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Community Transformation in Asian Societies. An Introduction

Fumiya Onaka *

Abstract: *»Gemeinschaftliche Transformation in der asiatischen Gesellschaften. Eine Einführung«.* This paper clarifies the importance of discussing community transformation in Asian societies. Since the definition of "communities" by McIver, this term has contained a meaning of "chamber of secrets." I criticize this notion of communities shown in Community Studies through a bibliographical and terminological consideration. I also introduce basic differences of concepts of communities between Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, and Europe as a background. Based on this criticism, it introduces five articles that overcome the previous understanding of communities in Asian societies.

Keywords: Community, community studies, transformation, Gemeinschaft, Asian societies, Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, Europe, chamber of secrets.

1. Notions of Communities as "Chamber of Secrets" in Current Community Research[1]

Western concepts of communities usually assume that *communities* are closed, exclusive, stable, and persistent ("chamber of secrets" [Rowling 2000], i.e. closed spheres with unintelligible knowledge). MacIver (1917, 22-3) first defined "community" to be "any area of common life, village, or town, or district, or country, or even wider areas." In this definition, he emphasized "common life." It can be interpreted to be "commonness" between lives of people in certain area.

Later in his book, he gives a detailed definition: "The bases of community. A community then is an area of social living marked by some degree of social coherence. The bases of community are locality and community sentiment" (MacIver and Page 1950, 9). The two requirements are "locality" and "community sentiments." Regarding "locality," he explains that "a community always occupies a territorial area. Even a nomad community [...], for example,

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[1] I am grateful to Oonagh Hayes for insightful and detailed comments in editing all the articles of this HSR Forum.

has a local, though changing, habitation. At every moment its members occupy together a definite place on the earth's surface" (ibid., 9).

"A territorial area" or "a definite place on the earth's surface" seems to be abstracted from "village, or town, or district, or country, or even wider areas" in the first definition.

Regarding "community sentiment," it seems to be more a detailed definition of the "common life."

One of the important points of this definition of community is its distinction from association, which in turn is defined as "an organisation of social beings (or a body of social beings as organised) for the pursuit of some common interest or interests" (ibid., 24). It is regarded as "a determinate social unity built upon common purpose" (ibid.). This definition shows that the difference between community and association rests on the difference between "life" and "interest/purpose." "Community" is characterized by the term "integral," while "association" is characterized by the term "partial."

Another important point of MacIver's definition is that he related "the State" to "association," not "community" (ibid., 24). He criticized Hegel and other Hegelian theorists who regarded community and communities only as elements of the State (ibid., 28). He understands that community is an entity which cannot be dissolved into "the State."

Building on MacIver, Etzioni (1996) proposes the concept of "responsive community" from a communitarian perspective and pointed out three characteristics of community: (1) A community entails a web of affect-laden relations within a group of individuals, relations that often crisscross and reinforce one another; (2) community requires a commitment to a set of shared values, norms, and meanings, and a shared history and identity – in short, a shared knowledge; (3) communities are characterized by a relatively high level of responsiveness (ibid., 5). This revised definition of community also presupposes a "chamber of secrets" (a closed sphere with unintelligible knowledge) which is the basis of "a web of affect-laden relations" and "a relatively high level of responsiveness."

Collins (2009) argues that community is "a political construct" and points out four characteristics of the construct: (1) The United States is awash in the language of community, making community ubiquitous in both common and scientific knowledge. (2) The construct of community is versatile, malleable, and easy to use. (3) The construct of community holds varied and often contradictory meanings, which reflect diverse and conflicting social practices. (4) The construct of community catalyzes deep, strong feelings that can move people to action (ibid., 11). This new constructive view on community still maintains the element of "chamber of secrets" in the third characteristic (varied and often contradictory meanings).

Minkler and Wallerstein (2008) propose "community-based participatory research" as follows:

> It is participatory. It is cooperative, engaging community members and researchers in a joint process in which both contribute equally. It is a co-learning process. It involves systems development and local community capacity building. It is an empowering process through which participants can increase control over their lives. It achieves a balance between research and action. (Minkler et al. 2008, 9)

Kleiner, Kerstetter and Green (2012) edited a special issue on "community-based research" in the *Journal of Rural Social Sciences* inspired by the above proposition. In this special issue, various topics such as Hurricane Katrina (Kleiner and Walker 2012; Kerstetter 2012), public health training (Montgomery and Thomas 2012), and two forms of social change (Stoecker 2012) are discussed from the viewpoint of community-based research. Wood and Samuel (2012) include history as a community-based research. They survey documentation of local histories surrounding the civil rights movement in Mississippi and Tennessee, because there are considerable opportunities for community-based research around documenting and sharing key memories (ibid., 33).

The "chamber of secrets" image can also be found in this community-based research proposition. For example, Kleiner, Kerstetter and Green (2012) state that this type of research can

> guide each step of the process by identifying the research question to be answered, designing the most appropriate research methods to be employed, collecting the data, analyzing the data, and reporting the results in a way that is useful for meeting the needs of the community-based partners. (ibid., 3)

This emphasizes the importance of "the needs of the community-based partners," which are secrets for outsiders. The article of Wood and Samuel shows that "history" is an important part of such secrets, which are, if not secret, at least riddles for outsiders.

Further, the concept of "community ecology" is proposed (e.g. Ruef 2000; Freeman et al. 2006). "Community ecology" derives from human ecology, which intends to explain organizational behavior using the knowledge of ecology including mathematical formulations. Ruef (2000) investigates the historical emergence of organizational forms in the health service domain and proposed two questions: (1) Are there typical patterns that structure the emergence of organizational forms? (2) Are there discrete points that are particularly critical to the successful institutionalization of a form of organizing? Ruef concludes that identity of form is coded on the basis of systematic discourse data from the health services domain (ibid., 687). Freeman et al. (2006) point out ideological interdependence and identity interdependence (ibid., 152), the role of private information transferred through network ties between organizations (ibid., 153). I can assume that ideologies, identity, and private information can also be called "secrets."

This image of "chamber of secrets" might have been supported by strong tradition of small communities in many Western countries, such as *community*, *commune* (French), *comune* (Italian), *Gemeinde* (German), *municipio* (Spanish).

By applying this notion of "community" to foreign countries, Western scholars have also understood Asian communities as "chamber of secrets," i.e. as a relatively remote sphere with unintelligible knowledge such as folkways, customs, and traditions. They have been both threatened and promoted by development projects of local governments or private companies. The populations of these communities tend to decrease because of the inhospitable rural economy. Communities in Asian societies, in particular, have attracted much attention by anthropologists, ethnologists, and sociologists, and by Western tourists. The English term "community" is usually translated as *chiikishakai* in Japanese. Its literal meaning is a local (*chiiki*) meeting (*kai*) in a shrine (*sha*), which reinforces the "chamber of secrets" notion of community.

Researches on religion often employ the concept of community. For example, "The Archipelago of Faith: Religious Individualism and Faith Community in America Today" (Madsen 2009),[2] "Conservative Protestant Congregations and Racial Residential Segregation: Evaluating the Closed Community Thesis in Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Counties" (Blanchard 2016)[3]. Also, ethnicity research often employs it. For example, "Church culture as a strategy of action in the black community" (Pattillo-McCoy 1998),[4] "Immigrant Enclaves and Ethnic Communities in New York and Los Angeles" (Logan, Zhang and Alba 2002)[5]. It is easy to see that a religious or ethnic group can be understood as a "chamber of secrets," because every religious or ethnic group has its own knowledge, rules, and culture. Bernet (2003) focuses on a marriage that

[2] Richard Madsen (2009) carries out ethnographies of four very different religious communities and insists that there is a deep cultural commonality underlying the diversity of religious expression among the American middle class. This "deep cultural commonality" thesis exemplifies our hypothesis.

[3] Troy Branchard (2016) studies residential segregation in the U.S. using the 2000 Census of Population and Housing and the 2000 Churches and Church Congregations data, tests the closed community thesis, and insists that theological and value orientation of white Conservative Protestant congregations undermines the creation of bridging group ties. This "theological and value orientation of white Conservative Protestant congregations" thesis illustrates our assumptions.

[4] Mary Pattillo-McCoy (1998) makes an ethnographic research in Groveland, an African American neighbourhood in Chicago, and finds that black Churches have provided a cultural blueprint for civic life in the neighbourhood for African-American residents. This "cultural blueprint for civic life" e.g. prayer, Christian imagery, particular theological associations, shows the traits of a "chamber of secrets."

[5] John R. Logan, Wenquan Zhang and Richard D. Alba (2002) study immigrant enclaves in New York and Los Angeles and evaluate ethnic communities model. In this study, contrary to "immigrant enclave" model in central cities, they found an ethnic community of a relatively high-status setting in suburban area. Their suburban and high-status "immigrant enclaves" can be explained by our concepts.

was not recognized but only tolerated by the State at the end of the 18th and the beginning of 19th century, and discovered that the marriage belonged to the pietistic religious community. Ewert, Roehl and Uhrmacher (2007) focus on a pre-modern urban community in late medieval Lille and propose a multi-agent model for its simulation. Vizer and Carvalho (2013) propose "socio analysis" as participatory methodology to research community issues and problems in Brazil.

That communities may in fact change is exemplified by the HSR Special issue "Political and Functional Elites in Post-Socialist Transformation: Central and East Europe since 1989/1990" (Best, Gebauer and Salheiser 2012). Although its focus was the role of elites in the transformation of previously socialist countries, it can also be regarded as a transformation of elite communities in the mentioned areas. It is a focus similar to that of the present volume in that it is a community transformation. Kostichenko (2012) examines elite continuity in Ukraine by using social network analysis. Stoica (2012) deals with political capitalism in post-communist Slovenia, which arose from the markets in the former communist society. Adam and Tomšič (2012) reveal that the elite's prevailing cultural patterns in Slovenia generated *immobilismo* and prevented the execution of the necessary reforms during financial and economic crises. Semenova (2012) investigates the continuities in the formation and careers of political elites in post-socialist Russia by using the data on MPs, cabinet ministers, and governors. Digol (2012) notes that diplomatic elites of Central and Eastern Europe and former Soviet Union member states in the post-communist period were drawn from a very exclusive segment of society. Kristóf (2012) shows elite circulation and reproduction as well as discontinuity in Hungary using four empirical surveys from 1988 to 2009. Salheiser (2012) finds from cross-sectoral, longitudinal, and cohort analysis and inspection of prosopographic elite data that dimensions of vertical social inequality under socialist rule, such as gender and class background, remain decisive even today. Gebauer and Salheiser (2012) observe that the former GDR delegates enjoy their "second life" in German Parliament after the "Peaceful Revolution" and German reunification, by using the German Parliament Survey, the social profile of delegates, and a questionnaire survey. Gebauer (2012) focuses on the career trajectories of the functional elites of GDR after the reunification by using event history analysis and found that factors such as being female and having to raise children accelerate status loss; factors that prevent status decline are privileged social origins and educational qualifications. In summary, this special issue reconfirmed the reproduction hypothesis of elite communities during the huge political transformation from communist to post-communist regimes.

2. Communities and Change

As stated above, Western studies on the community assume that *communities* are closed, exclusive, stable, and persistent spheres with unintelligible knowledge ("chamber of secrets"). However, its original Latin term *communitas* does not necessarily have these nuances. It means "joint possession / use / participation / partnership / sharing; social relationship, fellowship; community of nature or quality, kinship; obligingness" (Glare 1982, 370). Of course, joint possession, fellowship, and kinship are closed, and exclusive to some extent, but they are more or less unstable and inconstant.

The German translation *Gemeinschaft* does not necessarily have these meanings implied by the term *communitas*, as they explicitly allow for social change. Ferdinand Tönnies contrasted *Gemeinschaft* with *Gesellschaft*, equating the former with hitherto predominantly stable communities, and the latter with the present changing society (Tönnies 1922). This usage, which has profoundly influenced subsequent sociological thought, is the basis for the "chamber of secrets" notion attached to the term *community*.

A similar understanding of *Gemeinschaft* can be found in Karl Marx, who distinguishes between Asian, Roman, and German regimes before modern capitalism. He observes *Gemeinschaft* in all these pre-modern states of society (Marx and Engels 1983 [1857-58], 383-421), in which he connects the primitive form of common ownership (*gemeinschaftliches Eigentum*) to the Asian regime (ibid., 392). Marx often links the term "*asiatisch*" (Asian) and "*selbständig*" (self-sustaining) (ibid., 394, 401, 431). This means that an Asian *Gemeinschaft* is considered as self-sustaining and stable for him, while pre-modern Western regimes (Roman and German) are regarded as more changing and dynamic.

However, the usage of *Gemeinschaft* by Hegel has a different meaning. He distinguishes three stages of society: family, civil society, and State (Hegel 1911 [1821]). He often uses this term to describe characteristics especially of the stage of family (e.g., "*Gütergemeinschaft"* in Hegel 1911, 147), but he also uses this for the stage of State (e.g., "*gemeinschaftlichen Interesse der Beamten"* in Hegel 1911, 242). The usage by Kant (1853), who often uses this term, is far more different. It is used to indicate commonness (Kant 1853, 14) or interaction ("*Wechselwirkung*" in Kant 1853, 106) in human cognition or activities.

This brief terminological consideration reveals that the community (*Gemeinschaft*) does not have to mean a closed, exclusive, stable, and persistent state of past society that constitutes the starting point of transformation into present society. It could also mean an open, inclusive, unstable, and inconstant state, which is usually regarded as a characteristic of the present or future state of society, as is shown in Hegel or Kant. Similarly, Elias (2008) points out that

the community has to be discussed from the point of view of State-formation processes.

The Japanese translation *chiikishakai* subversively contains the term *chi* (earth, *Erde*), which is the most fundamentally constructed ground, gives all spaces the meaning of earth-spaces, and gives all things the meaning of earthly things (Husserl 1940, 317) and extends beyond closed spheres (Onaka 2015, 25-6).

Communities in Western countries have been influenced by processes of nationalization and globalization for centuries. Two World Wars have strengthened the power of the nation-states. Recently, communities in Europe have been influenced by the process of Europeanization, as has often been discussed. This process also increased the power of regions in the EU. However, those two processes have equally decreased the power of small communities (e.g. Delanty 2003).

Asian societies have experienced a similar process of nationalization and globalization for centuries. However, this European type of regional integration has not happened so far. In Southeast Asia, ASEAN intends to establish close ties, but the integration is far looser than in the EU. In some ASEAN societies (e.g. Indonesia), the power of subnational regions has recently increased. However, in other societies such as Thailand, the power of small communities (*tambol*) has been strengthened. In Northeast Asia, in the process of globalization, semi-large local associations ("prefecture," "circuit," "county," "city") tend to have been organized. In Northeast Asia, various kinds of historical or present confrontations have prevented from regional integration.

In Northeast Asia, the State is far stronger and more influential than small local communities, in comparison with Western societies. In contrast to the theoretical assumption of MacIver, small communities as well as semi-large local associations have easily been reorganized or sometimes destroyed by the State. Communities tend to be the smallest representations of the State in Northeast Asia. On the contrary, small communities tend to be strong in Southeast Asia though this is not the case in some areas (e.g. Java Island). MacIver's assumption on the relation between community, association, and the State, is not universal. One cannot assume "the State has obviously a very peculiar and distinctive place" or "the State seems to have some care for nearly every interest" (MacIver 1917, 28). The State is only a level of association that controls only a part of interests, different from the small community. Kings, presidents, and prime ministers are respected not due to heredity or to the result of elections, but due to their excellence in governance.

There are two factors for these processes of nationalization and globalization. One is elite, while the other is non-elite. These changes have been initiated partly by the elites in their neat offices. They have continuously been planning to organize or reorganize semi-large local associations under the name of "decentralization" (e.g., as in the 2000s of Japan), increase the State power

under the name of "restoration of community" (e.g. as in the 2010s of Japan), or astonishingly strengthen the power of community under the name of "national constitution" (e.g. as in the 2000s of Thailand). They have employed military, police, and educational power to control the situation.

However, these changes have been carried out by non-elites who are members of local associations or communities. During a period of turning point, they go out to the streets, the parliament, or the front of government buildings, out of the daily life. Or, they talk, discuss, and act for change in daily life. It has been supported by the means of communications of its time, such as letters, telephones, cell phones, smart phones, and so on. They manage changes indirectly through elites or directly by themselves.

Be it in the Northeast or Southeast Asian settings, be it in the past or the present, elites always try to increase their powers and resources, fact which brings about changes including nationalization, or semi-nationalization. Even the radical empowerment of small communities can be brought about by the elites on purpose, because the state elites can broaden their power if they succeeded in weakening middle-level associations between the State and small communities. In addition, incessant change of the world, such as globalization and regional integration, can trigger the transformation by the hand of elites, who intend to take advantage of the conditions for themselves (e.g., in Japan since WWII).

Non-elites tend to insist on interests of local associations or small communities, to which they belong. However, they sometimes try to protect and promote values which surpass their narrow interests. Globalization or regional integration could often first be felt, dealt with, or responded to by non-elites.

3. Transformations of the Community

This HSR Forum aims to introduce the discussion about how these communities in Asian societies have been changing rapidly and drastically. They are no longer at the starting points of transformation, but are in the present states or even reveal the future of transformation processes. What is now important is not the stability or instability of communities in the transformation, but the transformation of the community itself. It is not only because the concept of community is essentially related to transformation as I explained above, but also because the community formation has fundamentally been changing in Northeast and Southeast Asia. The methodological significance of the concept of process has been shown by several articles (Baur 2009; Baur and Ernst 2011; Onaka 2013a, 2013b).

This HSR Forum introduces studies on process-oriented social research on community transformation in Asian societies.

The first paper, by *Buapun Promphakping*, discusses the well-being of return migrants based on in-depth interviews and structured surveys conducted in three villages in Thailand. This paper concludes that the subjective and objective well-being of village communities are changing and that this change leads to shifts of migratory labors. The second paper, by *Taro Hirai*, discusses the decision-making on mutual aid implementation between local governments following the Great East Japan Earthquake and concludes that it is appropriate to find convergence rather than divergence in the decision-making. The third paper, by *Noriyuki Suzuki*, compares two villages' processes of civil societies formation and concludes that "grassroots"-type civil societies are more persistent than are the "top-down" type. The fourth paper, by *Thanapauge Chamaratana, Dusadee Ayuwat* and *Oranutda Chinnasri* discusses the occupational prestige of Thai labor brokers from the viewpoint of social mobility in communities and concludes that their prestige is greater than that of their previous occupation and that education was the major tool in their upgrading. The fifth paper, by *Mohd Amar Aziz, Noor Hazlida Ayob*, and *Kamaruddin Abdulsomad*, discusses foreign worker policies in Malaysia and concludes that the three important criteria, which provide communities for foreign workers, are collective agreements between the employers and the trade unions, reduction of the regulation through middlemen and private agents, and enhancement of human resources departments.

These papers reveal several important factors that have been causing community transformations: elite/non-elite (Hirai, Suzuki, Chamaratana et al.), labor migration (Promphakping, Chamaratana et al., Aziz et al.), natural disasters (Hirai). They prove that communities in Asian societies are no longer a hidden chamber of secrets, which is dangerous to enter, but a widely open great hall, from where extraordinary wisdom might emerge, which will contribute to describe, analyze, predict, and control the transformation of communities not only in Asia but also worldwide.

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