

The First Symposium on Civilization Studies

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journal or publication title	Senri Ethnological Studies
volume	16
page range	117-125
year	1984-12-28
URL	http://doi.org/10.15021/00003313

The First Symposium on Civilization Studies

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As we all know, Dr. Umesao has made an inordinate contribution toward the development of the new discipline called civilization studies, on which he has written numerous books and articles and delivered many speeches. If I am to cite a couple of his major works which have served as the basis of the deliberation at the first International Symposium on Civilization Studies and also of the papers in this volume, they would be his *Bummei no Seitaiishi-kan* (Ecological-Historical Approach to Civilization) [UMESAO 1974] and “Seitaikei kara Bummeikei e” (From Ecological System to Civilization System) [UMESAO 1980]. The motivation behind these efforts is his dissatisfaction with the objectives and research of conventional ethnology, or cultural anthropology:

Culture has been created through cultural and historical forces.... Ethnology, or cultural anthropology, finds its *raison d'être* in comparing cultures so created. But what constitutes our daily life is not simply culture..., but also a collection of devices—manmade material and non-material phenomena... Civilization is a system consisting of human beings and devices. Culture is merely an aspect of this civilization made up of human beings and devices. If I am to indicate the difference between culture and civilization, the latter, with its human devices, has concrete physical existence, whereas the former is abstract and mental [UMESAO 1981: 8–9].

Several issues arise out of this conception of civilization. For example, to which conventional discipline should civilization studies, thus conceptualized, belong? Does it squarely belong to one specific discipline? What methodology should civilization studies as a discipline follow for its research? Umesao has in the past already indicated several answers. For example, in one of the above works, he states:

Civilization studies may well be part of cultural anthropology in a broad sense. But objectives of civilization studies are not likely to be achieved through conventional methods of cultural anthropology. We thus need a different paradigm [UMESAO 1981: 11].

Umesao is convinced that this paradigm is found in the discipline of ecology, Umesao's original field of specialization. In the course of human evolution, the ecological system consisting of man and his environment has been observed to trans-

form into a civilization system involving man-made devices [UMESAO 1981: 13]. “Ecological system and civilization system form one historical continuum” [UMESAO 1981: 14]. The ultimate objective of civilization studies is to recognize “the stage at which we are now located in human history,” in other words, it is a question of “what is modern civilization?” [UMESAO 1981: 14].

While developing the problematics which I was able to outline only briefly above, Umesao has at the same time given much thought to the intimate relationship which the study of Japanese history and culture has to civilization studies. He has been rather critical of the so-called Japanese studies in the names of *Nihonbunkaron* and *Nihonjinron* and related genre which are *au courant* in Japan as well as abroad. In his words, “they uniformly stress the uniqueness of Japanese culture” [UMESAO 1984: 34]. It is in part in an effort to overcome this limitation that he advocates studying Japan from the perspective of civilization studies. This view is well expressed in his *Chikyū-jidai no Nihonjin* (The Japanese in the Global Age) [1980] and in his keynote address, “Japanese Civilization is a Whale,” to the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design, held in Kyoto in 1973. In the latter in particular, it should be mentioned, Umesao argues that through the use of comparison as a method in civilization studies, we are able to discover that Western and the Japanese civilizations share numerous morphological similarities, though they result from totally different spiritual constructs.

These two problem orientations—the development of the new field of civilization studies and the study of Japanese culture from the perspective of civilization studies—are the starting point of a series of symposia of which this is the first. Some background information is in order here. Apart from the international symposium which the National Museum of Ethnology has been holding annually since 1979 on a variety of ethnological topics, Umesao has been wishing to create an arena of debate in civilization studies in a long-range term with an entirely different problem orientation from the ethnological symposia. Fortunately, the Taniguchi Foundation offered support for this effort. It was in April, 1982 that a decision was finally reached to establish a civilization studies section in the Taniguchi Foundation and to inaugurate a series of international symposia with the Senri Cultural Foundation as its cosponsor. With Director-General Umesao Tadao of the National Museum of Ethnology as Chair of the organizing committee and Professor Ishige N. heading the steering committee which included numerous members of the Museum and the Senri Cultural Foundation, cooperation of all involved resulted in the realization of this plan in less than one year.

As the first of a ten year-series, a week-long symposium, “Study in Modern Japanese Civilization,” was held from February 28 to March 7, 1983 at the National Museum of Ethnology in Ōsaka and at Kyūze-sō of Toyo Textile Research Institute in Ōtsu. In accordance with the wishes of Mr. Taniguchi Toyosaburō, the founder and Executive Director of the Taniguchi Foundation, the number of participants, Japanese and foreign, was limited to about a dozen in order to maximize exchange of ideas. (Aside from those authoring papers in this volume, Professor Fosco Maraini

was also scheduled to speak at the Symposium, but regretably, he was forced to cancel his appearance due to illness.) The small size of the group enabled all participants to engage in a lively discussion intimately—in Japanese—through sharing all waking hours, day and night. The lively discussion of great import which took place on the floor of the Symposium is incorporated in the Japanese version of the proceedings report, *Kindai Nihon no Bummeigaku*, edited by Umesao T. and Ishige N. [1984], but is unfortunately omitted from the present English edition. I would like to summarize this discussion here for the purpose of helping the reader achieve a better understanding of the Symposium.

Before entering this task to which was assigned to me, I would like to point out a few unique features of the Symposium. First, while all participants shared the common denominator of being specialists on Japan, their disciplinary specializations were various. Cultural anthropology, or ethnology, was represented by Umesao (originally from ecology), Ishige (originally from archeology), Befu and Smith; the anthropology of religion by Nakamaki, history by Yokoyama and Moriya; Japanology (in the European sense) by Kreiner (originally from ethnology) and Linhart (from sociology). As a result, we were able to expect interdisciplinary exchange of ideas across the several fields, and in fact we can say that we met our expectations in this respect. The fact that we were able to conduct our discussion and presentation in Japanese was a positive factor.

Since specific topics of papers were by and large left to participants, superficially the papers may seem to represent a disparate collection. However, as the reader can see in reading the papers in this volume, the problems raised in the keynote address by Umesao have served neatly to integrate the papers. Thus, Yokoyama defined the concept of civilization by clarifying the relationship between civilization and civility, and discussed the nature of governance in the civilization of townspeople of the Tokugawa period. Kreiner and Befu, in turn, explored the possibility of a concrete theory of Japanese civilization. Linhart and Ishige further explored the question of “the grammar of civilization” which Umesao raised with the example of Japanese civilization. Nakamaki and Smith, with the example of religion, and Moriya with the example of performing arts, have each empirically compared Japan with the West. This summary characterization is necessarily only a rough approximation. The various problems raised here are those raised by Umesao, and are raised in other papers as well. This fact shows an overall continuity in the deliberation throughout the Symposium.

Now, in summarizing the lively discussion that took place over a week, five questions raised by Linhart in reaction to Umesao’s keynote speech delivered on the first day of the Symposium, provide a convenient starting point. Linhart, manifesting deep misgivings toward “civilization studies” proposed by Umesao, raised the following questions.

1. In the various fields of humanistic studies, “civilization” as a specialized term has denoted a particular concept. In Japan, too, since Fukuzawa Yukichi’s *Bummeiron no Gairyaku* [1975], “civilization” has been translated

as *Bummei*. Why does Umesao, who is proposing an entirely different conception of the term, not introduce a different term in order to avoid misunderstanding?

2. "Culture" and "civilization" have been understood, both among specialists and common people alike, as representing developmental stages, culture being older than civilization. Should Umesao not need to explicate the contrast between culture and civilization in closer detail?
3. What is the unit of civilization? Is it a country, an ethnic group, a language group, or something totally different?
4. Umesao points out the importance of comparison in civilization studies. What is to be compared in this comparison? Is a region to be compared with a region, a period to a period, or a developmental stage to a developmental stage?
5. To what discipline should civilization studies belong? Should it be a part of ethnology or a part of historiography as a total discipline? Or is the only way to realize this discipline to take an interdisciplinary approach?

These five points raised by Linhart, which stimulated a good deal of discussion, may be summarized into the following three concerns.

1. The nature and definition of civilization studies. This includes the question of the definition of "civilization" and of the relationship between civilization and culture. What term to use for this field was not much of an issue at this symposium.
2. Methodology of civilization studies, including the basic nature of comparison.
3. The domain of this discipline in relation to other humanistic and social science fields.

In addition to the above three points, the "grammar of Japanese civilization," which was discussed first in Yokoyama's presentation, was also a major focus. Below I would like to summarize the deliberation of the symposium along these four lines of thought.

It goes without saying that the nature of civilization studies, its definition and terminology, which were the central themes of the symposium, were debated throughout the conference. Now, what obfuscated the debate was the difficulty of distinguishing the concept from its conventional understanding, as Ishige, the chair of the first day's session, called our attention to.

In his summary of Umesao's keynote speech, Ishige pointed out that in Umesao's theory, material culture defines civilization, rather than culture, as it did for Herskovitz, to wit: "Culture is man-made environment." Ishige further alluded to Fukuzawa Yukichi's definition, *i.e.*, "theory of civilization has to do with man's mental and spiritual development." He also noted that Umesao does not regard civilization as occupying a developmental stage. Ishige, in short, expressed malaise, felt by Linhart and several others, toward Umesao's usage of the term.

Acknowledging these problems, Umesao nonetheless explicated his position,

namely that civilization is a totality encompassing both human mind and human devices. He further clarified with the use of an analogy, in which civilization is likened to a three-dimensional body, a two-dimensional projection of which is culture. While the two obviously have close relationship to one another, projections of two totally unrelated civilizations may be closely similar or the same, as a sphere and a cylinder may produce exactly the same projection. It is precisely because of the emphasis on "totality" in civilization that the term "culture" is inappropriate. Especially its Japanese translation, *bunka*, has lacked the sense of totality ever since it was introduced by Taguchi Ukichi in his *Nihon Kaika Shōshi* (A Short History of the Opening of Japan) [1883] in the sense of enlightenment. According to Umesao, the Japanese term for "civilization"—*bummei*—on the other hand, has a more familiar ring for the general public and should therefore afford easier comprehension.

The objective of civilization studies was also the subject of discussion from time to time. Umesao again contrasted civilization studies with conventional study of culture (*Bunka-gaku*) and empirical and concrete studies of culture, taking as examples European Japanese studies as referred to by Kreiner and sinology as practiced in Japan, in which developmental history from the past to the present is stressed, with emphasis on peculiarities of each culture. Civilization studies, rather, focusses on the problem of contemporary dynamics of particular nations and must afford a certain degree of prediction. Umesao convincingly argued for the importance of this new discipline. He further revealed that civilization studies is interested in universal phenomena in civilization rather than uniquenesses of civilizations and that one of the ultimate objectives of civilization studies is to appreciate beauty in human universality revealed through comparison of various cultures.

This hawks back to the essential nature of civilization studies, in relation to which Kreiner has suggested two levels of civilization studies. One of these is the study of concrete civilizations, such as Japan, the other being recognition of universal factors in systems of devices in the living environment in which man is situated. On this point Umesao stated that civilization studies encompasses, besides the study of various specific civilizations, research into civilizational concepts of a larger order, and that with progress in empirical analysis we may expect theoretical abstractions to emerge. We thus see that an ultimate possibility of "theory of civilizational studies" is already on his mind. However, Umesao did not feel the need of a distinction which Nakamaki noted between "theory of civilization" and "studies on civilizations."

The issue of "levels" of civilization studies, which was taken up a number of times, seems to be related to that of "units" which Linhart raised, according to whom nations, ethnic groups or linguistic communities may be thought of as examples of such units. Umesao, while making reference to Toynbee's concept of society, made clear his basic position that units in civilization studies do not naturally exist in an analogous fashion to ecological units, but instead are to be established by investigators in whatever way suitable for comparative purposes. For example, while Chinese civilization as a whole may be considered a unit of analysis, comparison of northern

China with southern China is also meaningful, and even smaller, subdivided units of China are conceivable for comparison with one another. In this context, echoing Kreiner's view that rather than geographical contiguity, it is shared historical experience which is important, Umesao emphasized the significance of shared historic fate, citing examples of the diaspora of the Miao tribe and the Jews.

The notion of "shared historic fate," to which Umesao alluded, was also invoked by the late Eiichirō Ishida in his definition of *minzoku* (ethnos) as an object of study in cultural anthropology, as noted in Kreiner's paper in this volume. This brings up the relation of civilization studies to cultural anthropology/ethnology, on the view of which Umesao was asked to elucidate from time to time. In his view, civilization studies is not only an extension of ethnology, but it is based on an interdisciplinary, holistic approach. Too, according to Umesao, contrary to cultural anthropology which has conventionally regarded culture as organic, civilization studies not only analyzes what Ishida E. has called "supra-historic cultural core," but it is also a discipline which considers problems surrounding this core. In this regard, in as much as history is always relevant to this "surrounding," Kreiner suggested the importance of history in civilizational studies, in which connection theory of civilizational change seems to play an important role, an issue which Befu raised time and time again, more about which will be taken up later.

In Umesao's view, *Kultur* or culture in Germanic sense, which emphasizes spiritual aspects, emerged after the contact of Germanic speakers with that giant, Latin civilization principally as a self-expression of the Germanic *geist*. In a similar fashion, *kokugaku* ("national learning" of Japan) as a discipline developed in Japan as a result of her contact with Chinese civilization. Both cases—that is, both German spiritualism initiated by Grimm and others and the lines of scholarship inaugurated by Yanagita Kunio by inheriting the tradition of *kokugaku*—manifested little interest in issues attendant upon "devices," and instead developed in the direction of the study of the "spiritual/mental." The problem of *Nihonjinron* ("theory" of Japanese character), which has been influenced directly or indirectly by this development, was discussed in connection with Befu's presentation. The thesis that *Nihonjinron* emerges out of felt cultural crisis was rejected. The argument, on the other hand, that *Nihonjinron* becomes popular when Japanese feel superior coincides with Umesao's above views. However, the problem of how and whether *Nihonjinron* is related to Umesao's theory of civilization was regrettably left unresolved. The relationship between civilization studies and *Nihonjinron* as has been debated seems all the more problematic in light of Umesao's response to Smith's question regarding the concept of "pattern" or "configuration" in the methodology of civilization studies, namely that in the construction of civilizational systems no such concept as "pattern" is recognized.

In spite of Smith's elemental stricture that a discipline is defined not by its methodology, but by its ultimate objectives, a lively debate ensued in discussing the methodology of civilization. Ishige expressed misgiving concerning the extent to which civilization studies as an objective science is possible when investigators them-

selves each belong to one civilization or another. Unfortunately this issue was not explored sufficiently.

Among the methods discussed, comparison weighed heavily. In any argument in civilization studies, a comparative civilizational viewpoint is always important. As units of civilization studies may be defined variously, comparison of systems may also be synchronic, or it may be dichronic, according to Umesao. The problem of civilizational change, which Befu raised, should be taken up again in this context. In this regard, Umesao gave the impression that whereas the study of culture deals with change, civilization studies emphasizes synchronic approach, even though dichronic changes are acknowledged. Taking up this issue elsewhere, however, Umesao has noted that contact between civilizations results in a variety of phenomena and sometimes confrontations (as exemplified by the empirical case presented by Nakamaki in this volume), discoverable regularities of which he has called "grammar?" or "syntax." Umesao thus recognizes civilizational change as a legitimate subject matter of civilizational studies. Umesao's conviction that potentials of civilization studies can only be attained through empirical methods was demonstrated in this symposium through the studies of Japan as a case in point. The importance of empirical approach in civilization studies was stressed by Smith and several others. In this connection, the idea of regional, or intermediate level analysis presented by Kreiner was critically examined and its importance recognized. But at the same time, it was agreed that the village level ethnographic analysis can also be important, depending on its problem orientation and on whether or not conscious effort is made toward abstracting the data in the framework of civilization studies.

The focus of discussion at last shifted to Japan in the context of civilization studies, that is, to the analysis of Japanese civilization. In the discussion of a variety of problems in this context, the focus of attention seemed to be on the special characteristics of Japanese culture. In other words, discussion tended to drift from civilization studies proper to the conventional cultural studies. To take an example, discussion on Linhart's presentation centered around issues properly belonging to cultural, rather than civilization studies. For example, Ishige asked whether Japanese kinship is bilateral rather than patrilineal. Umesao asserted that the Japanese society is not familistic, but is like a pile of sand. Yokoyama argued that the Japanese family manifest regional variations. Finally, Moriya and Smith stated that whereas detailed empirical studies of temple registers of the Tokugawa period and the postwar family are available, it is erroneously believed, with dangerous consequences, that the family system from the Meiji to 1945 was practiced according to the Meiji civil code. At long last, Umesao brought the discussion back to the starting point, arguing that the discussion on the family (*kazoku*) in the context of civilization as human being-cum-device should be substituted by discussion of domestic organization (*katei*). In short, family is merely an abstraction of human relations within the domestic organization, and what concretely exists is the domestic group. In relation to this, Linhart pointed out that the high ratio of aged parents living with their children in the highly industrialized society of Japan is a characteristic

feature of Japanese civilization. Thereupon Umesao and Befu, making reference to the aforementioned treatise "Japanese Civilization is a Whale" by Umesao, argued that highly industrialized societies everywhere need not manifest same consequences.

Japanese civilization and Chinese civilization were compared primarily in the context of Ishige's and Nakamaki's presentations. The so-called samuraization process, which was discussed in relationship to Yokoyama's paper, became a major topic of debate. Unlike the concept of letters, which dominated China, a decisive factor in Japan was that at least since the thirteenth century, or the Kamakura period, the military logic, which may be regarded as instrumentally rational logic, became the dominant orientation.

The question of the "grammar" of Japanese civilization was taken up by Umesao, Befu and Kreiner. After a lengthy debate on "grammatical" rules, such as "coexistence," "replacement" and "absorption," Umesao made the following observation. That is, if Toynbee's view is correct that Japan reoriented itself from Chinese civilization to Western civilization, then "replacement" should be the proper grammatical rule, but the reality forces us to recognize "coexistence" as the operative rule. Thus empirical study of Japanese civilization serves as a good example for understanding civilizational change.

We have no space here to engage in detailed discussion of actual comparison of Japanese civilization with Chinese and European civilizations. I will refer the reader to the Japanese version of the proceedings of the symposium, cited above, where the deliberation at the symposium on this subject is recorded.

In assessing the significance of the first international symposium of the section on civilization studies, its loose structure, it appears, turned out to be its advantage. It was Umesao's conviction that repeated discussion always brings about fruitful results. We did contemplate a format whereby participants present an outline and a list of major points of their papers beforehand. This method, however, probably would not have resulted in the lively debate with a variety of ideas as we observed this time. Questions were raised and comments made on Umesao's trial formulation of civilizational theory, which was reformulated many times in the course of one week's debate. Perhaps no one completely absorbed his theory; but everyone made concerted effort to understand it. At least, everyone understood Umesao's intentions better by the end of the week. Problems of civilization studies are enormous. It is not possible to establish a new discipline, nor is it easy to examine all the potentials of this discipline, in one single symposium. Fortunately, support of the Taniguchi Foundation is expected to continue for nine more conferences.

For the forthcoming symposia, rather than taking up civilization studies in its totality, consensus of the participants was that it is better to examine closely certain selected topics. Among the numerous suggestions, the following were chosen as topics for future symposia: "the city and urban culture," "comparative studies of the structure of governance," "comparative studies of economic institutions," comparative domestic organization" and "comparative education."

The second symposium, with the theme of "Japanese Civilization in the Modern

World—Comparative Studies of the City and Urbanization,” was held in March, 1984 in Ōsaka and Ōtsu. Participants for this symposium included, besides Umesao, Serghei A. Arutiunov of Academia NAUK, U.S.S.R., Harumi Befu, Ronald P. Dore of Technical Change Centre, U.K., Rene Sieffert of INCLO, University of Paris III, France, Henry D. Smith II of the University of California, Santa Barbara, U.S.A., Ogawa Ryō and Moriya Takeshi of the National Museum of Ethnology, Sonoda Hidehiro and Yoneyama Toshinao of Kyoto University, Narumi Kunihiro of Osaka University and myself. Since for this symposium, assignment was given to Yoneyama from the beginning to write an overview of the symposium, one can expect the report, including a well integrated overview, to be published in short order. I accepted the task of writing an overview on the spur of the moment without possessing requisite skills. As a result of my ineptness, publication of this volume was much delayed. I owe sincere apologies to the contributors and to the readers. I thank Professor Harumi Befu for the many troubles he undertook in translating this synopsis.

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