

【Master Paper】

## An Analysis of Knowledge Society

### Social Consciousness based Knowledge Acquisition, Circulation, and Production in Contemporary Japanese Society

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[tentative translation version]

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**Key Words:**

Knowledge Society / Knowledge Production / Social Consciousness Knowledge Production /  
Cognitive Function of Knowledge / Living Together

## Introduction

### 1-1 The Issue of this Thesis and the Aim

The issue of this master paper lies in knowledge production in knowledge society, in which large part of society comes to be organized by knowledge, focusing on especially “social consciousness knowledge production (SCKP).” SCKP represents the certain type of knowledge production which has awareness on and desires “society as the sphere to live together”; comprehends analytically and problematizes social phenomena; and makes alternative vision as another possibilities. SCKP puts emphasis on cognitive dimension of knowledge rather than instrumental-technical dimension of it. The aim of this paper lies in as follows. That is to say, by analyzing contents or produced materials of knowledge activities<sup>1</sup> of NGOs, NPOs and networks and idea or opinion on them by themselves, the aim is to show some suggestions as conclusion through considerations of limitations and possibilities of those actors’ SCKP. Through seeing NGOs and such actors this paper might show certain implications on knowledge production and the relations between knowledge and society in contemporary Japanese society.

This master paper has two levels of motivation to deal with the issue: personal and social. Personal motivation as starting point lies in the interests on knowledge itself. The following interrogations on the relations between knowledge and oneself or society are often posed: “Why does one acquire knowledge on oneself and society?”; “Why does one think about oneself and society through knowledge?” Sometimes the questions appeared taking the forms of “what do you want to do by acquiring knowledge?”; “Does it make sense to have knowledge that match?” and other times “why don’t you connect knowledge and society or your own life instead of having knowledge as mere ornaments?” Namely, the interrogation means what is knowledge for myself living in contemporary Japanese society. As a trial to deal with the question, this paper settles issue on knowledge society and knowledge production as broad social context. What can be said temporarily is that knowledge for the writer means the foundation of cognition and tool to comprehend oneself and society, to analyze them, and also to think about better conditions.

This paper also has social contexts. Firstly, in contemporary society some have argued society has come to be “knowledge society” in which knowledge has a certain importance. The importance has lain in that knowledge has been one of the main sources of power to organize economic, political, and cognitive realm. For example, some have argued in 21<sup>st</sup> century the core element of competition for enterprises has been knowledge and innovation stem from it. In the political realm one of the main sources of legitimacy has been scientific knowledge to make decision and solve problems. Knowledge as social stock has had large influence on how people to think. Then, activity of knowledge production which generate the source of power has come to be importance.

However, as argue later, in contemporary Japanese society, knowledge production and knowledge

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<sup>1</sup> Although the frameworks will be argued in theoretical part in details, this paper settles the large framework, “knowledge activity” and sub frameworks: “knowledge production” which generates new or novel knowledge and “knowledge circulation” which does not generate but make knowledge circulate.

have been argued in terms of the strong logic of economic development. The stream of argument that knowledge has importance because it can generate economic wealth through innovation has had large influence and even has seemed to be socially acceptable logic. This kind of logic has been tend to regard knowledge as mere tool or know how to generate economic wealth or as commodity itself (Kazancigil, 1998; Stephan, 1996; Fuller, 2001). This logic has very strong influence and permeability. If one enters the key words such as “knowledge society” or “knowledge production” into the search engine like “Google,” then he or she will see most of the results are connected with economic logic such as how to make innovation, how to take advantage through knowledge, and so and so. Also Science and Technology Basic Plan of Japanese state owned sector and agenda on science and technology in terms of knowledge by Nippon Keidanren, the biggest economic pressure group in Japan, have been connected with economic logic mostly. They regard knowledge as important because it can lead to boosting economic development and establishing industrial foundation and to stable life of people (Sougou-Kaigi, 2001; Keidanren, 2001a; 2001b; 2002a; 2002b; 2002c). Of course, economy has certain importance as social foundation of life. This paper does not mean to deny every economic activities or economic developments. One of the concerning problems consists in the point that most of the argument and cognition to talk about knowledge production and knowledge have been enclosed by the economic centered logic.

Second social context of the issue has been in the polarization processes of society; one of the major causes of the processes has been pressure from globalization based on neoliberalism. Contemporary societies have had a certain structure in which the rich becomes richer, and the poor becomes poorer through free competition in market capitalism. This can be applied to Japanese society (Takei, 2001; Kanazawa Seiichi, 2000; Sato Toshiki, 2000; Tachibanaki, 1998). This condition has had connection with neoliberal policies to privatize public services and to cut fiscal spending and with neoliberal way of thinking to demand strong individuals who can make self-decision and undertake self-responsibility. Those defeat the competition have to undertake self-responsibility; and, the social supports for those fail have been undermined. As a result, society has been in polarization processes (Walby, 2000; Gray, 2000).

One of the reasons of this polarization of society lies in particular way of treating knowledge and knowledge production. The way has been the economic centered logic, which has had almost dominant influence and has been main stream of arguments. Through the social context of and influence of neoliberal globalization the logic has boosted social polarization. Under the dominant stream of marketism which has claimed “market is always right!” knowledge and knowledge has been instrumentalized and commodified in order to make economic wealth. Knowledge production has been contextualized in these conditions; in contemporary society most of the relevance of knowledge production has been argued as “profitability,” “marketability,” and “applicability [for market]” (Gibbons et al., 1994). Then, whether one can acquire economic wealth or social superemacy have had certain relations with access and exertion of knowledge or capability of knowledge production. On the other hand, those do not have such skill, know how and capital to invest knowledge production might fall into disadvantaged position; if those come to lose the competition, it will be self-responsibility. Consequently, society has been under the processes of polarization between those have economic

and knowledge capital and those do not have. In contemporary knowledge society in which knowledge has certain power to define the social, social polarization has advanced with knowledge as major cause of it.

This kind of polarization has problems in normative sense; because it will bear tremendous socio-economic gap and might define those do not have knowledge as useless. Moreover, the cost of the polarization might “society as sphere to live together<sup>2</sup>” have to pay. Cost means not only deterioration of public peace and expanding demand for social support, but also loss of substance of society. Namely, on the one hand, the poor loser would be excluded from the sphere of society, and on the other hand, the rich winner might exclude themselves in order to sustain secure life by themselves without paying tax or cost for public matters: dual exclusion (Lister, 2000: 50-51). These conditions might undermine the sphere to live together: society. This paper grasps one of the major causes of these conditions is particular way of treating knowledge.

When one defines contemporary society as knowledge society, one of the problems consists in socio-economic gap based on economic centered logic knowledge and knowledge production which has dominant influence. In this sense, those two social contexts come to be overlapped. Based on this problem setting, this paper will focus on alternative mode of producing knowledge or treating knowledge: SCKP. Namely, it will show another perspective for knowledge production differing from the main stream economic centered knowledge production. Another perspective or alternative possibility means knowledge production based on interests desiring living together or conviviality oriented society, through analytical comprehension of society, shows alternative vision. This knowledge production has more affinity with cognitive dimension of knowledge rather than instrumental dimension. This paper defines it as social consciousness knowledge production (SCKP).

SCKP has some features. Firstly, it produces knowledge starting from the interests to desire living together as social consciousness in the social context of neoliberal competitive circumstances. The concept of “living together” “includes” plural ways of “well-being” of people into society as sphere to live together, then reaches “empowerment” (cf. Gray, 2000; Fielding, 1996). This knowledge production puts more emphasis on cognitive function of knowledge rather than instrumental function. This cognitive function has certain relations with cognitive structures of society, which form how society cognizes itself, or form cultural mode as system of meaning structures. Contemporary society has been influenced by

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<sup>2</sup> Society as sphere to live together can be defined as sphere to enable people to achieve their own way of well-being. This idea has affinity with “critical common society theory” introduced by M. Walzer. He defines civil society as following: The Words “civil society” name the space of uncoerced human association and also the set of relational networks—formed for the sake of family, faith, interest, and ideology—that fill this space. .... the first task of the new democracies created by the dissidents, so we are told, is to rebuild the networks: unions, churches, political parties and movements, cooperatives, neighborhoods, schools of thought, societies for promoting or preventing this and that’ (1996: 166 [1995: 153-154]). Namely, in the networks or common society as Walzer says, various individuals can acquire possibilities to live their own life via sense of well-being. It does not mean each individual seek their fulfilled life with the sense of fragments or individualism, but they seek in communal circumstance: the society. See in details, section 1 of chapter 2.

neoliberalism including realm of cognitive structures; various messages have circulated such as one needs to show one's relevance through superior position in a competition or needs to be strong to survive the games of competition (Komikawa, 2002). This master paper thinks it is important to confront alternative cognitive mode with this kind of strong structure of cognition, since the alternative cognition has possibilities to generate "different way of thinking and being" in the polarized society. SCKP might have possibilities to make society more convivial or living together oriented.

Secondly, based on this interest, SCKP analytically comprehends and problematizes society, and then provides alternative vision. Contemporary society has had complexities and uncertainties stem from constant changing; mere intuition cannot function to comprehend such complexities or uncertainties. What is required is a certain way of research which leads to analytical understanding and problematization of social phenomena. Based on such cognition, one might be able to deal with better social conditions. In this sense, SCKP values the cognitive dimension of knowledge.

Knowledge production, in general, has changed; it has less relevance to produce knowledge for its own sake or discipline's sake in ivory tower than before. In other words, knowledge production has come to be open for more various actors and issues. In this condition, SCKP represents one of the different logic and one of the another possibilities from economic centered one, which has certain orientation towards boosting economic development and establishing industrial foundations; SCKP might take the form to produce knowledge on what it means to live together through changing life style or creating community solidarity in competitive social conditions. This kind of knowledge has certain linkage with such as community currency or fair trade movements as this paper shows in case part.

This paper will analyze ideas or opinions and actual produced or generated knowledge in terms of SCKP. The actors to deal with are NGOs, NPOs and networks in contemporary Japanese society. Of course, state owned sectors or business sectors can conduct SCKP; however, this paper values the following conditions: this writer has had been interested in NGOs and such actors with involvement and has engendered the concerning issue through experiences around them. However, it does not mean to praise such actors as good movements, although as mention later this paper values attitudes of them to create the social from grassroots level with elements of new social movements based on their own interests or desire for a better society, because such kinds of social involvement might have possibilities to dynamize and pluralize the social.

To analyze knowledge activities of such actors this master paper takes two steps. First, it analyzes them from the framework of "knowledge production, which creates something new elements having innovative dynamics" and "knowledge circulation, which does not create anything new elements having not innovative dynamics." Namely, the first step of analysis lies in whether knowledge activities create new knowledge through research and study activities. Second, it analyzes them from the perspective of "how they can be evaluated in terms of SCKP." It means to analyze by confronting generated knowledge with ideal model of SCKP which will be constructed in theoretical part. This is the second step. These two steps will be analyzed through interview data and text data; the aim of the analysis lies in to show limitations and possibilities of SCKP of NGOs and such actors in contemporary Japanese society and then to make

some advocative comments.

The significance of this study has two dimensions: disciplinary and social. That is, to represent the existence of SCKP in theoretical and case level by NGOs, NPOs and networks as one of the various actors of knowledge production, although whose dominant logic lies in economic centered. It means to show alternative perspective or theoretical framework to comprehend knowledge production in the certain economic centered main stream. Moreover, not only theoretical level, but actual movements or dynamics are shown through cases. Through subsequent arguments and considerations one of the relations between knowledge and society in terms of social consciousness might be constituted as object of argument. This kind of precede study does not exist yet; in this sense this study has certain disciplinary significance. Moreover, the significance of knowledge activities by NGOs and such actors can be implied through considerations from alternative perspective on knowledge production; and through analyses and considerations concrete suggestions on knowledge activities of them will be provided. In these sense, this study has social significance.

### **1-2 Composition of this Master Paper**

In order to reach the aim this paper make the following arguments. Firstly, in Chapter 1 the premises are developed as foundation of whole argument; what is knowledge society, what is knowledge production, and such kinds of basic elements of the issue are explored. Without such basic considerations one might be at loss in the issue. This paper grasps knowledge society as society in which knowledge organize the economic, the political, and the cognitive realm. In this sense, knowledge has certain power. And, activities to produce such knowledge are defined as knowledge production. By doing such kinds of conceptual arguments, this paper develops the large stream of knowledge production in contemporary Japanese society through seeing state owned sector, business sector, university, and a part of thinktanks. As a concrete level, it shows what kinds of knowledge production are conducted and what kinds of perspective on it are held by them. Through these considerations, the already mentioned economic centered logic and actual knowledge production are shown. Then, the social context of this main stream is argued from the perspective of neoliberal globalization; such main stream of knowledge production has certain social context. The linkage between the social context and knowledge production might has certain social influence; one of the main reasons of the polarization of society might has connection with particular way of treating knowledge and knowledge production. This argumentation is problematization process; the main stream of knowledge production might lead to social polarization, or socio-economic gap. As already mentioned this social condition is normatively not desirable; and the cost might be society as sphere to live together itself. From the perspective of this problematization this paper argues location and significance of SCKP; in this part the basic features of SCKP are explored. In addition, contemporary meanings and importance to set the actors as NGOs and such are argued.

In chapter 2 the frameworks of analysis are explored. Before concrete frameworks it argues significance of thinking about SCKP in terms of fluid model of the social. The sphere of the social is explored to be organized or articulated through various social involvements. After exploring such arguments, chapter 2 constructs two frameworks of analyses. First consists of

broad framework: “knowledge activity” including concrete frameworks: “knowledge production” and “knowledge circulation.” Knowledge production can be defined as activity to produce something new elements through original research and study or composition of existing knowledge, and request writing text from another actors who might in broad networks. What is crucial for knowledge production lies in innovative element as argued in chapter 1. This element has certain relations with analytical understanding and problematization in terms of SCKP. In the case of knowledge circulation, this kind of innovative element does not necessarily appear; it mainly deals with circulation or distribution of knowledge through such activities as translation and arrangement. This master paper puts emphasis and value on knowledge production breeding new elements, because such activities might pluralize social cognition and social understanding. Second framework consists of the ideal model of SCKP; the model consists of mainly six elements as the constitutive elements and at the same time produced elements entailing knowledge production. The six elements are “interest”; “cognition”; “living together”; “analytical understanding”; “problematization”; and “vision”. These elements functions to analyze SCKP as conceptual instruments.

Chapter 3 organizes data of knowledge activities of NGOs and such actors through text data and interview data in order to analyze actual SCKP. Namely, this chapter organizes data to grasp actual level of knowledge activities. The actors this thesis analyzes are “A SEED JAPAN”; “ATTAC Japan”; “Gesell Research Society Japan”; “Sloth Club”; and “Asian Pacific Research Center (PARC).” Organized text data shows what kind of “interests” and “cognition” including “living together” each actor has; what kind of analytical understanding, problematization, and vision they provide. Interview data shows ideas, opinions, and even consciousness on knowledge production and knowledge itself; on process of knowledge generation; and sense of content and future task in terms of existing knowledge activities.

In chapter 4 these data are analyzed by the theoretical frameworks or conceptual models argued in chapter 2; it analyzes knowledge activities of each actors from the frameworks of “what kind of evaluation it can make in terms of knowledge production and knowledge circulation” and “what kind of evaluation it can make in terms of SCKP.” Then, it considers limitations and possibilities of SCKP by NGOs and such actors in contemporary Japanese society, and then makes some suggestions on it.

As concluding remarks, this paper confirms a limitation that NGOs and such actors are not expert or professional institution of knowledge production and possibilities that such actors provide various visions. And then, this paper suggests if one wants to enhance SCKP by those actors, then it might have importance to have certain connections with university as expert institution of knowledge production; to make networks among actors of knowledge production; and also to communicate each others who are in networks by reciprocal demand and supply, critics, and production of knowledge.