Methods for area studies and contemporary China study

Satoshi Amako

Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies, Waseda University, Tokyo, Japan

ABSTRACT

This article emphasizes that the discipline of area study is yet an important tool to understand problems occurring in each region on politics, economics, societies, and the behavior of political leaders in the real world, though it has come to be often neglected. The reason that area study itself has not developed a distinct analytical framework is a comprehensive synthetic research process, and there are many analytical approaches that inclines toward specific discipline of different researchers. Researchers with theoretical background often criticize that area studies are not social science. As long as we assert that area study is also a kind of theoretical research, it is necessary to construct a common methodological framework for area study researchers. The article proposes the idea of basic core structure combining with some extracted characteristics on topography, culture, history, and social structure, which are difficult to change easily in specific regions. By using it as an important analytical framework, and combining with disciplines such as political science and economics, we analyze and interpret specific phenomenon that has been revealed in certain region. The basic core structure of China, for example, can be understood as the combination with “the four massive aspects” (population, region, ideology, and power) and “the four divisions” (elite and people, human network and system, city and country, and politics and economics). Various phenomena in China (such as the relationship between economic development and democratization) can only be effectively understood by taking into account of the four massive aspects and divisions in the basic core structure of China.

KEYWORDS

Area studies; contemporary Chinese studies; basic core structure; four massive aspects; four divisions

1. Are area studies dying out?

From the perspective of international trends in academia up to the 1990s, the end of the Cold War and progress in globalization had enhanced the trend of decline in area studies, depreciation of interdisciplinary research, and partiality of discipline in the US academic society. Japan has been strongly influenced by these trends in the United States and even those who specialized in research of regions such as China, Korea, and Indonesia so far have frequently said, “The era of Area Studies is over,” “Interdisciplinary approaches are for liberal arts, and we do not consider them to be specialized study,” or “In my university, the course called ‘Area Studies’ was eliminated and its name was changed to ‘Comparative studies’.”
Area studies in United States began to be taken seriously with the start of the Cold War era as enemy (socialist) states research. The purpose of area studies in the United States is to study how behaviors of the leaders, national character, the relationship between the leader and nations, the leadership of enemy states, and even comprehensive national power, so on are analyzed and determined to help a nation’s own strategic needs. Thus, in research, comprehensive analyses needed to utilize various disciplines such as economics, politics, social sciences, history, culture, and international relations.

However, such a comprehensive approach is vague, and it was difficult to avoid the risk of falling into arbitrary decisions by the analyst. For example, scholars who have backgrounds in political science, economics, and historical science tend to think about issues through the lenses of their own fields of expertise. It is questionable whether this is truly a social-scientific approach. In addition, the number of countries that are identified as enemy countries decreased dramatically due to the end of the Cold War. Thus, it can be said that the significance of the area studies decreased greatly.

Those who emphasize regional analysis according to discipline claim that meaningful, comparable, and “objective” conclusions cannot be obtained until “objective data and information” are inputted using a common analytical framework of political and economic sciences. However, this claim raises an important question. What is an objective common analytical framework? Such analytical frameworks are mostly produced in the academic worlds of Europe and North America.

In a field where historical and social backgrounds in the West and Asia differ considerably, is it appropriate to assume that this framework is correct and then use it directly? For example, how can substantially meaningful decision-making processes in such regions be analyzed in-depth using game theory, approaches such as realism, liberalism, and constructivism used in decision-making process theory by the bureaucracy model or international relations theory, and so on? Of course, the author does not deny the significance and need for these analytical frameworks but opposes their use without limitations or constraints. Such researchers who actively make these analyses seem not to focus on the issue of regional peculiarities. For example, even if a bureaucracy model subject to rational choice by actors that engage in policy-making is used, it is not easy to generalize what is “reasonable” because this varies depending on circumstances in specific regions and the values of decision-makers. In other words, if unique historical, cultural, social, and political backgrounds in this region and the manner of interpretation and decision-making by actors based on the assessment standard and value standard (individuality) for policy-making are the issues, then what is referred to as a “reasonable judgment” will be deemed reasonable “to A,” “from the perspective of B,” and “according to the significance of C,” and it can be understood that rationality itself has diverse perspectives.¹

However, a “theoretical” analyst who emphasizes disciplines that have already been set according to the “textbook” performs analysis only according to what the discipline defines (e.g. what is considered “rational”). The content from that is not subject to analysis or is removed from the subject for analysis for the moment as a “special case.” For example, when debating modification of the political system, there is a “systemic transition theory” that is deemed to be common knowledge among political and social scholars in Europe and America, in which a traditional autocratic or totalitarian

¹Weber, Soziologie der Herrschaft.
dictatorship undergoes economic modernization to transition to an authoritarian dictatorship and then to a democratic system, in the process resulting in a change in the economic and social hierarchy. It is a trend in academia to apply this to societies in Asia, Latin America, and Africa in conducting system transition studies.

However, a political system is formed and functions with the strong adhesion of unique historical elements such as the relationship between administrators and people in the region, view of authority, recognition of power, and the relationship between nation and society, political culture, or the scale of the political space. With this in mind, can general and universal systemic transformation patterns be applied unconditionally? Originally, researchers of area studies fully took “regional characteristics” and “unique local characteristics” into consideration to understand various phenomena such as politics, economics, and society.

For this reason, the following questions arise. Can various phenomena in the region be understood by refining the theory and gathering information in detail based on the common “social scientific method”? Can it be said that there is no longer a need to claim to refer to this specifically as area studies?

Is there no longer the need to understand not superficially but in detail the actual circumstances of countries and the characteristics of people living there? Throughout the world, globalization has proceeded and economic barriers have come down considerably, and by rapid development of transportation and information means, the opportunity to move overseas and the opportunity to obtain overseas information have increased exponentially. International business negotiation, political negotiation, and cultural exchange have become part of daily activities. A rapid increase in exchange and contact will indeed increase common understand, sense of values, procedures, and the like.

However, from the perspective of decision-making criteria and behavior in individual countries, “regional characteristics” are still not easily changed and are found to play an important role. In this way, while contact and exchange have increased and the importance of relations with countries abroad has increased on a daily basis, “regional characteristics” still cannot be disregarded. In other words, it can also be said that there was never an era when the need to not only strategically but also comprehensively understand partner countries was growing to the same degree as it is today. Thus, it is no exaggeration to state that not only have area studies not ended but the need for area studies has increased while adding new significance.

1.1. Raising issues concerning restructuring of area studies

Area studies aims to comprehensively understand specific regions, and on that basis, individually understand various phenomena such as politics, economics, and community. As Kenichiro Hirano pointed “The essentials of area studies lie in the enjoyment involved in capturing the whole subject more than anything else.” In addition, “research privileges that can be regarded as ‘the pastoral’ enable everyone to observe inside by the rapid development of information means, and allows one to touch upon detailed internal regional research itself as well, but the more they focus on the details, the more difficult it has become to grasp the entire picture” he said.2 Regarding changes in the environment surrounding area studies,

---

2Hirano, “Area Studies in the Era of Globalization”, 18.
Shinichi Takeuchi points out that various problems that have been created such as human trafficking or statelessness, which exist regardless of national borders, as a result of globalization cannot be grasped by studies limited to any one country or region. In addition, he mentioned that in recent years we can see a clear tendency toward the development of analytical methods, proactive publication of various statistics by governments and international organizations, substantial increase in the availability of the data, and the development of micro-research for demonstration by using statistical analysis. He also said it has become possible to use the data for highly precise analysis and further argued that foreign researchers in “area studies” could no longer monopolize knowledge about a specific area by such analysis. This is similar to Hirano’s aforementioned comment.  

As area studies focus on the region as a whole, it is completely inadequate from the perspective of any specific discipline. However, only deepening regional knowledge from the large quantity of information obtained would also be insufficient. It is not a simple matter, but one must work to form a comprehensive theoretical methodology that involves the study of culture, history, geography, political science, economics, sociology, anthropology, etc., and must attempt to analyze issues through such lenses. Unless such attempts are successful, one could even argue convincingly that area studies are not theoretical research. However, it is unclear to me whether researchers of area studies are aware of such issues. This author has continued to focus on awareness of such issues and has found that the three important elements of a multidisciplinary analytical method include geographic features, culture (including history), and social structure. Geographical features include geographic scale, topography, and geopolitical positions.

We discuss China, which is my primary area of study, as follows. During the Cold War, and in particular, in the United States after the 1960s, theoretical area studies on contemporary China were carried out, but essentially, there seemed to be a tendency for various phenomena during the Mao era to be analyzed according to the totalitarianism model. For example, “Contemporary Chinese politics,” which is regarded as a textbook of contemporary China studies written by James Townsend, analyzed Mao’s days under a framework of “radical totalitarianism.” Post-Mao Tse-tung, the Deng Xiaoping era has been interpreted under a framework known as the “authoritarianism model” or “regime of authoritarianism,” and it was tacitly assumed that China would enter a path toward democratization in the post-Deng Xiaoping era.

However, the roadmap for democratization was destroyed in the so-called Tiananmen Square incident of 1989. There was one possible scenario that was considered for a path to democratization in which modernization and economic development by developmental dictatorship and developmental policy would eventually result in a large number of citizens having an awareness of rights as well as a desire to make a profit, and these citizens would become the engine for democratization. That scenario collapsed. At that time, Michael Oksenburg who was said to be the most famous leading professor of modern Chinese studies in the United States engaged in self-criticism on the Tiananmen Square incident.

---

3 Takeuchi, “Area Studies and Discipline”, 6–7.
4 For example, although this might be presumptuous to state, but while several excellent theses appear in Hiroshi and Yokote, Area Study and Present-Day State. The way of thinking and approach regarding area studies are not shown at all including in the introduction.
5 Townsend, Politics in China.
6 Mori, Present-Day Chinese Politics. By reading this publication, one can easily gain an understanding of the Chinese political system.
saying that “we China watchers did not foresee the major challenge to the leaders’ authority, or their inability to handle the situation with the requisite.”

It has nearly been 30 years since then. Chinese economic development and the affluence of the people have been remarkable. However, the communist dictatorship remains. The path to democratization that leads to so-called political pluralism, freedom of speech and press, and human rights remains blocked. Is it just sufficient to continue to interpret this through a Western lens that indicates that China is simply “delayed” on its path to democratization? Perhaps Michel Oksenberg’s confession that he was unable to “see fundamental aspects of the undercurrent in China,” belated as it is, is what is strongly needed now.

Indeed, it is necessary to revive and develop China studies as a branch of area studies that emphasizes local realities. Looking back on results of contemporary studies on China in Japan, there have been quite a number of people engaged in inventive ways to study the topic in order to see the aforementioned “fundamental aspects.” For instance, Yuzo Mizoguchi has raised the necessity for “reexamination of the postwar methodology” because simple dualisms such as progressivism/conservatism, socialism/capitalism, and developed/undeveloped have broken down as a result of the collapse of the Cold War structure, and he argued as follows. “In order to consider modern Asia, whether it be Japan or China, it is necessary to consider the ‘non’-European characteristics based on the pre-modern eras in Japan and China.” He further stated that “universalities in world history would also of course be based on such ‘non’-European or individual characteristics.” To express this notion in a simple manner, one should not discuss Asian countries according to values, concepts, and analytical methods created in the West, but rather, one should analyze and explain various phenomena while recognizing regional characteristics and “universal” concepts born in Europe should be discussed relative to regional characteristics.

Similar arguments regarding the need for understanding the problem can be seen in the article written by Niida and Yoshimi. Taking a bird’s eye perspective, we can see in various places that China studies in Japan, including what was referred to as “Sinology” before the war, are objectively speaking at a very high level by international standards.

This research mainly relied on field studies, reference sources, so on, and the fact that Japanese researchers are able to read Chinese characters and that they have much in common in regard to culture and social customs has posed strong advantages to Japanese researchers of China compared to European and American researchers. However, it did not make for robust theoretical research.

Indeed, because an interdisciplinary approach itself is in disarray, it will be very difficult to consolidate and link them and then to create and present a given theoretical framework. As a matter of course, there were some scholars who attempted to create a theory, and very acute insights are seen in those studies as well, but they were merely attempts to theoretically explain Chinese social peculiarities by accumulation of empirical research and the researcher’s own acute insights.

For example, immediately after the war, economist Yuji Muramatsu, professor of Hitotsubashi University, researched Chinese political, economic, and social history,

---

7 Oksenberg, “Confessions of a China-Watcher.”
8 Mizoguchi, Hoho Toshiteno Chugoku, 35.
9 Niida, What is the East?, Takeuchi, Japan and Asia.
10 For example, Tachibana, The Research on Chinese Society; Simizu, The Study on Chinese Society; and Niida, Chinese Tradition and Revolution, etc.
clarified the current situation, and based on that, intended to depict a future Chinese relational structure according to a unique dynamic–static relationship between economics and politics. Muramatsu expressed political change and the structure of the economy and society that restrict and influence political change as a dynamic system (態制), and regarding such characteristics, he argued that “what was on the other side of the coin of the long term drastic political changes was the continuation of the static cycle in the economy, which was to a certain degree stable. Furthermore, what is seen as a marked contrast was merely two aspects of one dynamic system.”

Muramatsu was an economist, of course, and in this book he analyzed and mentioned mainly the history and structure of agriculture, industry, commercial features, the Chinese economic outlook in the process of switching to communism, so on that surround economics, but he also made efforts to analyze sociopolitical issues such as government organizations, structure, village/clan, and guilds, expressing these as an “external dynamic system of economics,” thereby achieving exemplary inter-disciplinary research.

Also, Hiroyuki Kato, who passed away at a young age not so long ago, noted in the introduction to his last full-fledged book that he focused intensively on “what the essential structures behind the Chinese economic system that achieved economic growth are, and to thoroughly investigate what makes China unique” as this book’s primary goal. He indicates that this uniqueness is “characterized by the system creating cultural principles that underpin the socioeconomic order.” He also mentioned that such characteristics lie in “ambiguity that is embedded in the system” and analyzed the <Bao> (contract) as a phenomenon that symbolizes such ambiguity. In order to analyze this “ambiguity,” Kato attempts to create a theory based on Chinese traditional culture theory, legal theory, perspectives on contracts, nation/social theory, so on.

Having introduced Chinese analytical research on economics, the author now introduces a publication of similar research results on politics up to now. This publication is titled “Super stable system of Chinese society” written by Jin Guantao and Liu Qingfeng. According to the authors, at the start of the Reform and Opening-Up policy, vigorous discussions on historical reflection took place in China’s historical society. In these discussions, the topic that garnered the most attention was why Chinese feudal society lasted as long as 2000 years.

In order to answer this question, authors did not consider traditional economics, politics, and ideology individually but instead attempted to clarify this age-old difficult question from all perspectives, or in other words, the interaction and interdependence of the three parts (economics, politics, and ideology), in order to recognize them as interdependent and linked components of the whole system. While paying attention to the interaction of three main subsystems (ideological structure, political structure, and economic structure) in historical processes, they concluded that “China’s feudal society was not unchanged and stagnated, but rather the social structure is undergoing a continuous cycle of collapse and renewal even as the social structure as a whole has not changing to a new structure.” The authors drew such a relational structure of these three subsystems as shown in the Figure 1.

---

11 Muramatsu, Social Dynamic System of Chinese Economy, 8.
12 Kato, Chinese-Style Capitalism as an Ambiguous System.
13 Original title is Jin, Behind the Symbol of History.
The left figure is a depiction of the basic structure while the right figure is a depiction of the structure of the feudal society in China.

As such, the dynastic system of China that continued in this manner for over 2000 years is analyzed according to the following three structures: ideology (traditional Confucianism), politics (bureaucracy), and economics (landlord economic), and perhaps this basic structure could continue to be applied at least up to the Mao era.

In other words, under ideology would fit communism, under bureaucracy would fit the single party Communist regime, and although the economy changed to a state-controlled system, the structure of agricultural economy and state exploitation were not changed and support the system of governance interdependently. The author believes that this framework can still be applied to the present system in China. In other words, patriotism and traditional Confucianism combine to form an ideology, and the bureaucracy and one-party system combine to form the political structure.

The economic structure has drastically changed as the economy has transformed to a capitalist and market economy. However, in the three-part structure, ideology and politics restricts economic transformation and maintains the entire dynamic system. It remains to be seen how this relational structure will develop in the future.

What is common to such research results is that in order to decipher the various characteristic phenomena and questions regarding China, the uniqueness of China as a region throughout the ages is focused upon, and such phenomena are explained and questions answered according to those characteristics.

Indeed, attention should be paid to Muramatsu’s approach of interpreting the dynamic politics and static socioeconomics as one system, Kato’s understanding that the “vague system” centered on “bao” is the most important element of Chinese economic vitality, and Jin’s view of the mutual relationship of the three structures of ideology, politics, and economics.

One thing these approaches have in common is that “regional uniqueness” is a characteristic that is key to understanding Chinese society.
2. Basic core structure theory as analytical methodology

The author has high regard for the aforementioned research results in the sense of theorizing area studies’ methodology. However, in the sense of using a common methodology that can be used for research of other regions as well, as repeatedly emphasized by those who focus on various disciplines in conducting area studies, the area studies’ methodology is still very much insufficient and is still in development.

In the first place, it is questionable whether there is even a common methodology in area studies. But if area studies are to be used to conduct realistic analyses of various phenomena that have occurred in each region and behaviors through the lenses of several disciplines, then by taking into consideration the uniqueness of the region, or to borrow the words of Oksenburg, to see “fundamental aspects of the undercurrent” of each region, the author believes that it is inevitable that a common methodology will be created.14

The author believes that the key point to constructing a theoretical methodology of area studies is finding “difficult to change elements” caused by the various elements that constitute a region’s unique qualities. Note that “difficult to change” does not mean “unchanging.” Therefore, the author has come to believe that the set of meaningful relations that are difficult to change is defined as the “basic core structure” and that this basic core structure may become a foundation and analytical framework to understand the reality of each region. The author believes that not only is clarification of the dynamic structure of the unique qualities of the region important in gaining a theoretical understanding of various phenomena of the region, but by considering the transformation of difficult to change elements, it will be possible to foresee the vector or qualitative content of medium- to long-term change in the region. In other words, the author believes that such an analytical approach is indispensable for medium- to long-term prospects.

For example, let us consider Japan’s own “difficult to change structure” as a familiar case. First of all, characteristics of Japan include that (1) Japan is an island; (2) in comparison with other countries, there is a high degree of homogeneity in race, language, culture, history, and lifestyle; (3) Japan has relatively well-defined seasons (four seasons) and is blessed with an abundance of nature such as lush forests, fertile soil, water, so on, and people have been depending on and harmonizing with nature, and (4) in all of Japan’s history, there has been almost no invasion from enemies, and no internal wars resulting in the country being torn apart.

With these as clues, the following explanation can be made for Japan’s “difficult to change” features that would be familiar to anyone. Relating to (1), Japan is surrounded by the sea, which serves as a natural fortress, and therefore, its inhabitants lack a strong instinct to defend their own territory through force of might. Also, there are many people who embody the island mentality by being introverted or shy outside of their own turf. Additionally, there has been relatively frequent movement of people and exchange of information and culture within the country, and in common with (2) as well, a “homogeneous society” has been created. For (3), borrowing the interpretation of Shunshin Chin, while the Chinese had a tendency to fight and conquer nature, the

14See note 7.
Japanese people attempted to harmonize with nature, resulting in the concepts of "mono no aware (awareness of impermanence)" and "wabi-sabi (aesthetic of quiet and simple beauty)" coming into existence. In other words, it is the characteristic of sensitivity to emotions that a relationship with nature produces.\(^{15}\) In (4), except for the Genpei War, the Mongolian invasion, the Warring States period, and the Meiji Restoration at the end of Edo period, there was no chaos domestically, and social order had essentially been kept. Unlike the West, Japan did not need to make an agreement to maintain order between state and society, and unlike China, it did not need to win and maintain order by the might of the emperor and a massive bureaucracy.

Characteristics of “difficult to change elements” in Japan may include island mentality/introversion, community spirit, collective strength, homogeneity, mentality toward harmony with nature, sensitivity, and a sense of order and defense that does not incur high costs. Of course, cases that were excluded from these characteristics can easily be pointed out. Important elements to produce a basis for these characteristics include (1) social implications of geographic characteristics in the country, (2) historical consciousness accumulated over many year, and (3) a view of humanity created repeatedly among people and between people and nature, the social structure in a broad sense, and the like.

To summarize the basic core structure in Japan as a group of relationship of these elements, (1) a community space is created by active inward-looking exchange within Japan as an island country, with a strong “group mentality” and “collective strength”; (2) Japanese people prefer harmony, do not like drastic change, and have a strong ethnic sense of jus sanguinis symbolized by the emperor’s unbroken imperial line; and (3) a familial line-based hierarchy existed, but even commoners had an opportunity or mechanism by which to receive education and medical care, there was no despotic rule by an administrator or maintenance of order by bureaucratic control, and there was a relatively equitable social structure.

Next, let us consider the basic core structure of Korea according to the same idea. Considering the situation in Korea, (1) geopolitical constraints posed by being surrounded by three major countries including China to the west, Russia to the north, and Japan to the southwest across the sea have played an important role. Particularly, since the latter half of the nineteenth century, Korea has been at the mercy of these external factors up to the present day. As a result of these factors, Korea was forced to become a colony of the Empire of Japan in 1910, and after the Second World War, partition into North Korea and South Korea was further reinforced by the Korean War and continues to this day. Particularly, strained relations with North Korea on the other side of the 38th parallel have become a major issue concerning security in the Asia-Pacific region surrounding the Korean Peninsula as well as the foreign policy and security of South Korea.

(2) Korean culture is known to have been strongly influenced by Confucianism. Korea once defined itself as “Xiao-Zhong Hua (Little China)” and had a strong sense of cultural superiority to other countries except for China. However, at the same time, Korea has a strong ethnic identity symbolized by the fact that they got rid of Chinese

\(^{15}\)Chen, Japanese and Chinese, 80–92.
characters and invented the Hangul alphabet. To this day, some scholars insist on the restoration of “small China” to aim for an autonomous Korea while being strongly conscious of China world.

(3) Regarding the economy, multiple large business conglomerates (chaebols) have massive influential power (10 groups including Samsung, Hyundai, LG, etc., constituted 76% of South Korea’s GDP in 2011). Thus, the economic aspect is easy to understand, and monopolar concentration in Seoul is a notable characteristic. These large industrial conglomerates and mid to small businesses are operated by founders, their sons, and their families. However, unlike Japan’s familial inheritance rules, the father’s assets are divided on a basic level. This is similar to Confucian inheritance rules in China. At the same time, the economy is deeply fused with and adheres to politics, military affairs, society, so on, and greatly affects the entire Korean society.

When considering the basic core structure, which strongly affects thought, strategy, and behavior in Korea, the following should be taken into consideration: (1) geographic and geopolitical location and scale, in the sense that Korea is surrounded by major countries; (2) a sense of history that is strongly influenced by Confucian culture; (3) personal connections based on the principle of jus sanguinis and the structure of various deep divisions between the elite, who guide the society as a whole, and commoners. Similarly, the author has a strong interest in the basic core structure of the United States. However, the author does not yet have sufficient basic knowledge required to theorize on the United States, and thus, this is a topic to be discussed in the future.

3. What is China’s basic core structure?

3.1. Basic core structure in China I; four massive aspects

It is not easy to theoretically extract structural characteristics of Chinese society in a broad sense. The studies by Muramatsu (1949), Jin and Liu (1987), Kato (2013), so on, aforementioned have succeeded in exposing important divisions in Chinese social, economic, and political characteristics. However, that alone is not sufficient in terms of promoting theoretical systematization of area studies. How does one generate a group of characteristics unique to the region that are systematized in general and make that a basis for an area studies’ approach?

The author stayed in China for a long period of time in the latter half of the 1980s, and even after that, visited China frequently and studied and investigated almost all provinces/autonomous regions, where the author could find some elements that are difficult to change as the unique characteristics of China. Then, the author came to believe that it would be possible, and even necessary, to see the unique regional characteristics of China as an organic aggregate, or in other words the basic core structure, by bundling those elements together and examining the mutual relationship. Through attempts to examine, choose, and summarize various unique characteristics that are individually found, the

---

16The author initially came to have such an idea when he met Dr Fei Xiaotong in Beijing in 1986 and exchanged views with him directly (see, Amako, The Chinese Reform Forefront). Since then, Amako introduced this concept to the academic world as “basic core structural theory.” Based on a common awareness of the issue, the following sources attempt to analyze and understand China in the authors’ unique ways: in Ishida, “The Basic Structure of the Chinese Agriculture Community,” 113; and Sasaki, Substrate Layer Structure.
author found that the basic core structure of China could be combined into the characteristics of “Four Massive Aspects” and “Four Divisions.” Thereafter through further literature research, the author could determine that those characteristics have not simply been caused by various contemporary factors, and that the characteristics consist of several factors that have been maintained traditionally, culturally, historically, economically, geopolitically, or demographically over long periods of time.

First of all, the author posits the massiveness of territory as the first characteristic of the “massive aspects.” The culture that originally developed in the zone referred to as the land of “zhong yuan” (中原) in the watershed of the Yellow River had gradually spread outward, and the old dynasty appeared there. Broadly speaking, Qin (秦) unified the whole country in 221 BC, and thereafter during dynasties such as Han, Tang, Song, and Ming, the area ranging north to the Great Wall and west to Lanzhou and Chengdu was controlled by the Han Chinese, and furthermore, there were regions in the western area inhabited by local ethnic groups that were vassals of the Chinese dynasties. Apart from the age where the country was split into Southern Song/Northern Song and the age from the Mongol invasion to the Yuan dynasty, China controlled territories as described earlier. China’s territory spread during the Qing (清) dynasty and expanded to present-day Mongolia and Vladivostok, which led to China governing a vaster area than it does today. China’s total present day land area is 9,600,000 km², which is 1/15 of the world’s land area, making it the third largest country in the world after Russia and Canada.

The massiveness of China’s territory, needless to say, has a major impact on the concept (idea) and form of “governance” and requires a huge amount of energy to ensure the human and financial resources to do so. This contrasts with the case of Japan. The Great Wall was constructed by investing an enormous amount of human resources and materials over a period of hundreds of years in order to deal with threats from the north. The presence of the world’s largest army today, the People’s Liberation Army and armed police, which exceed three million people, is essential for dealing with threats both at home and abroad, and there appears to be no significant change to the traditional concept of defense.

Also, the massiveness of China’s territory inevitably leads to an acceptance of diversity in various aspects. In terms of climate, there are various zones, such as the northern cold zone, southern tropical zone, northwest dry zone, and humid zone in southwestern mountain forests and the southeastern coast. In terms of body types, the fact that the northern people are large and the southern people are small shows distinctive characteristics. In terms of language as well, if people use their local dialects, those dialects might as well be a foreign language to people from other regions, who would be unable to understand them. There is a wide variety in terms of food culture, manners, customs, and economic level as well. If ethnic minority communities are included, those differences are even more marked.

The author posits the massiveness of China’s population as the second characteristic of the “massive aspects.” China’s population had historically been hovering around approximately 50 million people since the age of the old dynasty. It has exceeded 100 million people since the age of the Kangxi emperor (the total population of the world around the same period was approximately 660 million people according to estimates by History Database of the Global Environment, HYDE 2006, etc.) and has been increasing at the pace of around 100 million people every 50 years thereafter.
The increase in population is deeply related to the expansion of territories controlled by China, which was mentioned under the first characteristic. The controlled territories significantly expanded during the age of the Kangxi Emperor. Thereafter, there has been no significant change in the area of territories controlled by China; despite this, its population has been increasing.

It appears that the economic development and increasing exchanges among people have had an impact. The population had already reached 450 million during the Republic of China era (1947). Thereafter, a full-fledged census was conducted and it was found that the population was approximately 540 million. The population had reached 700 million during the Cultural Revolution, and since the adoption of the Reform and Opening-Up policy, the famous “one-child policy” was adopted. However, the population continued to increase and has reached 1.3 billion people in the present day, which is the largest population in the world (the total population of the world is approximately 7.2 billion; China’s population occupies the nearly same percentage of the world population as the era of the Kangxi Emperor).

By comparison, the population of Japan had exceeded 15 million people since the 1600s, the beginning of the Edo Period, and had reached more than 30 million people by the end of Edo Period, and 34 million people in the early Meiji Period. Japan’s population had been on the rise until 2005 but slightly decreased in 2005, and thereafter, has continued to hover around the same level with slight increases and decreases, to reach 127,100,000 people as of 2015.

The massiveness of China’s population is deeply related to the third and fourth massive aspects. Mao Tse-tung theory of war, the people’s war, was also born with the backdrop of China’s massive population. Furthermore, China had followed the path of modernization by the Reform and Opening-Up policy and prioritizing economic development under the direction of Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s, and the so-called one-child policy in order to attain efficient progress in this area. This was a major policy that responded to the negative impact of the massiveness of the population.

The author posits the massiveness of ideas as the third characteristic of the “massive aspects,” which includes two meanings. The first meaning is the idea of emphasizing everyone uniting together, and the second meaning is the idea of placing China at the center of the world with a hierarchy that spreads outward in a conical manner. Regarding the first meaning, in addition to (1) the size of its territory and (2) the size of its population, the economy had primarily been agricultural over a long period of time, and the society had undeveloped information and exchange networks. Therefore, the regions in the country were out of sync, and it was difficult to unify them as a united nation/society.

In ancient times, since before the Yellow River civilization, various unique cultures, such as the Yangtze River Culture, Daxi Culture in Sichuan, and Shijiahe Culture in Hubei had been flourishing in various locations. In such ancient times, scales and currency for exchanging goods were different, and regarding language, although the Beijing language is the standard, languages in each province including not only Cantonese, Fujianese, and Shanghainese, but also Sichuan and Shanxi languages as well as various languages within each province are distinct. Those accustomed to the language of Beijing would mostly be unable to understand other regional dialects even since the Reform and Opening-Up policy and to the present day. China has not
followed the same path as the European continent in which a number of small nations had risen and fallen, eventually leading to the formation of a group of nation-states, which subsequently converged to form the EU. China instead has a long history in which large dynastic states took control one after another, although with brief periods of turmoil.

Why has such a historical transition emerged in which convergence to such a pattern is seen? In addition to that, the fact that the population of China is large and the territories are vast naturally has a major impact on the manner of governance as well as conflicts and disputes over governance. All countries with large territories and populations in the world, such as Russia, which succeeded the former Soviet Union, India, and the United States, have federal systems. However, only China does not have such a system. Why? In considering such a question, the “massiveness of ideas” (third characteristic) is an important factor along with the fourth characteristic.

In Chinese traditional thought, there is a word “da yi tong (大一統),” which means “it is better to unify as one,” and this served as the basic concept that supported the “super stable system” proposed by Jin Guan Tao, so on. Unified states would be realized by the idea of “da yi tong” rather than be created by a system and legal framework. “Yi tong” means unifying various items and does not necessarily mean everyone being painted with the same brush. This idea is also thought to be the way of thinking that leads to the concept of “bao (包)” as pointed out by Hiroyuki Kato.

Confucianism, which is a representative example of Chinese traditional thought, strongly emphasizes such a way of thinking. It can be said that this way of thinking is the basis sustained by the Four Books including Great Learning, Analects of Confucius, Mencius, and Doctrine of the Mean and the Five Classics including the Book of Changes, Book of Documents, Classic of Poetry, Book of Rites, and Spring and Autumn Annals, which should also be called Confucian messages. These preach heaven, path, virtue, benevolence, righteousness, as well as how the world and the society should be, policies and way of living that people, especially rulers and governors, should adopt, the relationship between and rulers and retainers, and the relationship between governors and the governed, the core of which is how stable order for the society can be realized.

Its symbolic expression is “xiushen-qijia-zhiguo-pingtianxia (修身-齊家-治國-平天下).” That means that only training of people, realization of a calm home, stabilization of authoritative relationships between patriarch and other family members, those between governors and the governed, and the ones between rulers and retainers enable the society and the nation to be stable, and the world peaceful. And, with the emperor’s (son of heaven) superiority to rulers of various other countries as its foremost component, strong authoritative relationships expanded downward in multi-layered and infinite ways in terms of the presence and complexity of Chinese culture, where the massive world with a cone-shaped hierarchy can be imagined, and that is in fact the second characteristic indicating the “massiveness of the ideas” or the “Chinese Order.” The author had some doubts about whether Confucianism had deeply penetrated to

---

17 Jin, *Behind the Symbol of History*, 33.
18 Kato, *Chinese-Style Capitalism as an Ambiguous System*, 27.
19 Li Ji, *Da Xue* (http://bingrong78.blog.163.com/blog/static/86919535201152832942933/).
that level among ordinary people. However, Chen Shunchen (陳舜臣) points out that in contrast to the level of acceptance of Confucianism in Japan, where it was just accepted as a philosophy and did not reach ordinary people's lives, “Confucianism was a system of thought and a system of living standards born in China, and it was life itself."\(^{20}\) In fact, “xiushen (cultivating oneself)” and “qijia (governing a family)” are never limited to the problems of only governors.

Daoism is often mentioned as the idea in contrast with Confucianism, but Daoism is also based on heaven and path. However, in contrast with the artificiality that is emphasized in Confucianist thoughts, Daoism preaches the value of nature and non-action. In addition, the Hundred Schools of Thought were born during the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period, and their massive scale, with topics such as the subjects of ideas, observation, and deep thought, rivals that of Greek philosophy.

Even besides documents written by Xi Jinping, many of today’s leaders often quote the Hundred Schools of Thought including Confucianism, and the traditional thoughts have played a decisive role in China’s politics even today.

With regard to the governance by the thoughts of “Confucianism,” Communists and the Communist Party have officially criticized these as thoughts of feudalistic governance. However, leaders of the Communist Party, such as Mao Tse-tung, Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, and Lin Biao, often quote the Hundred Schools of Thought including Confucianism and demonstrate knowledge of it. At the moment, China leaders including Xi Jinping have argued for and sought the “China Model,” where heavy influence of traditional thoughts themselves and their applications can be seen.

The author posits the massiveness of power as the fourth characteristic of the “massive aspects.” K.A. Wittfogel, who previously wrote “Oriental Despotism” and presented the national image of historical Asia (China), proposed a way of thinking in which large-scale projects such as flood control and irrigation (artificial irrigation/water control) and utilization of water control allow for the creation of the huge power structure that can exclusively collect products, focusing on the fact that there are large rivers in Asia where floods occur repeatedly and there is a large amount of fertile soil.\(^{21}\) And, based on that, he argued the reason for centralized state power (power of the emperor) being formed in China.

The fact that power has an overwhelming force on society in a broad sense can be seen by observing successive dynasties. In the center was the bureaucratic organization that also served as a military and inspection organization called Liubu, which was the system where local areas were controlled by the right of appointment of local directors and the “avoidance system,” etc., where a strong authoritative hierarchy existed.

The leader who first worked on the construction of such a bureaucracy was the first Qin Emperor. He created a centralized administrative framework known as the county and prefecture system where government officials were dispatched to each area from the center and unified the writing system, currency, and measurement standard. Also, working on construction of the famous Great Wall to preventing invasion by nomads from the north the Xiongnu would have been utterly unthinkable without a massive amount of power. Of course, the first Qin emperor could not complete the Great Wall

\(^{20}\) Chen, Japanese and Chinese, Chapter 1.
\(^{21}\) Wittfogel, Oriental Despotism, 49.
before his death, but it had a decisive impact on the governance of the Chinese empire thereafter.

As industry thrived, trade became more vigorous, and the economy was growing, exchanges within the empires were promoted, and a loose unity was born. However, the general public itself, as mentioned later, did not form an autonomous and self-sustaining society that had a constant positive impact on the state, although natural small-scale village communities did exist. Rather, they had a passive and resigned mentality toward power and the cycle of nature, living as a “small country with a small population (xiao guo guamin)” as described by Lao-tzu or a “heap of loose sand (yi pan san sha)” as described by Sun Yat-sen in the modern era.

The Communist Party, which has nearly 90 million members, has an overlapping role with the already existing central and local bureaucratic organizations today, and has a massive force of arms with 2,300,000 people in the People’s Liberation Army and more than 1,500,000 people in the People’s Armed Police, which is exclusively in charge of internal security. Even around 1960, during the Great Leap Forward when casualties from starvation were said to exceed 30–45 million as a result of reckless radical policies by Mao Tse-tung and the period of the Cultural Revolution, which resulted in casualty figures of at least 100 million, a movement to defeat the system of the Communist Party did not emerge, which is because the public recognized the sheer scale of the state’s overwhelming power.

3.2. Underlying structure II in China: four divisions

The next issue is to derive the structural characteristics of the “difficult to change society” by observing the society from within. The angle by which to observe the society from within is from the relational structures of social, cultural, and economic values, hierarchies, and systems. As a result, although the author is wary of oversimplification, the author believes that the difficult to change social structure, or basic core structure, can be interpreted as consisting of “four divisions.” These four divisions include: (1) the leadership vs. the people, (2) relationships (guan xi) vs. systems, (3) urban vs. rural communities, and (4) politics vs. economics.

(1) Division between leadership and people

The author would like to start this section with an anecdote. The author began research on China during the period of the Cultural Revolution when Maoism was dominant. The author wondered what the characteristics of Maoism and Chinese socialism were and compared these with Soviet bureaucratic socialism, and the author concluded that the key is egalitarianism. Various efforts to aim for a so-called equal society, such as organizing self-sufficient people’s communes throughout the country, simplifying the power structure, rejecting professional elites, and abolishing military hierarchy, were undertaken to the fullest extent. The summer of 1976 was when the author had the opportunity to enter China for the first time. First in Beijing, the author visited Tiananmen Square, National Museum of China, so on, where the senior officials guiding the author’s China delegation drove away many ordinary people who were in a long line at the entrance as though they were a nuisance, and as a result, the author and his party were able to openly enter those locations without waiting in line and were
given priority to view anything inside. The author vividly remembers feeling disgust at how authoritative and formal their way of arranging the welcome party, seating order, toasting, so on, in various places was, wondering, “Is this what is supposed to be an equal society?”

After that, when the author had the opportunity to stay in Beijing from 1986 to 1988, he found that, for example, the hospital reception areas as well as the ticket sales counters of film theaters and stations had two windows, one for senior officials and the other for ordinary people, and the officials were given preferential treatment. What is it like inside the “Zhongnanhai” in Beijing, the center of power? What happens inside? It is a world opaque and unknown to ordinary Chinese people as well as foreigners. Of course, word sometimes leaks to the outside world that important conferences and power struggles that would have an effect on all of China take place, that there are private swimming pools for the supreme leaders, and that there are schools for their own children, but what happens inside the Zhongnanhai is mostly secret. Nonetheless, at the entrance of Gate of China (Zhong Hua Men) facing Chang’an Avenue, the large billboard on which is written Mao Tse-tung’s saying “Serve the People,” was placed to block the inside view, and, on both sides of the gate, the security police with guns stand to prevent anyone from stepping inside. It is a scene that symbolizes the division between the leadership and people.

According to the Western political theories based on the viewpoints of people and citizens, for example, people are categorized by G. Almond and S. Verba into three types: participant, subject, and parochial, and their approach is to examine political changes by looking into the transition from parochial to participant. However, is it possible at all to discuss Chinese politics based on these general theories without considering the specific relationship between people and power in China?

The author introduces here the discussion on the traditional relationship between the ruler (scholar/official) and the public (ordinary people). First Confucius said, “The noble man cares about virtue; the inferior man cares about material things. The noble man seeks discipline; the inferior man seeks favors” (Analects of Confucius, Vol. 2, Lijin 4). Also, Mencius pointed out as follows:

There is a man of virtue. There is an unwise man…. Some use their mind, while others use their labor. Those who use their mind rule people, and those who use their labor are ruled by people. Those who are ruled by people feed people, and those who rule people are fed by people (Discourses of Mencius, Vol. 5 Part 2 (Tobunko-shoku Part 1)).

It was argued here that what a scholar/official (leader) thought of and what ordinary people thought of were quite contrary, resulting in a lord/vassal relationship.

The most important point that distinguishes a scholar/official and ordinary people is the acquisition of culture and education. Although a scholar-official is also referred to as a reader in China, “reader” has the connotation of those close to power. The culture of Chinese characters itself is generally esoteric and requires considerable education and training. What is more, the effort to learn Chinese culture intensively, linked to Chinese civil service examinations, was the first important stage to becoming a bureaucrat. “Reading” literally meant “studying to become an official.”

---

22Almond and Verba, The Civic Culture.
The idea that a bureaucrat is part of the elite remains deeply ingrained in modern society. Since the founding of the nation, the Communist Party itself is the only elite party, and there are various elite education preparatory organizations such as the Communist Youth League, the Central Party School, local party schools in each region, and key universities and high schools. After the start of the Reform and Opening-Up policy, the recruitment of elites from new advanced enterprises and key companies to the party has also become common. As frequently mentioned in recent research, the close ties between the power elite and moneyed elite, their domination of large interests, so on, indicate that the division between elites and ordinary people has deepened in a new way.

Meanwhile, the existence of ordinary people will be examined. In the typical image of the traditional life led by an old peasant, he lives in the cycle of nature regardless of persons in authority. “Soon after sunrise, he starts to work. Soon after sunset, he rests. How can he care about the emperor?” (Qin Dynasty). Lao-Tzu also mentions a “small country with a small population (小国寡民),” as the way ordinary people should be. In other words,

In a small country with a small population, people delight in their meal, favor their clothes, feel safe in their living place, and enjoy their customs. Even if they look over to a neighboring country and hear the voices of chickens and dogs, they do not leave their own land until the day they grow old and die.  

This concept continues to this day.

Considering such a relationship between persons in authority and ordinary people in China, the commitment of the ruler to ordinary people was unilateral, as Confucianism argued, and “democracy” referred to “benevolent rule” in which people’s voices were carefully listened to in order to have them live happily, but it did not refer to a mechanism in which, based on an established system that forms the basis of Western politics, people themselves can choose their own rulers and also freely replace them, or in which people can decide some policies by referendum. The issue is that ordinary people themselves have been accustomed to and immersed in such a relationship with their rulers over a long period.

Mao Tse-tung considered the idea of “(Listen) to the masses and have (policies permeate) the masses” to be people’s democracy, and this corresponds to the traditional Confucian view of democracy. For example, in the closing ceremony of the 7th National Congress that took place nearly at the end of anti-Japanese war, Mao made a speech titled “The Foolish Old Man Removes the Mountains.” Here Mao talked about a story in which the Creator, impressed by the foolish old man’s firm will and patient behavior, helped him to move the mountains, and said, “Today’s mountains are the mountains of imperialism and feudalism. It is our mission to dig them away, but we must impress the Creator. The Creator is none other than the masses of people.”

This idea can also be seen in statements by Xi Jinping. He has made the same argument as Mao Tse-tung that “We must stick to the popular line, ‘Everything is for people, everything depends on people, and out of the people, into the people’. In addition, he cited one of the classics saying as follows: “A successful government follows

---

23 Zi, Zhuang Zi, 47.
24 Mao, Selected Work 3, 192–3.
what people have in mind, while a failed government goes against it” (cited from Books of Guan zi and Mumin).\textsuperscript{25}

It is true that China took the path of Reform and Opening-Up, and the resultant economic development has drastically changed the image of ordinary people today. If the so-called middle class, which has undergone a rapid increase, is defined as a group possessing $50,000 (approximately 5,900,000 JPY) to $500,000, today there are approximately 100 million people in the middle class, and it is said that the middle class will expand to twice as large as in the United States. The middle class enjoys a civil life involving contemporary lifestyle, eating habits, and diverse sources of information.

On the other hand, regarding the poor left behind in China’s economic development, the number of those who live in absolute poverty, defined as having an income of US $1.25 or less per day, has been decreasing slowly, accounting for 12.3% of China’s total population or about 163 million people in 2008, 11.8% or about 157 million people in 2009, and 9.2% or about 123 million people in 2010. Those who live in “semi-absolute poverty,” defined as having an income of US$1.25 to US$2.5 per day with an annual income of US$442 to US$885 has been also decreasing gradually, accounting for 25.8% of the total population or 342 million people in 2008, 24.7% or 329 million people in 2009, and 22.8% or 305 million people in 2010.\textsuperscript{26} According to another set of data from US-based Gallup, in the past 6 years from 2007 to 2012 China’s poverty rate decreased to a quarter of that of 2007, when the poverty rate was 26% of the total population, with the new poverty rate being 7%.\textsuperscript{27} In consideration of this trend, it can be said that China’s social hierarchy has a tendency toward increasing the middle class.

However, there are claims that China has yet to achieve an “olive-shaped” income structure in which there is a relative increase in the middle class in China’s social hierarchy. In fact, has the increase in size of the middle class resulted in an increase in the number of people who have gained a sense of entitlement toward their own rights and values as seen in other countries undergoing economic growth, and who has raised objections toward those in power? Indeed there are quite a few cases where the citizens and farmers have taken part in fierce protests in several regions to force authorities to change policies. However, the mainstream has yet directly clash with China’s massive power. While discussing the history of common people in China, Niida (1968) stated:

Another aspect of freedom in the East was to escape from the reality of Eastern autocratic rule and then fall silent. The purpose of this escapism was not to deny the real world, and the willingness to change the ‘principles of ruling’ at the same time as providing an interpretation that goes beyond this world was forfeited.\textsuperscript{28}

This relation between people with power and ordinary people seems to apply to some extent to the modern Chinese world as well.

According to Sun, “da yi dong” (it is better to unify as one) and the “xiao guo gua min” (small country with a small population) are interdependent even after the

\textsuperscript{25}Xi, Explaining Governmental Politics, 295–6.
\textsuperscript{26}Shibuya, “The Chinese Poor People Who We Cannot Overlook.”
\textsuperscript{27}“China Makes Huge Strides to Tackle Poverty,” http://edition.cnn.com/2013/12/2 index.html?hpt = hp_t3 (accessed on 13 December 2016).
\textsuperscript{28}Niida, What is the East?, 15.
founding of the nation. Furthermore, it is pointed out that the phenomenon of the “small country with a small population,” that is, “the people do not leave their own land until the day they grow old and die” deepened during the Cultural Revolution.  

In other words, for people who had experienced the frenzied power struggle of the Cultural Revolution, the “Beijing Spring” in 1978, and the suppression of democratization such as the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989, escapism from autocratic rule and falling silent were a means of survival, and were a way of building their own space (“civil space, living environment”) distant from authority and finding joy in living there. As well as increasing their desire to make a profit and desire for rights along with the economic development and the rise of the middle class, the behavior of ordinary people who tend to keep a certain distance from political power is one of features of China to keep in mind.

(2) Division between human network (guan xi) and system

We need to point out the division between the “human network (guan xi) and the system,” which is another important feature of the manner in which relations are formed in Chinese society. As modernization progresses, systems and rules are usually put in place in various fields of society. People act according to the rules, respect the rules, and continue to follow them, and in the process become increasingly dependent on the systems and rules and trust them more, thereby strengthening norms, and as a result, all members of the society start acting according to the system and people’s behaviors generally become highly predictable. This is referred to as institutionalization.

However, in China’s case, systems, regulations, and rules are not necessarily the basis for dealing with issues. Systems, regulations, and rules do exist in China for sure, and we can generally see cases where situations are handled in accordance with them. In particular, when engaging in economic activity, those who ignore the rules and regulations might suffer serious loss and damage. However, when there are important issues, intentions, or strong personal statements involving those with power, these systems, regulations, and rules are often ignored, and there are often cases in which things are handled in an arbitrary manner and authoritatively in certain situations. For example, Article 35 of the Chinese Constitution stipulates that “Citizens of the People’s Republic of China enjoy freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of procession and of demonstration.” If people can act according to the system, they should also be able to freely engage in activities listed in Article 35.

However, people realize that if they acted against the intentions of the party, they would definitely be detained by the authorities and suffer some kind of punishment even if such activities were not “anti-Communist,” so they do not engage in such actions. In other words, because they have been betrayed by people in power many times, they do not unilaterally trust the systems and rules. This is a passive but wise choice by ordinary people. If one examines China’s environmental law closely, the content is on par with those of environmental laws in developed countries. However,
there are not many cases in which the law is actually enforced properly and the environment is being increasingly degraded. Why is that?

This example relates to the question of how Chinese people handle situations to get their way, and what they rely on. People cannot rely on laws and regulations after all, so they do not try to rely on them. For example, even when they discovered that air pollution around a factory is mainly caused by emissions, the manager of the factory would not make improvements to reduce its emissions nor place restrictions on production because profits take priority. In fact, the manager would use his/her connections to people in power and bribery to cover up the problem. It is a case of “if there is a policy above, there are countermeasures below.” That is not to say that this sort of phenomenon is nonexistent in Japan, but once it has been revealed, the parties responsible would be punished according to the relevant laws and suffer social sanctions as well.

However, it seems very unlikely that something like that would happen in China. Whether they are disadvantaged or powerful, what they can rely most heavily on is not laws and systems but human networks (guan xi) when they want to protect themselves.

In a way, this may be Chinese people’s “wisdom” for handling situations, which was developed through its long history. It was a practical way that they have developed by considering all the time how to survive and how to get their way when faced with political chaos, disorder, and strong authorities caused by repeated wars, major disasters, or arbitrary decisions made by those in power.

A bundle of various relations that someone has is what is referred to as “quanzi (social circles),” and serves as an effective system in China. “Quanzi” originally comes from an analogy by Fei Xiaotong of concentric ripples created by a stone dropped into water to express the idea of close/distant relations. The relations are expressed as a “differential mode of association.” The particularly close concentric circles among them are expressed as “quanzi.”

“Quanzi” signifies the bundles (networks) of human relations where people feel that they can generally trust and help each other. They are informal networks formed based on human relations such as blood ties, territorial connections, having attended the same schools, so on.

When the author asked many Chinese students at the author’s university what was most reliable when they want to do something, most of them answered that it would be “quanzi.” And when I followed up this question by asking, “Wouldn’t relevant laws and rules be more important?” most of the students laughed and shook their heads. When we think about functions of the Chinese political system, these “quanzi” are very important. According to some books, “quanzi” are the base where members guarantee their own safety in a political system. Quanzi is an important political force. Anyone who ended up outside of a quanzi would be marginalized.

As discussed earlier, according to the general theory of modernization, people become more profit- and rights-conscious as the economic system in the society develops and the number of people who think rationally about profits and right increases, resulting in a tendency to make decisions and act based on rules, regulations,

---

31 Fei, Xiangtu Zhongguo, 21.
32 Zhang and Chen, Quanzi, 7.
and systems. The atmosphere of attaching importance to such situations, a sense of entitlement, and a fair process is created, and a procedural democracy develops. However, in China, human networks and quanzi remain the most important basis for people’s behavior even to this day. Systems and rules are unmistakably permeating people’s ways of thinking, but changes in the ways of thinking are slow compared to the rapid development and modernization of the economy.

(3) Divisions between cities and rural communities

The traditional image of cities and village communities in China was clear. A city meant a space surrounded by four castle walls and was called a “castle city.” In cities, government and businesses affairs were conducted. The city gate was closed at night and the city was cut off from the outside world. Outside of urban areas was primarily a sprawl of farming villages. Except for local officials (local gentry), peasants (farmers) lived there. The divide between urban and rural was literally symbolized by these castle walls. There was no culture in a village outside of urban areas, and it was a case of “Soon after sunrise, he starts to work. Soon after sunset, he rests. How can he care about the emperor?” as described earlier.

Tadashi Fukutake, who frequently conducted surveys on Chinese farming villages primarily during the 1940–1950s, argued that “the villages do not seem to be closely bound together by some form of administrative relationship,” as he closely analyzed various relations among prefectural governments, ward official places, and farming villages. Li Dazhao called on young people to go to farming villages, which had been cut off and reached their darkest point, in order to reform them during the time of the May Fourth Movement.

It seemed that an equal and free society had been realized since the foundation of the nation, but as the socialist system developed, work unit societies (dan wei she hui) were formed in cities and people’s communes were established in farming villages under strict surveillance by party committees at the grassroots level, and freedom of movement was taken away. Furthermore, divisions between them became fixed by the family registry system, which included a city family registry and a village family registry.

With the progression of the Reform and Opening-Up policy, fluidity between cities and villages increased after 1980s. In particular, since 2000 after joining the World Trade Organization (WTO), the nation saw migrant laborers (nongmin gong) migrating into coastal urban areas in droves. The divisions between them gradually became smaller and seemed to be on their way out.

The author actively conducted local surveys while staying in China, and mostly traveled by train. The author traveled long distances such as from Beijing to Urumqi through Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, and Lanzhou by train, as well as traveling from Beijing to Xi’an, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Daqing, which is beyond Harbin. The landscape of China seen out of the train window helped in imagining the whole of China. When passing the provincial city and the second big city of each province, an urban landscape suddenly appeared in the train window and then after a while the view changed to the vast scenery of a rural village, desert, or grazing ground. These changes in scenery seemed to continue

33Fukutake, The Structure of Village Society in China, 199–201.
34Li, “Qing Nian yu Nong Cun,” 146.
on forever. This reminded the author of his hometown, the landscape of the Seto Inland Sea. The rural villages appear like a vast ocean with the cities being the numerous islands. The difference in scenery between the cities and the rural villages, which could be distinguished clearly, formed a landscape resembling small islands amid a vast ocean that characterize the land in China. Of course, such landscapes themselves have changed a lot during the rapid development of economy. However, the author suspects that the structural gap between the cities and farming villages, that is, the fundamental division has not changed. Since the early days of the Reform and Opening-Up policy, three elements including the agricultural (production) issue, farmer (actor) issue, and farming village (social) issue were referred to as “the three agricultural issues,” and a level of disparity greater than that of other countries has existed.

These disparities include disparities in modernization such as information and communication and disparities in social welfare such as cultural benefits, healthcare, education, and social security, as well as in production. Making more of an effort to stabilize the life of farmers by enhancing the aforementioned factors is emphasized, but who would be in charge of this, how much funds would be used, how much effort would be expended, and can this be sustained? Considering the course of events thus far, unless these questions are addressed, the author believes that a fundamental solution to “the three agricultural issues” is impossible. Furthermore, since the Xi Jinping’s administration, China has entered a slower economy phase referred to as the “new normal,” and the general course of events of modernization has started to lose steam. There was a view of solving “the three agricultural issues” in China through a general theory of social development in which social development is promoted by economic development, resulting in an increasingly equitable society, with the urban/rural disparity disappearing.

However, sociologist Sun Liping characterizes the relation between the present cities and farming villages as constituting a “torn society” and explains as follows. In the past, many essential goods for urban life such as food, clothing, coal, water, so on, were supplied by farming villages. However, China has now entered the era of durable goods. Durable goods are mainly provided from urban areas, links with the international market have become closer, and even some of the food supply has begun to be provided from the global market. With systems such as the family registry continuing to exist and market reforms in the economy, the disparity between farming villages and cities has become even wider. In other words, the two-way split between present cities and farming villages has further deepened.35 Lu Xue Yi, the former director of the Sociology Institute of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, also points out that “because of the family registry system, farmers, who are the vast majority of the population, are forced into an unequal system and their upward mobility is hindered.”36

Table 1 shows the general status of reforms of the family registry system, but the urban family registry and farming village family registry still remain.

(4) Division between politics and economics

The expression “division between politics and economics” may immediately cause objections to be raised. In previous dynastic history, there were many cases in which economic turmoil caused peasant revolts leading to governmental collapse. Conversely,

---

35 Sun, “Torn Society: Dual Social Structure.” http://wenku.baidu.com/link?url=x9f5KjG09_I4m206.
36 Lu, “San Nong” New Theory.
Mao Zedong’s reckless policies devastated the economy. The division that the author wishes to discuss as an issue does not pertain to “destructive intervention” by both the economy and the politics but pertains to “mutual permeation” on a day-to-day basis. In other words, the interaction between various political and economic elements or mechanisms represents a normal relationship. And on the basis of the “mutual permeation” concept, the aforementioned “systemic transition theory,” and the rise of the middle class and citizens by economic development causes diversification of values and awareness of one’s rights, as well as participation in citizen activities, enabling a pattern of transition to democracy over time. However, in the case of China, this “mutual permeation” can be said to be extremely weak, and there is in fact a divide.

Muramatsu previously pointed out that “a long period of dizzyingly fast political changes and the lasting static circulation of the economy, which has remained stable in a certain sense, are two sides of the same coin.”37 The significance of the economic static cycle comes from the fact that China has had an agriculturally based economy for long time, which operated under restrictions posed by seasons and the day-to-day cycle of nature. Dizzying political change may signify the cycle of human relations around the fight for power. The approximately one-century period, studied by Muramatsu, from the end of the Qing dynasty to the founding of the People’s Republic of China seems to fit this mold.

In the first place, when considering politics and economics in China, the relationship between “xu (虚)” and “shi (実)” must be understood. When the author was reading “Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping” 20 or more years ago, he found a passage stating, “This was a lecture by Deng Xiaoping at a central wuxu hui (務虚会)” in the lecture about “four basic principles.” After that, in the article about the death of Hú Yàobāng, which triggered the Tiananmen Square case in April 1989, there was an expression “wuxu hui.” What is “wuxu”? There is another expression “wushi (務实).” The Chinese character “xu,” unlike its meaning in Japanese, was not used in the sense of “vain” or “vacuous,” but rather had the meaning of “A substance that is invisible and does not have a form.” It includes politics, ideas, norms, so on. Thus, “wuxu” means discussions about and management of politics, laws, and ideas. Implementation of “xu” results in the creation of a “mold,” and for China, that often takes on the tangible form of an authoritarian hierarchy. On the other hand, “shi” means “A substance that is visible and has a form,” and examples include economic factors such as cost of living or trade, and social life factors such as the environment or medicine. “Wushi (務実)” means considering a problem and solving it. Practicing “shi” appears to yield a benefit. “Xu” and “shi” are captured as two sides of the same coin, but are in fact separate entities, and the

---

Table 1. Changes of China’s family registry system.

| Period | Year | Main contents |
|--------|------|---------------|
| 1      | 1949–1957 | Free movement of people between urban and rural areas is allowed |
| 2      | 1958–1977 | Rigid regulation on movement of people between urban and rural areas |
| 3      | 1977–1992 | Relaxation of the family registry system |
| 4      | 1992–2000s | Reform of the family registry system |
| 5      | 2010– | Speed up urbanization by encouraging rural residents to settle down in small cities and towns |

Source: Mitsui Global Strategic Studies Institute.

---

37 Muramatsu, Social Dynamic System of Chinese Economy, 8.
fact that these are understood as a dualism is a characteristic of China. It seems to be based on the traditional concept of “yin-yang dualism.”

The fact that politics was considered to be “xu” is likely due to the strong influence of Confucianism. The idea that the monarch/leader of a government “does not talk about food, but values virtue” and the idea that ordinary people “think about food and value land” represent a dualism. Despite the fact that many people suffered food shortages on a daily basis, Mao Tse-tung called for a “great proletarian cultural revolution that touches people to their very souls” and played the role of a “great leader.” In another example, despite the fact that during the Vietnam War Zhou Enlai supported the anti-American national liberation struggle, and despite the fact that China at the time was poor, during Nixon’s visit to China calling for closer relations between the United States and China, Zhou Enlai showed China as being a major power. These can be considered to be a practice of “xu.” This is a behavior that would not be seen among top leaders in Japan or other countries.

It is a fact that China’s economy is developing as a result of the progression of the Reform and Opening-Up policy, and its impact on politics is increasing. In that sense, one might make the interpretation that mutual permeation and the division between politics and economics are dissolving. However, just when it seemed that democratization might be proceeding in line with the progress of economic reform, the Tiananmen Square incident occurred in 1989, and the pattern of opening economy/tightening policy has continued. China has become the second-largest economy in the world, and the middle classes have increased by hundreds of millions of members, but even today, political reform has remained sluggish, and those who criticize the Communist Party even slightly have been detained. Under such a situation, thought control and an information blockade are being enhanced while the economy is further opening up to the outside world. The author believes that this situation is in fact an example of the division between politics and economics.

4. Conclusion: how should multiple divides in the modern era and visions of the future be theorized?

Based on the aforementioned analysis, the current and future outlooks of China are considered. A major change in the economy and society by the progression of the Reform and Opening-Up policy over 30 years has without a doubt resulted in changes in these four divides.

Considering some cases, (1) even if the division between the elite and the general public still exists, its core essence has in fact changed. The political elite and economic elite appear to have become closer, thereby creating a divide between the new elite and the general public. Although the desire to make a profit and a sense of entitlement at the public level are indeed growing, they do not easily lead to an emergence and increase in political awareness. The people believe that earning a profit will resolve issues and do not seek any more than that. Even though people who are regarded as elites have started to focus on procedural democracy among the elite (“inner-party democracy” is one example), they do not desire popular democracy. Of course, voices calling for a truly autonomous and independent participatory democracy are increasing. But, this movement is difficult to expand due to strong suppression by those in power.
26 S. AMAKO

(2) Regarding the divide between human networks and the system, partial system-
ization is indeed proceeding in various regions. In particular, the process to deal with
situations according to formal procedures, rules, the law, and so on is penetrating the
economic field.

However, the party leadership is still given highest priority, and the reality is that
politics intervenes in peoples’ life without rules, and people realize the limitation of the
rule of law. In that sense, there exists an awareness that what people rely on is human
networks and not the law.

(3) Regarding the urban/rural divide, there is a view that with a large number of
people moving from inland villages to coastal cities resulting from a change in eco-
nomic activities, and with remarkable progress in information socialization such as with
the internet, smartphones, mobile phone, so on, including in rural areas, there has been
a significant change in circumstances. Nevertheless, the family registry system of city
and rural communities and economic/social disparities are evident. Even after large
number of migrant laborers from farming villages moved to the cities, there continues
to be serious discrimination of such laborers in areas such as education, medicine, and
social security, and this phenomenon was described by the famous sociologist Lu Xue
Yi as a “binary structure of urban and rural communities” in urban areas.

(4) Even regarding the divide between politics and economics, as mentioned earlier,
the structure of “opened economics and tightened politics” is robust, and changes in
economy and society do not easily affect political change. Thus, one cannot simply
extend the logic of economic change in considering political change.

However, what the author wishes to emphasize is not what is unchanged, but what
characterizes the changes, albeit gradual, of difficult to change structures. Furthermore,
by taking into consideration both marked changes and aspects that are difficult to
change in considering social change is the key to considering the future prospects of
China in an objective and theoretical manner.

In addition, the “four divides” strongly affect the structural characteristics of the
Chinese community, and while those effects are included, the characteristics of the
“four massive aspects” bring about various effects to the international community.
Thus, the author believes that analysis of effects of the four massive aspects will make
it possible to view the future image of China as an emerging power.

From the end of the twentieth centuries to today, the rise of China has been very
remarkable from the perspective of world history, but when discussing the outlook of
China, real-life examples such as forecasted GDP growth rates and the increase in
economic disparity and corruption are used as a basis for pessimistic outlooks of China
(China collapse theory, etc.) as well as optimistic outlooks of China (Pax Sinica theory,
etc.). However, even if China can in the end achieve general economic development and
modernization (which the author believes will happen), China will have no choice but
to follow its own unique path, and its destination may differ from the typical manner of
modernization (this is deeply associated with issues concerning “basic core structure”).

When considering the future of China in the international community while taking
into account these issues, it is also important to clarify China’s new position and the
issue of international impact, while considering how the massiveness of China’s popu-
lation, territory, and ideas intertwine with China’s massive power. Of course, the “basic
core structural theory” as the author’s area studies theory stated in this paper must continue to be refined through a variety of empirical considerations.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Satoshi Amako has been a professor in the Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies (GSAPS) at Waseda University since April 2002. Currently, he is also Director of the Contemporary Chinese Area Studies Program of National Institutes for the Humanities (NIHU) and the Waseda Institute of Contemporary Chinese Studies (WICCS). His major publications include (all in Japanese) Sino-Japanese Rivalry (Chikuma Shobo, 2013); The Road Toward Asian Union: The Design for Theory and Personnel Training (Chikuma Shobo, 2010); The History of People’s Republic of China, New Edition (Iwanami, 1999); Life-Size China (Keiso Shobo, 2003); How to Associate with China (NHK Book, 2003); and The History of China, Vol. 11: Mao Zedong vs. Deng Xiaoping (Kodansha, 2004).

References

Almond, G. A., and S. Verba. The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015.
Amako, S. The Chinese Reform Forefront. Tokyo: Iwanami New Book, 1988.
Amako, S. China: Gradual Changing Large Socialist Country. Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 1992.
Chen, S.-S. Japanese and Chinese. Tokyo: Shodensya, 1971.
Fei, X. Xiangtu Zhongguo [Local China]. Shanghai: Shanghai People’s Press, 2006.
Fukutake, T. The Structure of Village Society in China. Tokyo: Tai Ga Dou, 1946.
Hirano, K. ”Area Studies in the Era of Globalization.” In New Perspective for Area Studies of Contemporary China, edited by S. Nishimura and H. Tanaka. Tokyo: Sekai Shiso Sha, 2007.
Huntington, S. P. Political Order in Changing Societies. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968.
Ishida, H. “The Basic Structure of the Chinese Agriculture Community.” In Lecture Series: Present Asia 2: Modernization and Structural Variation, edited by K. Nakagane. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1994.
Ji, L. Da Xue (Japanese Version) Shu Ei Sha, 79. Tokyo, 1976.
Jin, G. Behind the Symbol of History: The Research on Super-Stable System of Chinese Feudal Society. Tokyo: Sichuan People's Public Company, 1983.
Jin, G., and Q. Liu. Super-Stable System of Chinese Society. Tokyo: Kenbun shuppan, 1987.
Jinping, X. Explaining Governmental Politics. Translated by Japanese Translation Group. Tokyo: Foreign Languages Press, 2014.
Kato, H. Chinese-Style Capitalism as an Ambiguous System. Tokyo: NTT Publications, 2013.
Li, D. "Qing Nian Yu Nong Cun [Youth and Village].” In Li Dazhao Selected Works. Beijing: People’s Press, 1962.
Lu, X. “San Nong” New Theory: Study of Issues in Agriculture, Village, and Farmers in Contemporary China. Beijing: She Hui Ke Xue Wen Xian Press, 2005.
Mao, T.-T. Mao Tse-Tong – Selected Work 3, (Japanese Version), 192–193. Beijing, 1974.
Mizoguchi, Y. Hoho Toshitone Chugoku [China as Methodology]. Beijing: Tokyo University Press, 1989.
Mori, K. Present-Day Chinese Politics. 3rd ed. Tokyo: Nagoya University Press, 2012.
Muramatsu, Y. *Social Dynamic System of Chinese Economy*. Tokyo: Toyo Keizai Inc, 1949.

Niida, N. *What is the East?* Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 1968.

Niida, N. *Chinese Tradition and Revolution*. Tokyo: Heibonsya, 1974.

Nishimura, S., and H. Tanaka. eds. *New Perspective for Area Studies of Contemporary China*. Tokyo: Sekai Shiso Sha, 2007.

Oksenberg, M. “Confessions of a China-Watcher.” *Newsweek* (1989): 30.

Sasaki, M. *Substrate Layer Structure of the Contemporary Chinese Society*. Tokyo: Toho Shoten, 2012.

Shibuya, T. “The Chinese Poor People Who We Cannot Overlook.” *The Financial World* (2015). [http://net.keizaikai.co.jp/archives/16182](http://net.keizaikai.co.jp/archives/16182)

Simizu, M. *The Study on Chinese Society: The Approach from Sociology*. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1939.

Sun, L. “Torn Society: Dual Social Structure.” *Bai Du Wen Ku*. Tokyo.

Sun, L. *Chinese Culture’s Deep Structure*. Hong Kong: Yi Sheng Chu Ban She, 1983.

Tachibana, S. *The Research on Chinese Society*. Tokyo: Nipponhyoronsya, 1936.

Takeuchi, S. “Area Studies and Discipline.” *Asia Economy*, no. 6 (2012): 6–7.

Takeuchi, Y. *Japan and Asia*. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1966.

Tomita, H., and S. Yokote, eds. *Area Study and Present-Day State*. Tokyo: Keio University Press, 1998.

Townsend, J. R. *Politics in China*, 2nd ed. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980.

Weber, M. *Soziologie Der Herrschaft [Kenryoku to Shihai]* [Translated by Akira Hamashima]. Tokyo: Kodansha Gakujutubunko, 2012.

Wittfogel, K. A. *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power*. New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1957.

Zhang, Y., and J. Chen. *Quanzi*. Beijing: Dang Dai Shi Jie Press, 2006.

Zi, L. *Zhuang Zi (Japanese Version) Chuo Koron*, 147. Tokyo, 1984.