Creative Lifestyles and the Public Sphere : A Case Study of Tokyo

ライフスタイルと公共圏：東京の事例を中心として

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Abstract:

　第二次世界大戦後の日本で、東京を中心に、消費文化の成熟化が進行した。消費者は、受動的な大衆としてではなく、クリエイティブな消費を目指す、自律的な個人としての輪郭を、1990年代を前後して、見せ始めた。こうした、個人の事例として、カリスマ雑貨店オーナーと呼ばれた益永みつ枝の自伝的著作を手がかりに、東京における、自律的な個人の成立とこうした個人によって緩やかに成立しつつある公共圏の可能性について、コミュニティーという概念に懐疑的であったユルゲン・ハーバマスの議論を踏まえながら、考察を行い、ハーバマスの議論の相対化と脱構築の可能性を探る。

　第二次大戦後の日本は、狭義のコミュニティーを前提としない、比較的豊で自立した個人の形成はあるものの、ハーバマスが描くブルジョア的公共圏が成立した状況とは大きく異なり、強い政治的な抑圧や対立が希薄で、現在のところ、ハーバマスの言う「文学的な公共圏」に類似した段階に留まっており、しかも、文芸よりは、より広範な、雑貨などを含めた、単に言語コミュニケーションの域を超えた、「文化的な公共圏」と呼ぶべきものが成立しつつあるようにみえる。

　こうした考察を通して、消費文化の進展が、自立した個人の解体や成立を阻害するものではなく、むしろ、自立した個人の成立基盤になるのではないかという点と、ハーバマス自身による「文学的公共圏」の議論に示されるように、公共圏とは必ずしも政治的なものである必要はなく、ある特定の条件下ではじめて政治的公共圏が生まれるのではないかという点を論じる。

Keywords: lifestyle, creative consumers, puplic sphere, dialectic of enlightenment
キーワード：ライフスタイル、クリエイティブな消費者、公共圏、啓蒙の弁証法、東京

INTRODUCTION

My argument examines the effectiveness of the concept of the public sphere, which is often criticized as being Eurocentric and idealistic, with respect to the cultural realities of Tokyo today.

I draw my case from Tokyo, Japan, where postwar socio-cultural changes have provided a nurturing ground for a sort of subjective consumers; the lives of such consumers are testimony to their creative involvement. Places such as furnishing and kitchen shops, French style cafes and fashion select-shops have been becoming centers of such a distinct stylization wherein new creative styles of life are recurrently brought into being.

With this case I attempt to formulate the notion of the public sphere in reference to the different process from that of modernization in Europe. In so doing, I will evaluate the extent to which the democratic exchange of ideas and visions can exist in the different context from European. I envisage another birth condition of public sphere in the context of Tokyo, where the people, freed from the social hierarchy of the pre-war regime, can engage in open discussions and exchange ideas unfettered by state regulations and status constrictions.

In Japan, with its own historical trajectory, it is questionable whether the modern concepts such as public sphere, democracy, citizenship, and rational communication, developed in Western context, are applicable in the Japanese context. I wish to investigate this point with respect to specific case of the creative styles of life in Tokyo.

1. Case Study: Emergence of Creative Consumers

In Japan, after 1980, the numbers of various new types of shops and stores, such as variety shops, coffee shops, and fashion select-shops targeting creative consumers, began growing rapidly. They were centered around Tokyo, and their establishment was driven by creative consumer-owners.

When World War II ended, Japan's pre-war system suddenly collapsed. It had been a sole role model for many Japanese people, for better or worse, and people had difficulty in finding food, clothing, and housing in those days. Socio-cultural changes advanced under the extension of such a situation for about half a century. In a new environment with a new education system, the Japanese people voraciously enjoyed the benefits of a mass consumption society. In the 1970s, new consumption patterns, along with creative consumers, gradually began emerging towards the 1990s, when the new generation that had been born and had grown up under the new environment became a cadre of society.

I would like to take up the case of F.O.B COOP, which represents such new types of shops and has been attracting attention. F.O.B COOP operates variety shops and cafes and has recently entered the housing market. It is one of the pioneering stores that offer various lifestyles. The owner of F.O.B COOP, Mitsue Masunaga, born shortly after the end of World War II, is a typical creative consumer-owner who has expanded her business, having begun as a creative consumer. She wanted to become an artist when she was young, although her dream did not come true. After she married, she lived in an old apartment of one room and an eat-in kitchen, constructed by the housing corporation. Every day, she went to a department store near her house to buy household commodities such as cooking pots and plates, because she wanted to have what she really liked, even for such everyday items. At that time, she was a housewife who was 24 years old and had one child.

In her book, she said that she decided to open her own shop because she could not find what she really wanted at ordinary stores (Masunaga: 8). This means that her motivation to run a business is based on the viewpoint of the user or buyer, rather than that of a seller. Her priority is not to sell profitable or hot-selling items but to supply what she herself wants to buy as a creative consumer.

The publicity given to her shops increased when for the first time in Japan they introduced the commercial grade kitchen utensils often found at bistros and cafes in France as home-use items. The importation of tempered Duralex Picardie drinking glasses, in particular, revolutionized variety shops and cafes in this country.

"What? This glass fits perfectly in my hand! How comfortable it is when it touches the lips!"(Masunaga: 69). She recalled the tremor of excitement she felt when she first encountered the Picardie glassware. She then wanted to import it. So this was an idea that she conceived as a consumer, not as a businessperson. Actually, the trading company that she asked to import the Picardie glassware turned down her request because they said that it would not be profitable. In actuality, this business of importing and selling of the glassware has been very successful .

In addition to Apilco's octagonal coffee cups and aluminum cutlery for use in bistros and cafes, F.O.B COOP had a large collection of household goods with a new flavor, such as country fashion items like willow baskets, kitchen utensils, and laundry goods, which had not been available in Japan until that time. From early on, cafes have been attached to the shops—a pioneering idea. The cafes provide French-style coffee made mostly with commercial-grade espresso machines and new food menus. They also have fashion items. "We first have to have modes to express ourselves and then we can establish our own lifestyles. Since we want everybody to be herself for 24 hours a day, F.O.B COOP has decided not to sell work clothes for home use," Ms. Masunaga said (Masunaga: 78).

Around this time, a move to establish new lifestyles became noticeable under the buzzword of "lifestyle," a word that was written in Japanese *katakana* or in English. Together with F.O.B COOP, Afternoon Tea, of the Sazaby's Group, which is larger than F.O.B. COOP in scale, also played a big role. We can find such a trend in the following message on the web-site issued by Afternoon Tea at the 20th anniversary of its establishment in 2001:

> In the 1970s, the culture of mass production and mass consumption came into bloom, and toward 1980, people began shifting their emphasis from quantity to quality and individuality in their lives. But still, at that time, fashions that influence our appearance were at the center of commercialization and manufacturers were trend-setters. This is called product-out.
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> In those days, forward-looking consumers felt something lacking in their lives while they enjoyed fashion trends changing according to the times. Those who were aware of the changes of the times felt that something was missing in current trends focusing only on fashions determined by manufacturers and neglecting lifestyles as a whole. It was a frustrating and unpleasant feeling for them.
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> Under such circumstances, in 1981, Afternoon Tea was born as a shop suggesting enjoyable lifestyles based on the ideas of ordinary citizens. This was the antithesis of the inflexible ideas of the professionals. This is when a concept of lifestyle emerged. Afternoon Tea has been offering peace of mind to its customers; they can enjoy a natural, moderate, and comfortable life through spacious arrangements, people, products, and menus.
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> I think lifestyles are changes in the preference of consumers in response to the changes of the times. In the mighty swell of changing times, individuals come to feel like changing their lifestyles. Since such changes are perceived by individuals, they seem to be mere changes in preference on a superficial level. But, actually, they are changes rooted in culture and policy, and these changes continue to occur in a complex manner, while an intertwining phenomenon, such as the combination of luxury and inexpensive items taking on value, sometimes happens.

So what will be the lifestyle in the immediate future? I think that information technology and warm side of humanity will be important factors. Information technology is now changing the fundamental means of our lives. What we had believed to be impossible before may become possible. However, no matter how much technology advances, we would have a strong desire to maintain the rhythms we have cultivated over the years and the warmth of the familiar analog world. We would like to see the fusion between information technology and the warmth of analog format. That may be why we now suddenly have come to feel like cherishing the warmth of candle-light (Satoh: 156-7).

Sazaby, the parent company of this lifestyle company, established Starbucks Japan and has been expanding its operations, adding one coffee shop a week. Currently there are over 600 shops in Japan; this is the highest number in the world, except for North America. This coffee chain is now well known as a symbol of globalization, but the operation in Japan was their first attempt at overseas operations. It is said that the start-up of business in Japan was originally requested from the Japanese side.

In the early '90s new-style cafes began appearing, with several small-scale French-style open cafes opening in Tokyo and gaining popularity. Under such circumstances the success of Starbucks has established the new style.

Starbucks Coffee originated in Seattle, and there is no doubt that it is now a global brand. But looking at the company more closely, we find that it is well positioned in the history of the development of Japan's unique consumption culture. It can also be said that the development of a unique consumption culture in Japan is conspicuous in the global trend.

This agrees with the fact that most of the stores of Conran, the world's leading household goods company, can be found in Japan, not in the U.K. where its headquarters are located. The role played by fashion-select shops in the fashion industry is also in line with this trend.

These autonomous consumers are not the privileged bourgeoisie but ordinary people who in the past would have been called the masses. Generally, they are thought to have a high level of concern for the good of the community, for example, in terms of environmental consciousness. In her book, Masunaga defined her view of the ideal way of life as including a strong sense of public spirit, and her personal history shows that she has put her ideas in practice.

But this situation did not emerge overnight. During the process of restarting from the ashes of defeat, both physically and spiritually, a unique and rich culture accumulated in Japan. However, compared with European culture it was a shabby and eccentric Asian-style slum culture in which too many poor people were concentrated in relatively hot, humid, and gloomy places. In 1950, when the import of coffee beans resumed, a unique culture of *kissaten*, meaning coffee shops, took hold. Since they are quite peculiar to Japan, in Japanese we call them the *kissaten* culture, not the café or coffee shop culture as you would say in English. In the 1960s, Mitsue Masunaga also ran *kissaten*, starting at the age of 21 and only giving it up when she got married.

On the other hand, the position of professional designers was established in the graphic and product design fields, and this led to the emergence of many art colleges and schools. A move led by professionals to shape new lifestyles began in earnest, as seen in the establishment of "popular artwork activity", one of the living art activities that have existed before the war, and the development of craft activities. Such movements, together with moves made by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry and large-scale retailers such as department stores, made possible the distribution of tableware, furniture, and fabric of Scandinavian design and mid-century modern design from soon after the creation

of these design movements..

Actually, along this line, SEIBU, a large-scale capital investor, invited Ikko Tanaka, an iconic post-war professional designer, to become a creative director of MUJI, one of the first lifestyle shops in Japan Tanaka:200. Though MIJI was expanded by professionals, government, large-scale capital investors, and suppliers, the shops can be said to have played an important role that enabled the accumulation of sufficient cultural affluence to prepare for the next step. I don't have enough time to discuss this here, but we can find similar trends in the fashion, food and drink, and leisure industries. Higher education which was very rare before the war has now become quite common in Japan.

During this period, complete democracy also became advanced and spread everywhere to households, classrooms, and corporate meeting rooms. Under this system, it was considered that decisions should be made not by paternalistic authority or dictatorship of teachers or bossy kids or by a top-down system, but by a majority vote involving even those people at the bottom of the ladder.

Following this stage of infancy, movements led by creative consumers began appearing in the 1990s.

2. Consideration: The post-war Japanese context

In his book *"The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society"* (Habermas,2000; Habermas,2005; Habermass,2006), Jülgen Habermas portrayed the rise of the bourgeoisie that stood against the powerful regal power known to have originated in Europe; the formation of a public sphere or an arena for rational public opinion that they helped to achieve; and the process by which this public sphere declined with the expansion of the consumption culture that followed.

The case of Tokyo I intended to describe here seems to at least differ greatly from the process described by Habermas.

First of all, Japan in the post-war days was transformed into a nation of popular sovereignty that was not officially allowed to have an army following its occupation by the U.S.-led Allied Powers. On the hardware side, many of the urban areas were physically burned to the ground. In terms of software, too, the pre-war imperial system and hierarchies, including the nobility, collapsed, the land-owning class and "*Ke*" (the house or family) disappeared, the Zaibatsu was dissolved, the social structure and system were destroyed extensively, and the pre-war cultural systems were abolished wherever possible, as symbolized by changes in the form of the Japanese characters. All these brought great social and cultural upheavals to the country. What was then sought after was a leveled society or an image of a new democratic and economically affluent society with no wide gaps, labeled "all-Japanese-are-middle-class." There also emerged a time and a space whose political orientation was substantially ambiguous, though it might have been otherwise officially. Therefore, the road to Japan's post-war recovery was not without some political conflict, but it may be pointed out that a system comparable to the powerful sovereign power described in Hebermas's case was non-existent or its presence was relatively low-profile.

In Tokyo's case, women's searches for their own lifestyles are evident, and also the broader spectrum of society, not the privileged bourgeoisie, act as creative consumers, with a sense of opposition against the supply side. The Habermas's case in contrast, was criticized by Terry Eagleton as gender- and class-biased (Eagleton: 118). This is also significantly different from Habermas's case.

Furthermore, it contrasts with the process envisaged by Habermas in that the formation of an autonomous citizens' class was accelerated amid rapid economic growth and the dissemination of a

consumption culture.

Does such a difference deny Habermas's argument or does it polarize it? It seems at least possible to make the following interpretation. Apart from the European historical concrete process described by Habermas, it is possible that Tokyo's case, taken up here, will call for some sort of modification to Habermas's model, even if it is effective in terms of a generalized scheme.

Habermas himself suggested a kind of expansion in consumption culture in the development of the bourgeoisie. The formation of the public sphere was based on the tacit premise of the affluent growth of the newly rising class, both economically and culturally. In order for a political public sphere to come into existence, another premise needed was the context in which standing against the powerful authority that was so opposed to such a class was inevitable.

Thus it would be possible to interpret this as indicating that although a process equivalent to the first premise can be found in Tokyo's case, the second one is unlikely to be established.

3. Conclusion: Reconsideration of Habermas

If the above interpretation applies, the rise of the consumption culture that prompted the decline of the bourgeois public sphere was the first step in a process of growth toward the economic and cultural affluence of a wider class of people called the public, and hence the possibility that a phenomenon would occur that looked like a temporary regression. If that had been the case, Habermas might have passed a shortsighted and rash judgment on the phenomenon. In other words, he failed to foresee a further continuation of the scenario.

Is it possible that a wise man like Habermas really made such a mistake? That is unlikely, but I will not say that there was absolutely no possibility, considering the following points.

In his book *"Der Philosophische Diskurs der Moderne"* (Habermas, 1988), Habermas devoted a chapter to an examination of where Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno made an error over the book *"Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments"* (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002). In conclusion, Habermas indicated that the tragic experience that tortured the lives and thoughts of the two social philosophers due to the rise of the Nazis (although he noted his empathy with their pessimistic views arising from such an experience) turned out to be one of the factors responsible for their loss of reason—the essence of enlightenment and the flower of modern times—and their fall into hopeless discussions. As mentioned, Habermas, who did not lose hope for rational communication, apparently kept his distance from Horkheimer and Adorno. On the other hand, there is no doubt that, at least in *"The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere"*, Habermas followed the theory on the 'great sin of mass consumption culture' expounded in *"Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments"*. It seems that here is the experience that led to these pessimistic views. The influence of a classic, Marxist interpretation of mass consumption would also be undeniable.

There is one more point to add. It concerns the implications of the growth of economic and cultural affluence that should have been witnessed in the formative period of the bourgeoisie, but was treated as something like a given condition and not fully examined in *"The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere"*. Habermas was concerned with rational communication and the public sphere, an arena for public opinion based on such communication, but factors other than a narrow sense of rational communication that economic and cultural affluence imply, would be essential for such a public sphere to be in existence. They should also include a sensitivity factor that could contradict logic. An autonomous class would come into being only after all these factors were included.

I do not mean to advocate the stereotypical idea that Europe is rational, whereas Asia is sensitive. I

wish to indicate that I can get a glimpse of a wider reality through the case described by Habermas. My view is neither European- nor Asian-oriented in that sense. If I have to find a difference, it would be one between the context on which the Frankfurt School was reliant and the context on which I am reliant.

Tokyo's case, which I have taken up here, is not meant to indicate that the Asian context essentially differs from the European context. It is aimed at urging modification to Habermas's interpretation of the European case. As I did in Tokyo's case, overlapping Dubai's case, Bishkek's case, or whatever case is apparently different from the European case described by Habermas with Habermas's case could enrich the discussions essential for today's world concerning such topics as the public sphere, democracy, citizenship, rational communication, and modernity. It could also bring about a more contemporary modification of these discussions, regardless of whether overlapping leads to the modification of Habermas's discussion, its deconstruction, or confirmation of the appropriateness of alternative discussions.

Finally, as we all know, such examinations promise great benefits in considering the Japanese case.

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