
Introduction

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Abstract:

国士舘大学アジア・日本研究センターは、アジア文化に対する理解の枠組みを押し広げるため「公共圏」の概念に注目し、過去3年以上にわたりその有用性を検証するさまざまな研究プロジェクトを展開してきた。その成果を問う一環として、われわれは2007年8月2日～5日にクアラルンプールで開催された「第5回国際アジア研究者会議 (ICAS 5)」に参加し、「アジアにおける文化的公共圏の可能性」と題するパネル発表をおこなった。4つのプロジェクトの中間報告をおこない、この概念がアジア文化を捉える視角としてどのような有効性をもっているかという問題を討議した。本特集は当日の発表をベースにしなが、その内容を再構成したものである。

まずここで、ドイツの哲学者ハーバーマスが発展させた「公共圏」という概念が、西ヨーロッパの近代化の歴史と分かちがたく結びついたものであるが、この考え方の出発点となった文化の具体的な情景にまで立ち戻ることによって、アジアの近代化と普遍的価値との関係についてよりダイナミックな理解を切り開くことができる点を論ずる。

Keywords: public sphere, Jürgen Habermas, Asian culture

キーワード：公共圏、ユルゲン・ハーバーマス、アジア文化

The Asia-Japan Research Center at Kokushikan University, Japan, has been developing a series of research projects over the past three years based on the concept of the *Öffentlichkeit* (public sphere). For further development, we participated in the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS 5) held in Kuala Lumpur from 2nd to 5th August 2007, and opened the panel entitled “The Prospects of Cultural Public Sphere in Asia”. In the panel we tried to discuss the effectiveness of this concept by presenting four case studies. How can this concept grasp the cultural realities of today’s Asia, and to what extent does it help to widen the scope of Asian Studies? This introduction and the following four articles are based on the presentations and the discussions at ICAS 5.

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Jürgen Habermas formulated the concept of *Öffentlichkeit* by focusing on the historical process of European modernization. In 1962 he published a book in German, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, which helped to spread this concept and had a great influence on various fields of social science. Yet, its English translation was published as late as 1989 (Habermas 1989), and the most popular version in circulation is the revised edition that was published in 1990 (Habermas 1990). So the problem of the public sphere is actually quite new. By the way, the Japanese translation appeared relatively early, in 1973, and has stimulated many fields ranging from media studies to grass-root movements (Habermas 1994). Nevertheless, case studies that apply this concept to Asian culture are really scarce. We believe that it is of great significance to reconsider the meaning of Asian culture in this perspective.

One of the major reasons for this absence comes from Habermas himself. His study was focused on Western Europe between the late 17th and 19th centuries, and he was reluctant to extend his analysis in separation from the original historical context. More generally, the historical process of Asian modernization appears contradictory to such an application. Even in Asia today, there are many cases in which the state has no hesitation to lead coercive economic developmentalism and suppress democratic movements.

However, it is possible to give new life to this concept by considering specific cases in contemporary Asian culture. In this respect, we are prompted to remember that the concept of *Öffentlichkeit* came into existence from specific cultural landscapes. For Habermas, the primordial model of the “public sphere” was envisaged in the coffee houses of Britain or the salons of France, where the bourgeoisie, freed from a status-conscious society, could hold open discussions. The existence of “literary public sphere” based on the development of the print media preceded and affected the modernization process in the politico-economical sense. The free communication that was imminent at the time was actually controlled and regulated in various forms by the state and society. The basic problématique for Habermas was to see how the emergent public sphere, which was neither state nor market, was connected to the development of a political public sphere, and how the connection gradually collapsed. So we think that it is of great significance to approach specific cultural scenes and verify this problem in the Asian context.

Our four case studies share this same perspective, and each endeavors to reveal a specific

development. The first presentation, by Hiroshi Aoyagi, is on social spaces for multivocal communication in Okinawa, Japan. The second one, by Geroge Kunihiro, describes his own commitment to the social movement as an architect. The third presentation, by Kenichi Sato, reviews the meaning of new lifestyles in postwar Japan from Habermas's viewpoint. The last one, by myself, is on the ironic interpretation of cultural piracy as public sphere in Myanmar. Apparently there is no simple convergence of discussions in our presentations*¹.

Here I would like to mention only the dimension of consumption as a point of review on Habermas's argument in reference to the contexts of Asia. His standpoint on consumption is ambiguous. First, it is highly valued, because culture became open to everyone in the process of commercialization, which greatly contributed to the birth of the public sphere. But, on the other hand, he concluded that civil culture collapsed alongside the emergence of the mass consumption society. The public sphere formed by readings and free discussions was transformed into a passive consumer culture. The liberal atmosphere that predominates in the public sphere was subsequently lost to the development of mass media and consumer society, which transformed the critical masses into social dupes. Thus, the commercialization of culture ruined the literary public sphere in Western Europe during the 18th and 19th Centuries. The mass culture or consumption culture created only a pseudo-public sphere and led to the spread of mass leisure activities and "acts of individuated reception" of mass culture. This is exactly what "the structural transformation of the public sphere" is meant to signify.

Habermas nevertheless admitted that such an analysis—a critique of culture industry in the tradition of Frankfurt school—was insufficient. The development of a consumer culture has ambiguous social effects, as shown by the fact that the commercialization of culture paves the way for an open relationship beyond traditional hierarchy. If we remember this ambiguity, we can develop his problématique in today's Asian context. For instance, in many Asian countries it looks as if the emergence of mass consumption society goes hand-in-hand with democratization. How, then, can we interpret this trend from the concept of the public sphere? Public values in Asia, on the other hand, tend to be merged with nationalism, but there are various styles of social movement beyond the nationalist imagination, as shown by the development of Internet technologies. If we were to reconsider the relationship between modernization and universal values in Asia by way of specific cultural scenes, we could seek a more dynamic understanding. And if we continue to work on, we could expect a new development of Asian studies (Tosa 2007). Habermas's formularization has met with much criticism that such a historical process was nothing but an idealized image (e.g., Calhoun 1992, Holub 1991, Hanada 1996), but if we review it from the Asian cultural reality, we can give new life to both Habermas's analysis and the possibilities of Asian studies. These are still open questions. We are here not to conclude, but to raise some questions for further research. If you see any significance in our presentations, we cordially invite you to join our research project to develop the academic process. Also, our project itself can grow into a testimony of networking in the Asian public sphere.

Endnote

- *1 Dr. Zohreh Bayatrizi of Saint Mary's University, Canada, was generous enough to accept our pushy request to participate as a discussant at ICAS 5. We are grateful that she gave us many useful clues to extend the horizon of our research project.

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