

The Unique History of Taiwanese Sociology and its implication to the Making of Asian Sociologies

Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao
(IOS, Academia Sinica, Taipei)

2011 Asian Sociology Workshop, co-organized by
IASA, University of Tokyo and IOS, Academia Sinica,
December 16, 2011, IOS, Academia Sinica
Taipei, Taiwan

1

I. Introduction: The Unique History of Sociology in Taiwan

- A new birth with a different developmental path
- A breakdown from sociology in China before World War II
- No inheritance from Japanese colonial legacy
- A brand new tradition of its own after WWII
- Sociology had not been treated as a legitimate social science discipline for more than 3 decades before 1980s

2

II. History of Rootless and Dependence: 1950-1970s

- The tradition of sociology developed in China's mainland had not been transplanted or transformed in Taiwan
- The new birth of sociology in early 1960s with US assistance in establishing related departments of sociology in various universities
- The first wave of study abroad from Taiwan to US since 1960s

3

- The structure of "dependence" (institutional, personnel, research orientation, teaching materials, training, ideology)---"American core paradigm" was transplanted in peripheral Taiwan academics
- A generational transition also occurred with the passing away of the China-born sociologists and the rise of new Taiwan-born sociologists
- Finally, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the occurrence of the "indigenization movement" in social sciences such as sociology, psychology and anthropology, in demanding to make social science relevant to Taiwan's social reality

4

III. Era of Indigenization and liberalization: 1980-2011

- With the growing number of returning sociologists trained in the US and taking part of the indigenization effort the 1980s, the intellectual landscape of Taiwan's sociology began to change eventually
- Self-criticisms among new generation sociologists
 - * short of critical mass
 - * lack of distinctive character
 - * no mainstream effort
 - * weak/ poor theoretical effort
 - * inadequate empirical research

5

- Criticism on the negative political influences of the KMT's authoritarian rule on the healthy and independent development of sociology in Taiwan
- Advocacy for a free and democratic society so that a mature and reflexive sociology can be possible
- Demand for a rooted development of sociology with clear cultural and historical identity of Taiwan
- "Collective awakening":
 - * maintaining sociology's universality
 - * making sociology culturally and nationally relevant
 - * rejuvenating global sociology by providing new elements stemming from diversified and different cultures and nations

6

IV. Three Turns of “Indigenization with liberalization” of Taiwanese Sociology

1. The Moderate Turn

- Institutionalization of a large-scale Taiwan Social Change General Survey since 1984
- Consecutive publications of ongoing and revised editions of Taiwan’s Social Problems, 1979, 1984, 1991, 2002, 2005, 2010

7

2. The Critical Turn

- Breaking the political taboos by engaging in two formerly prohibited research areas: ethnic studies and class analysis
- Systematic account of the rise and practice of emerging social movements and advocacy civil society activism
 - * Emerging Social Movements in Taiwan, Hsu and Soong (eds.), 1989
 - * Taiwan’s Social Welfare Movements, Hsiao and Lin (eds.), 2000
 - * Social History of Social Movements, Ho and Hsiao (eds.), 2006
 - * Taiwanese Social Movements March Again, Hsiao and Ku (eds.), 2010
 - * The Age of Social Movements: Atavism in Taiwan in the Past 20 Years, Ho and Lin (eds.), 2011

8

3. The Radical Turn

- Practicing public sociology/ engaged sociology in Taiwan's pro-democracy movements since 1980s
- Quite a number of sociologists have been acting as public intellectuals, directly involved in initiating, mobilizing, supporting and defending pro-democracy social movements as well as criticizing authoritarian rule

9

V. The Current State of Taiwanese Sociology: Convergence and Diversification

- 19 sociology and related departments and graduate institutes in universities; 5 PhD programs;
- Taiwan Sociological Association (TSA) has 300 members, 200 practicing academic sociologists
- Major sociological journals: Taiwanese Sociology, Taiwanese Journal of Sociology, Journal of Taiwan Studies, Journal of Educational Sociology (e-journal), Social Analysis

10

- After “transplantation with dependent growth”, “indigenization with liberal development”, now entering “globalization with maturity and confidence”
- Still Struggle to gain its academic status and reputation: domestic and international
- The problems of evaluation of academic competitiveness on campus: negative consequences of judging scholarly achievements from publications in SSCI or TSSCI journals (performance indices)
- Issues remain to be critically examined :
 - * Is indigenization critical enough to establish the subjectivity of a Taiwanese sociology?
 - * Is globalization really substantiated to enrich the further intellectual development of sociology in Taiwan?

11

VI. Lessons to be Learned? Implication to the Making of Asian Sociologies?

1. Lessons?

- A truly unique history of Taiwanese sociology or a common one among the natural histories of sociology in Asia (East Asia vs. Southeast Asia vs. South Asia vs. the Pacific vs. Australia and New Zealand)?
- Did colonialism matter?
- Did wars (domestic and world) matter?
- Did post-war authoritarian rule matter?

12

- Did liberalization and democratization movements matter?
- Did economic underdevelopment followed by economic miracles matter?
- Did the brain-drain and American/ European dominance in higher education matter?
- Did state-led economic success or failures matter?
- Did financial crisis and economic tsunami matter?
- Did neo-liberal globalization matter?

13

2. Implications?

- Can a common history of Asia sociology possible? or only separate histories of sociology in Asian countries be possible?
- Judged from the above lessons shared by most of Asian societies and the impacts on their respective sociologies, a common history and a convergent Asian sociology development seem possible, though there are separate (histories) and divergent (developments) can be found in various Asian sociologies.
- Considering “commonality in differences” the likelihood

14

3. Suggestions?

- A realization of the establishment of East Asian Sociological Association (EASA), a step further of East Asian Sociology Conference (EASC)?
- A proposal to co-author a textbook on East Asian Sociology (or Sociology in East Asian Context) to be used by undergraduate students in sociology in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China?