The Study of Civilization and the Study of Japan

SENRI ETHNOLOGICAL STUDIES 25 1989

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UMESAO TADAO
National Museum of Ethnology

This is the third in a series of ten projected annual sessions of the Taniguchi Symposium on civilization studies. It has become an established custom for me to deliver the keynote lecture at the beginning of each annual symposium. As a general rule, the role of a keynote lecturer is to set out the theme for the meeting and outline the goals for the subsequent proceedings. Were I to follow standard practice, I would put forward my own views on the theme of this symposium, the "comparative study of civilization: administrative organizations." However, in each of the previous lectures I have instead spoken to the common themes that undergird the entire series of ten international meetings. For the first, I spoke on "Japanese Civilization in the Modern World" and for the second on "The Methodology of the Comparative Study of Civilization."[1)]

In other words, in each of the keynote lectures I have addressed such overarching questions as, "what is civilization," "how do civilization and culture differ," "what is the methodology of comparative study of civilization," and so forth. I have also discussed the disciplines and modes of inquiry needed to establish the study of civilization as an academic field of research. I do so because I believe my task as a keynote lecturer is to promote discussion among the participants by bringing to the fore the general and theoretical rationale for our discussions.

The symposium's topic changes every year and new scholars participate each time. Moreover, the proceedings of each symposium are published separately. Therefore, I think that it is necessary in each of the keynote lectures to re-state the overall objectives of the symposium, as well as the basic concept of what the study of civilization should be. The keynote lecturer for a series of meetings such as this should not only encourage discussion, but also recall past discussions and clarify

1) The keynote lecture for the first symposium was published in English as "Japanese Civilization in the Modern World" in the English translation of the proceedings in *Senri Ethnological Studies* 16 (1984). The second lecture was published as "The Methodology of the Comparative Study of Civilization" in *Senri Ethnological Studies* 19 (1986).

the key themes which should shape our debates.

1. THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CIVILIZATION

First I would like to review the main themes that we have been developing during the first two sessions of this symposium. One recurrent theme is that the study of civilization and the comparative study of civilization are not identical to the study of culture. Given that we are based in an institute for ethnological research, and that I myself come from the field of ethnology, people might naturally assume that culture is our fundamental interest. In my view, however, the study of civilization is not a cultural science like ethnology; rather, it is a social science—that is, a science in which we attempt to analyze social structure from various angles in order to understand the essence of civilization.

The study of civilization as a social science is exemplified by the work of Max Weber. Indeed, to some extent the study of civilization is engaged in bringing the work of Max Weber into the context of today's world. Weber's theoretical and comparative writings have had a lasting impact on social science. However, the age in which he lived and our own differ radically in terms of the world situation and our views of the political and economic landscape. In particular, although Weber studied some aspects of China, he had almost no knowledge of Japan. Today, it is unthinkable to try to understand the world without considering Japan. One perspective on what we are trying to accomplish is to think of continuing the scope of Weber's inquiries, but with a new input card, "Japan". In so doing, we may get a very different picture from that presented by Weber (We could do the same thing with Karl Marx). But while Weber was an extraordinarily capable individual who singlehandedly built his comparative theory, we are trying to tackle this task through the joint research efforts of many individuals.

I believe that Weber's seminal theories of religion and his typology of administration should be regarded as part of a theory of civilization rather than of culture. By introducing one important factor that is missing from Weber's work—Japanese civilization—we hope to develop a new social science theory: the study of civilization.

It is my firm conviction that at the core of the study of civilization is the theory of social structure. In this sense, Weber can provide us with a model. Of course, we should note that if we talk about social structure from a sociological point of view there may be nothing new in our approach. In this symposium, however, we are trying to view social structure as civilization. That is, we seek ways to understand civilization based on the idea that a civilization, as I said in the first keynote lecture, is a system consisting of human beings, machinery, and institutions.

I have proposed two objectives for this ten year symposium. The first is the exploration of a new academic territory called the study of civilization (*bunmeigaku*) or the comparative study of civilization. The second is the further evolution of the study of Japan. At first glance these two objectives may seem unrelated, but

because the development of the study of civilization demands that we input the "Japan card" they are two aspects of the same endeavor. Both focus on the redefinition of the structure of the various civilizations of the world, which until now have been analyzed without adequate reference to Japan.

Research undertaken by Japanese scholars has so far been concerned only with the investigation of Japan itself, without putting Japan into the frame of reference of the rest of the world. The same can be said of the efforts of European and American scholars. Moreover, scholars in general have made too little effort to draw the Japanese case into a reexamination of world systems and world history. Therefore the two objectives of establishing the study of civilization and improving the study of Japan are indeed two sides of the same coin. In other words, this symposium is an attempt to introduce a comparative study of civilization with Japan at its center, and to engage in the study of Japan from the viewpoint of the comparative study of civilization. Our international, interdisciplinary discussions scheduled for the coming years are thus to be directed toward these ends.

It goes without saying that in the comparative study of civilization we are comparing one civilization to another. The comparison is usually of the form of a comparison between Civilization A and Civilization B, between A and C, or A and D, but not between B and C or C and D. In this symposium, one should note that Civilization A is the Japanese civilization. By comparing it with others, we can discover its fundamental traits, and this in turn can clarify the traits of other civilizations.

The Japanese today are encountering and even colliding with other civilizations at an unprecedented rate and intensity. Since this symposium series began in 1982, an academic society for the comparative study of civilization has been established. I believe it is not unrelated to the current Japanese confrontation with a wide range of other civilizations and to the changing global environment to which Japan must adjust. In such an environment, Japanese are finding the comparative study of civilization a field that has become increasingly congenial and even essential.

2. CULTURE THEORY AND CIVILIZATION THEORY

How can one grasp so complex and diverse a phenomenon as civilization? It is possible to take any aspect of civilization and add the word "comparative" to it to make it part of the comparative study of civilization. We can have, for example, comparative administrative theory. Or we can develop a comparative theory of bureaucracy. There could be comparative theories of commerce, religion, education, knowledge, agriculture, technology, management, the family, revolution, and so on. Any and all of them make interesting topics for study. In a more abstract vein, one can also imagine comparative theories of ethics and morality, literature, science, and the performing arts. I hope to take up some of these topics in the remaining annual sessions of this decade-long symposium. The concepts of culture and civilization have been recurrent topics of discussion in the previous symposia,

and the debates have often generated more heat than light. I do not intend to address again the question of how culture and civilization differ (an issue that I discussed in considerable detail in my keynote address for the first annual meeting). Here I wish only to add that the difference between the two can be likened to the difference between taxonomy and ecology in biology (my original field of study). You rarely find biological taxonomists who completely understand ecology. Their pattern of perception is very different from that of ecologists. The taxonomists study each classification—a pine tree or a cedar—to identify the morphology of each species. But the questions of how each species actually lives in its environment and how the species relate to each other in real life lie outside their purview. They see the generic pine tree or the cedar, but they are not interested in the forest in which the pines and cedars live. Ecologists, on the other hand, see the forest as a system, made up of many different kinds of trees.

Analogously, the study of civilization does not center on detailed research into various individual cultures. Instead, it focuses on the "forest"—the system created by human beings and their surrounding tools and institutions. Of course, without a taxonomy of the different species of trees, we could not study the ecology of the forest; without detailed descriptions of individual cultures and societies, we could not develop the study of civilization. But on the other hand, those who specialize in the fine-grained study of particular cultures, however expert, cannot be expected to generate the larger discipline of civilization studies. Such experts provide us with the material for our discussion, but in this symposium we must go beyond the boundaries of our individual scholarly disciplines to advance the study of civilization as a system theory.

Contemplating the essential traits of civilization leads us, with a bit of imagination, to the question of how the various civilizations of today first appeared on the face of the earth. One logical assumptiom is that there emerged an original "parent" civilization that spread around the globe, evolving different forms over time. Similarly, it is widely accepted that the human species originated in one spot on the earth and migrated around the world.

However, I see things differently, although I know my approach cannot be proved from existing evidence. I believe there is evidence to suggest that humankind appeared in many different parts of the world, simultaneously or otherwise, and that as a result there are many kinds of people living in the world today. I believe that the existence of such a wide variety of "species" of humankind strongly suggests different points of origin. The wide distribution of fossils of primitive human beings suggests that humankind appeared separately in various parts of the world.

I think the same is true of language. The assumption that a single language arose somewhere and gradually mutated into many different forms is less logical than the assumption that peoples around the world started speaking different languages, perhaps during the late Old Stone Age, the great hunting era, without any cross-communication.

The Neolithic Era witnessed the emergence of civilization in a variety of

regions. Elements of this civilization emerged in various places in various manifestations, and then gradually converged to form the larger scale civilization that we call "Neolithic". This is a process of convergence, not divergence. The major civilizations that subsequently emerged exhibit the same pattern. For example, the civilizations of the Incas, of the Aztecs, and of the Ancient Near East and North Africa have some striking similarities. It is, of course, possible to explain this resemblance as a consequence of the diffusion of one original civilization. My own viewpoint, however, is that people, wherever they are, tend to exhibit common patterns of thought and action; hence the smaller units of civilization gradually converge to form a number of larger units which share certain broadly similar traits.

To take this a step further, human beings are likely to form similar civilizations wherever certain basic conditions are met. Of course, civilizations exhibit differences as well as similarities, differences that can be attributed to the differing conditions under which they emerge and develop. One of the basic tasks of the comparative study of civilization is the identification of the salient similarities and differences across types of civilization and the study of the various conditions that have produced such types, through the systematic comparison of civilizations and their patterns of development. Similarly, if convergence is the major direction of civilization, then we can study the causes underlying it. I believe that the comparative study of civilization is the discipline of studying the historical process of convergence. The world today can best be perceived from this standpoint: it is steadily moving in the direction of convergence.

3. THE STUDY OF CIVILIZATION AND ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATIONS

The theme of this third session of the symposium is "the study of civilization: administrative organizations." In keeping with my earlier statement of our approach, Japan occupies the center stage of our discussions, and is to be compared with China, the Korean Peninsula, Turkey, and other regions.

In the background discussions for this symposium, Professor Matsubara (Chairman of the symposium's Executive Committee) and I came to the conclusion that a civilization exhibits strong pulls toward convergence or assimilation, whereas culture (the province of ethnology and cultural anthropology) has a tendency toward differentiation and divergence.

Cultural assimilation of elements from other civilizations is a process that often encounters deep-seated resistance, since each society stresses its own unique cultural identity. At the same time, however, each society must change continuously and rapidly with the times. It requires force to reverse the currents of cultural differentiation; in the natural evolution of culture, assimilation is highly unusual. The prototypical element of force that achieves such a reversal and forces the society toward the assimilation of elements from other civilizations is administrative organization. Administrative organization, in other words, is the central element in the con-

vergence of civilizations. There has been a wide variety of administrative organization in world history, but I believe that each has played a role in the movement toward congruence among civilizations.

There are many approaches to the study of administrative organization. In sociology, bureaucracy is one of the most widely employed concepts for studying the structures of administration; in political history, an array of concepts has been developed. But from the viewpoint of this symposium, what does it mean to discuss "administrative organization?" The mainstream of anthropology emphasizes the family, lineage, and community. However, the field rarely ventures beyond this level of analysis to the level of the nation. Anthropology, particularly cultural anthropology, cannot provide us with adequate conceptual tools for analyzing administrative organization. As a major aspect of social structure, it is a phenomenon that should be explicated within the framework of the study of civilization.

The term, "administrative system," can be defined as a national integration system. At the same time, we must note that the word "administration" carries a variety of meanings. For instance, administration is a mechanism for taxation. In this context, it would be interesting to compare the Chinese and Japanese taxation machinery. Another approach would be to reflect on the processes by which rulers and ruling classes emerge, and to compare the degree of stability of a ruling class. Historically, the Japanese ruling class has been quite fluid, and today's Japan is, in my opinion, one of the first classless societies to emerge on this planet. In most of the rest of the world clearly structured class systems still predominate. Even in post-revolutionary China, there is still an identifiable class system, although its form differs considerably from the pre-revolutionary structure. Europe, too, is has a clear class system. One interesting field of study is the comparison between a classless society like Japan (and perhaps the United States as well, which is also identifiably a "mass society") and an elitist class-based society, and to compare the consequences in the two different systems.

The exercise of administration requires power, a ruling authority. Power and administrative style take many forms, including such different modes as direct rule based on the machinery of coercion (such as the military), and the less direct exercise of power by a so-called "benevolent ruler" with his or her own unique governing style. Variations in the forms of power constitute a major theme in the study of administrative systems.

Administrative systems can cover not only one's own territory and people but also other peoples, as in colonial rule. There we find the administration of a people whose culture and social systems differ from those of the ruler, and which is often geographically remote from the ruler's own country. The pre-war Japanese empire included colonies in Micronesia, Manchuria, Taiwan, and the Korean Peninsula. It is often asserted that among these various possessions, the most successful colonial rule was achieved in Taiwan, and the greatest failure was experienced in Korea. If this assertion is true, what are the causes of such variation? The rule of

alien peoples is itself a fascinating theme, possible approaches to which include the comparative study of the administration of alien people and the comparative study of colonialism or imperialism.

There are two types of administrative organization whose fundamental principles demand illumination from the viewpoint of comparative civilization studies: feudalism and imperialism.

The term "feudal system" has been used extremely loosely, and some more rigorous concept is necessary for useful comparative work. My own concept of feudalism is based on the idea of the decentralization of power and of regional or local autonomy. Among Asian nations, Japan is the only one with a history of decentralized administration and local autonomy. Korea, China, India, and even countries such as Indonesia and Thailand—which Professor Yano describes in these proceedings as "small-scale patrimonial states"—do not have a comparable history of local autonomy. Given this fundamental difference, Asian nations, with the sole exception of Japan, did not experience a true feudal system.

After the thirteenth century, Japan witnessed the emergence of a typical feudal system whose forms and processes were very similar to those of French or German feudalism. I would identify the search for a comprehensive explanation of this phenomenon as an important task in the comparative study of civilization.

Administrative organization based on the principle of imperialism is another major area of investigation. The history of humankind has seen the rise and fall of many empires: the Roman Empire, the Ch'in Dynasty, the Han Dynasty, the Ottoman Empire, the Mogul Empire, and so on. In more modern times we have seen the British Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the Japanese Empire. However, from the late 19th century through the 20th century, all these modern empires collapsed. Nevertheless, to this day one can still find traces of the classic imperial system in China and the Soviet Union, which we may call modernized versions of the classic empire. How did such empires emerge? What social and other conditions were necessary for their emergence? How did the administrative structures of these empires develop? All these questions and more challenge the imagination, and can best be addressed by what I have called the comparative study of civilizations.

4. CONCEPT AND REALITY

An empire can be viewed as a system which exists to maintain a vast territory and to expand its area of control. In history we can find many territories described as "empires:" the Ottoman Empire, the Roman Empire, the Austro- Hungarian Empire, and so on. But the key question is: what are the common denominators that we can derive from comparative administrative organization theory to justify the inclusion of all these varied territories in the category of "empire"?

In common speech, a kingdom and an empire are differentiated by the fact that a territory ruled by a king is called a kingdom, while a territory ruled by an emperor

is called an empire. However, this is hardly a strong theoretical distinction: a ruler's title, whether king or emperor, is arbitrarily determined. Another way of conceiving of an empire is to think of it as an area on a map with a clearly delineated center and a vaguely portrayed periphery. When territories pay tribute to the center, they become part of that center's "empire" on the map.

I believe that the practice of calling one's own territory an "empire" is a relatively recent phenomenon in human history. In ancient times, there were no self-styled "empires." Historians of later generations were the ones who began to classify certain territories as empires, as if this was a clearly understood categorization. However, without a more theoretically and empirically grounded concept of "empire" our understanding of the dynamics of history will remain inadequate. But despite all our problems in clearly defining what an empire is, unquestionably empires have been critically important historical phenomenon, and indeed they remain so to this day.

The ambiguity of the concept of feudalism is also a continuing problem. When we use the term "feudal system" in Japanese, we express it using the Chinese characters for feudalism. However, in Marxian terminology, the entire pre-modern age is referred to as "feudalistic". In present-day China, therefore, "feudalistic" is applied to both Chinese and world history to mean "pre-modern". But the substance of the feudal system in Chinese and Japanese history is completely different. If the principle underlying the formation of the administrative organization in Japan at a certain point in history can rightly be called "feudalistic", then the Chinese administrative organization cannot usefully be identified by the same term.

Similarly, Europeans who came to Japan during the Meiji period first described the Tokugawa Shogunate as a feudal system. They based this on their own interpretation of its similarities with the feudal period in Europe. However, as we now know, there were some major differences between the feudalism of the Tokugawa period and the varieties of European feudalism. Yet despite these differences there are clearly some common elements underlying the "feudal" experience of Europe and Japan. One of the tasks confronting us is to identify and understand those fundamental similarities in terms of their administrative organization.

One final historical observation may be in order. In Korea and China, the administrator was traditionally a civil official. Although certain Chinese dynasties, such as the Yüan and the Ch'ing, were initially ruled militarily by foreign powers, rule by civil servants was always gradually re-instituted over time. In contrast, the administrators in Japan were essentially military officers who were formally placed in the position of civil servants. In other words, they were military officials with civilian titles. Such differences in administrative organization constitute some of the most fascinating problems in the comparative study of civilization.

Historical research has in the past proceeded to develop in an individual and autonomous fashion, with relatively little interchange of concepts and interactive comparative research. The task before us here is to engage in reexamining and comparing our basic concepts and approaches, using our individual expertise as a basis

for comparative inquiry.

This becomes all the more crucial in historical inquiry, where concepts have all too often been rather vague and indistinct. Through our cooperative efforts to inquire closely into the variety of concepts and terminology that we use to shape our inquiries, I hope we can develop a flexible framework for understanding history and the development of civilizations. In so doing we can contribute to the establishment of the study of civilization as an empirically grounded science.

In conclusion, let me express my sincere hopes for an animated and fruitful discussion during the coming symposium.