paul Rabinow and others have observed that:

What is actualized or emergent has nothing to do with whatever totality, but with the combination of different elements, hence with an assemblage, that creates new conjunctures that lead to new or at least different dynamics. It is circumstantial and in motion (Rabinow *et al.* 2008: 79).

2. Anthropological views of Europe from Japan

In this section, I will give an overview of anthropological and ethnological studies of Europe by Japanese researchers. The issue here is how these studies have taken form, and where they are located in the development of anthropology.

Concern with European cultures already existed in the formative period of anthropology in Japan. There are two noteworthy approaches that have implicitly exerted an influence on present-day research. The first is that of Masao Oka (1898-1982) who studied in Japan and then in Vienna. He wrote his dissertation under Wilhelm Schmidt on the subject of the cultural strata and cultural descent of Japan²⁾. Oka was interested in Europe from a comparative point of view, and pointed out similarities between European folk customs and those of Japan. Oka was one of the founders of the ethnological and anthropological society in Japan³⁾. In its formative period, ethnological study in Japan was, from today’s point of view, a composite of adjacent disciplines such as archaeology, prehistory, folklore studies and agrarian sociology (see ex. Oka 1958).

The second approach is that of the scholar, Tadao Umehao (1920-2010). He is known for developing the ecological conception of history and focusing on civilization

from an analytical point of view by comparing Japan with Western Europe. He pointed out that the two civilizations bear similarities in their environmental and socio-historical settings, as each is on the periphery of an imperial centre. He organized several research expeditions to different continents, two of which were to Europe in the 1970s. The aim of his European expedition was to introduce an ecological point of view to European studies, the same as he had done in Mongolia and Africa. Yutaka Tani, well known for the comparative study of pastoral societies and also for his explication study of the biblical world today, participated in this expedition as a young scholar (Aida and Umesao (eds.) 1977).

Umesao was the first Director-General of the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka and through numerous pioneering works contributed to the improvement of the academic and social conditions of ethnological study in Japan, especially in the 1970s and '80s. Both Oka and Umesao were the doyens of ethnological study in Japan, and they laid out two contrastive routes by which to objectify Europe. One was the pursuit of the similarities between Europe and Japan, as demonstrated by Oka. The other, Umesao's approach, was to detach Europe from Japan through the ecological point of view.

Up to the 1970s, ethnological and anthropological studies of Europe in Japan were led by such major figures. Since the 1980s, scholars of a younger generation have begun to do fieldwork in Europe and carry out ethnographical studies. Inheriting the perspectives of Oka and Umesao, they have also come under the direct influence of Western anthropology and have been inspired by critical discussions of modern thought. Their studies have been conducted under the influence of the epistemological turn in anthropology since the mid-1980s, and particularly in the 1990s. Most of the authors of the present volume belong to this and later generations.

In order to understand how Japanese anthropologists have approached the post-colonial critical argument, I would like to turn our attention to the social and academic conditions of Japan in relation to Europe. While anthropological studies in Japan have partly developed through studies of the colonial period in regions such as the South Pacific islands and East, Southeast and Northeast Asia, they owe a good deal, especially after World War II, to the active pursuit of the Western academic tradition. Younger scholars went to Europe and the USA to learn and study the advanced research of anthropology. They not only adopted Western theories and methods, but also embarked on field research in areas where Western anthropologists had been carrying out their research for a long time. This movement became apparent particularly in the late 1970s and 1980s, when the economic and political position of Japan in the world was growing.

The results are reflected in the some of the characteristics of Japanese anthropology. Scholars have established contacts with multiple countries, and there are a variety of areas surveyed by Japanese anthropologists. However if we look at classic anthropology through the West and non-West relationship, the position of Japanese anthropologists seems ambiguous. Japanese anthropologists, who have studied the Western academic tradition, adopted not only Western knowledge but also the academic stance and, as research subjects, they have approached non-Western people as research objects. For instance, in critical post-colonial discussions some Japanese scholars engaged in African

studies have identified themselves as Western in relation to the non-Western people, and though it may seem odd, they have been very self-critical about this. While this has been partly due to the position of Japan in the world economy, it has also been due to the anthropologists' own sense of identity.

In post-colonial discussions the word 'West' has often been critically used, but the use of 'the West' in that context is, in fact, stereotypical and monolithic. It could also be said that the criticized 'West' was a conventional category, and one that needs to be considered more carefully and concretely. Setting Europe in the position of research object means a reconsideration of this frame—a frame that anthropological study has unconsciously helped to maintain for a long time. We will then be able to research Europe as one region among many.

In light of the position of Japan in relation to Europe, studying Europe from Japan seems to be a worthwhile project. In this regard, we have so far organized two joint research groups. The first was active from 1999 to 2001, and the second from 2006 to 2010⁴⁾.

3. The 'social'

How should we imagine the research object of an anthropological study that describes people's lives and activities in modern Europe? This question arises from our recognition that the concept of 'community' at present is open to debate, and yet, we do not have an alternative concept. This recognition resonates with the popular perception of the present, defined by phrases such as 'loss of solidarity', 'collapse of the community' and 'crisis of the welfare state'. In a similar vein we realize that some key terms used in discussing modern Europe such as 'civil' and 'public' are also very ambiguous.

Reflecting this situation, a compatible relation between modernity and community has been repeatedly called into question. Community has traditionally designated a particular form of social organization based on small groups or a spatially bounded locality. But since the 1980s the discussion over community has shifted the focus from an emphasis on social interactions based on locality to a concern with meaning and identity. For example, Anthony Cohen has argued that we should understand community less as a social practice than a symbolic structure (Cohen 1985). This shift of concern is understandable as an appearance of cultural turn, which was a trend covering the whole range of social science and humanities in those days. We could also say that the well-known concept of 'imagined community' by Benedict Anderson reflects this disposition. Anderson argued in the early 1980s that the phenomena of a nation and nationalism are rooted in an atomized polity, abstract homogeneous space and narrative time, rather than as a specific form of social interaction (Anderson 1983). Various discussions and modern thought in several disciplines such as sociology, political science, philosophy and history, as well as anthropology, have influenced the idea of community, and it is not easy to draw out its contour.

Looking at recent debates on community, Gerard Delanty outlined four broad positions that are not easily reconcilable given their respective concerns with social,

cultural, political and technological issues. The first is an approach typical of community studies but also reflected in the communitarian philosophy. The second position sees community as the search for belonging and emphasizes identity. The third is inspired by post-modern politics and radical democracy. The fourth has emerged recently with the improvements in global communications, transnational movements and cyberspace communications (Delanty 2003).

As an example we can point to the postmodern reflexive community as defined by Scott Lash. He argued in the 1990s that the whole notion of society in modernity is abstract, and characterized not by the concrete and particular relationships of *Gemeinschaft*, but by abstract relationships such as impersonality, achievement, and universalism. He emphasizes the shared nature of community, but not in the sense of traditional ones. He argues that community is conceptualized as reflexive, and one of its remarkable aspects is that one is not born or thrown into it, but throws oneself into it. Lash emphasizes the aesthetic sphere as the main location of reflexive community where a kind of groundless community exists (Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994). In this argument I pay attention to Lash's emphasis on the community's shared nature on the one hand and its groundlessness on the other.

As Delanty has pointed out, the excessive concern with the cultural dimensions of community since the 1980s has led to a view of community shaped by what separates people rather than by what they have in common. But this view of community has been called into question, and there has been a tendency to reinsert the social into community and recover the sense of place that was displaced by cultural turn in the theory of community (Delanty 2003: 3).

From this point of view we want to consider the anthropological study of Europe. Anthropologists have long carried out field research focusing both on social interactions and their cultural meanings. Their research has been very time-consuming but it has made very clear how several dimensions of life-world are overlapping. Taking these overlapping dimensions into consideration, anthropological studies may bring up other perspectives for imagining contemporary society. Here we will look at what people consider 'social', and what they want to have in common.

In regard to the meaning of the term 'social', it should be mentioned that it has not yet been fully translated into Japanese. To illustrate this, I will relate a personal experience. I once interviewed a lady who had emigrated from a village in eastern Turkey to Berlin some twenty years before. After she had recounted her painful experiences both in Germany and in Turkey for more than two hours, she came to a breaking point and asked me, '*Arbeiten Sie sozial?*' She wanted to know if I was engaged in practical welfare work. But for me her question also had another possible interpretation, which was to ask if my research is in itself social. To the first, I would say no, however, I felt I could not give the same negative reply to the second. The two meanings of 'social' in colloquial use are, for me as a Japanese speaker, separate and not attached to only one word. German speakers use the same word 'social' with different meanings, and if they talk about it in one context, they do not think about its other meanings in other contexts. This shows a subtle difference in the use of the term 'social'

between Europe and Japan.

There are many official and colloquial uses of ‘social’ in various contexts. Historically, it has been used along with the concept of modernity in Europe. *Du contrat social*, by Jean Jacques Rousseau is an early usage, where ‘social’ indicates values such as equality and solidarity. In this usage the word has a deep meaning that can also be seen in the following case. Both the constitution of the French Republic and German fundamental law refer to the social state⁵⁾. However the meaning of the phrase ‘social state’ might not be fully conveyable in Japanese. So, in this case, in order to help Japanese speakers understand the meaning, we should say ‘welfare state’, rather than ‘social state’. However, ‘welfare state’ still only expresses part of the meaning of ‘social state’.

As this case shows, ‘social’ seems to have a broader or more developed meaning in Europe than in Japan. The concept of ‘social’ in Europe seems to me to serve as a common ground for manifold and overlapping dimensions of society. This word is found at the core of welfare work in the realm of state policy, and in grassroots movements by self-help groups. And, at a spontaneous personal level, it also refers somewhat to one’s lifestyle. By means of the concept of ‘social’, ties to others such as the aged, the poor, the suffering and migrant families are initiated. Moreover these ties are mobile, flexible, and vary in form. Some are narrative communications and others embody practical activities such as caring and sharing. They also vary in duration—some are passing and others constitute large durable networks. The ways in which all these ties are initiated and developed are worthy of consideration.

4. The chapters

The approach of each author in this volume is derived from his or her own ethnographical study and each event is considered within its local context. This volume consists of four sections and an overview of each section follows.

Section I

The first section deals with social change and the construction of community. It is clear that Jeremy Boissevain has been a pioneer in the field of social anthropology of Europe since the mid-1970s. At that time he criticized the stereotypical small community studies framed by the structural functionalism. His analysis of social networks opened a new field for the anthropological study of social interactions (Boissevain 1974). In this volume Boissevain reports on changes in Malta since 1960 based on his own fieldwork over half a century. He explains that the ways of life have changed drastically due to outside influences: incomers, new transport facilities, and television broadcasting. He looks at how celebrations have become more important in creating a sense of social belonging and anchorage, and that as the complexity and pace of life has increased, the social distance between residents has also grown.

Yuko Shioji carried out her research in the English countryside and concentrated on a subject parallel to that of Boissevain. She demonstrates how incomers build social

relations where they settle. In England, since the 1980s, there has been a trend for successful pensioners to buy and live in old houses in the countryside. She investigates the role of charities with regard to social activities in one municipality in order to examine change in a rural English community. Charities are not only volunteer groups for the poor, sick, and elderly, but also conservation and preservation groups for history, heritage, and the environment. She points out that, different from traditional communities, charities contribute to building the bonds of incomers to the locale by appropriating access to local history and cultural resources. It is also evident that social class is involved in the building of these bonds.

Tomoko Sakai is interested in storytelling practices in relation to the construction of community. She approaches narratives about the long term political violence in Northern Ireland by focusing on the daily exchange of stories among those who have face-to-face interactions and whose lives often share an areal basis. The story-sharing practices enable people, through the narrative imaginary, to place their violent memories within the structure of collective experience and identify themselves with a particular political community. Such narrative imaginaries can create novel links between life stories that have never before been connected.

Section II

The second section is concerned with the relationship between solidarity and individualism. In the studies of this section, the concepts of reciprocity, morality and justice are reconsidered.

Atsushi Miura and Osamu Nakagawa conducted their research in different municipalities in rural France, and both focused on the farmers' point of view, referring to the theory of moral economy. These two scholars delineate two completely different forms of individualism and inclinations in confronting the market economy on the part of the farmers. Miura analyzes sociability and associations in rural French Jura, where agriculture was modernized with its communitarian custom of using cooperatives for cheese making and its common pastures that have medieval origin. Miura is interested in modern associations as one of the keys for building a civil society. He focuses on the role of cooperatives in Franche-Comté in adapting social life to the modern market economy. His paper examines the generations of social patterns in associations in Franche-Comté and their implications for modern society. His discussion about the development of farmers' ideas for building a civil society goes further, bringing in social networks and Proudhonian philosophy.

Nakagawa, on the other hand, analyzes vegetable farmers in the era of world economy, who are characterized by deeply rooted individualism. Nakagawa's research was carried out in Provence, an area highly suitable for the cultivation of vegetables and fruits, and where agriculture has undergone severe trials in the context of globalization. The driving force of agriculture in the region has always been immigrants. Nakagawa describes and analyzes how conflicts between farmers and immigrant agricultural labourers have come about, and argues that the globalization of the agricultural market causes the farmers to resort to informal practices. While their illegal practices toward

immigrant labourers are criticized as exploitation, they regard their relationships with immigrant labourers as harmonic and based on reciprocity. This view stands in opposition to the legalist view of the unions. Nakagawa points out a significant conflict in perception in the relationship between nationals and minorities under globalization.

The third paper of this section focuses on the linkage between ageing, solitude and the life of the modern individual. Erika Takahashi carried out her fieldwork in a small municipality in Finland, one of the Nordic welfare states. In the welfare states, where individual independence is valued, she questions how solitude is dealt with as a negative aspect of the independent self. In the elderly welfare system in Finland, one's life course after retirement is regulated by both frequent changes of accommodation and the configuration of social services. Social services encourage elderly people to engage in 'reciprocal' activities, but they also isolate care recipients by treating them as consumers. Takahashi notices that the mode of payment creates a time-lag of exchange and is disguised as a reciprocal activity. So the principles of market exchange and gift exchange are intertwined in the contemporary welfare system. To be a consumer or to be a reciprocal participant depends on the way of thinking, which determines the life of the modern individual between the two opposing natures of welfare; namely, solitude and sociality.

Section III

The papers in the third section focus on the relation between cultural manifestations and communal entities. As Eisuke Tanaka wrote, cultural manifestations of heritage are considered to belong to two aggregates: 1) the heritage of a particular community, and 2) the heritage of humanity as a whole.

Hiroko Takenaka carried out her research along the Pilgrim's Way in Galicia, Spain. She explains the process of the 'patrimonialization' of cultural heritage in which cultural resources are discovered, perceived and identified as 'ours'. Some voluntary associations are engaged in this process. Takenaka looked at these associations as communal entities and examined their activities and the social interactions among members. She pointed out that while the associations are very active in conserving the heritage of their own locale, the contour of the group is rather elusive and far from monolithic. The individualism in their behaviour and the locale-oriented interest combine to form the foundation of the associations.

Sharing an interest in the shaping of cultural heritage, Tanaka investigates a wider context. He is concerned with the dynamic and multistoried discourse space. He deals with a Roman mosaic collection discovered in southeast Turkey, which culturally represents the European past and territorially belongs to the Republic of Turkey, a state on the border of the Orient and Occident. Different agents such as the European media, Turkish government, archaeologists, and locals have different interests. He underscores the fact that both aspects of heritage—the heritage of a particular community and that of humanity—coexist and affect each other. He points out that the European category has a two-sidedness and has a hand in the conservation of heritage.

Kuniko Fujiwara is interested in the act of pilgrimage in contemporary Malta and examines the appropriateness of adopting a dichotomy between the sacred and the

profane. She observes that pilgrimages are repeatedly practiced in nearby localities and made on a daily basis in line with the beliefs of the individuals who practice them. She argues that people customize places based on their preference and convenience in practicing a belief in the saints, where a temporal form of connectedness is made. At this site, she has found a contemporary form of social bond emerging.

Section IV

In this last section, two papers discuss the anthropology of Europe from Japan and open a dialogue between Europe and Japan. Both authors come from Europe and each has a thorough knowledge, not only of Japan, but also of anthropology in Japan.

With this book we open a dialogue that we hope will develop over time. There are a number of possible subjects for future dialogue. Boissevain observes that there are many similarities and also remarkable differences in the post-WWII development of community festivals in Malta and Japan. Both are more elaborate and require more funds to celebrate. The Maltese villagers meet the increasing costs by organizing activities for local supporters, while in Japan the growing costs seem to be met by corporate sponsors whose logos are prominently displayed during the processions. To cite another example, I carried out field research in a district of Berlin and observed that the people were very conscious of the political meanings of their behaviour. The influence and results of the new social movement at end of the 1960s can be seen in the way people behave. In Japan political consciousness is rather latent and people are more indifferent to a social movement, but they are very sensitive and aware of the bonds between people. After the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011 the term *kizuna* (bonds) became a nationwide slogan and many projects under the name *kizuna* have launched.

People in our world today are searching for new forms of society. Contemporary forms and meanings of the social are in a state of flux, and therefore deserve all the more to be studied.

Notes

- 1) Inter-university research projects promoted by the National Museum of Ethnology (hereinafter referred to as Minpaku) are conducted jointly by scholars of Minpaku and outside organizations. In this framework our research project was held from October 2006 to March 2010. The main subject was to rethink the concept of community and to consider how we, as anthropologists, should imagine society in contemporary Europe.
- 2) Masao Oka, *Kulturschichten in Japan*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Vienna, 1933. He also contributed to the establishment of the Institute of Japanology at the University of Vienna, and was invited to give lectures as a director of this institute from 1938 to 1940.
- 3) The Japanese Society of Ethnology was established in 1934. It renamed itself the Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology in 2004 and has more than 2000 members today.
- 4) The results of the first project were published in *The Anthropology of Europe: Perspectives on*

the Modern World (in Japanese, Akiko Mori (ed.), Shinyo-sha, 2003). The results of the second project are forthcoming in *Reconsidering the 'Social': A Perspective of the Anthropology of Europe* (in Japanese, Akiko Mori (ed.), Sekaishisoshia, n.d.).

- 5) According to the constitution of the French Republic, «La France est une République indivisible, laïque, démocratique et sociale» (Article premier de la Constitution). According to the German fundamental law, „Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland ist ein demokratischer und sozialer Bundesstaat“ (Grundgesetz Artikel 20, Paragraph 1).

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