Cultural sociology in East Asia: three trajectories in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Korea

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Abstract

The essay reviews the trajectories of cultural sociology in three East Asian societies, namely Hong Kong, Taiwan and Korea, which show interesting parallels and distinctive developments within their respective social and historical contexts. Sociologists in these societies in general, and cultural sociologists in particular, have endeavored to reflect on the cultural ramifications of the social and political changes wrought by the processes of modernization, (de-)colonization and democratization. By building on the efforts of their predecessors and taking inspiration from new theoretical ideas from the West, cultural sociologists in these Asian societies have blazed a long trail beyond the conventional approach of the sociology of culture. By seriously considering the analytic autonomy of culture, their works have sought to wrestle with the issues of meaning, identity, morality, trust, everyday life, collective consciousness, community and resistance under the increasing influences of state power, markets and global hegemony.

Keywords Cultural sociology · Hong Kong · Taiwan · Korea · East Asia

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Introduction

Under the dominant influences of structural functionalism and structural Marxism, the field of sociology in East Asia approached culture either in terms of a value analysis couched in positivistic terms or as reduced to the effect of the social structure until at least the 1980s. In response to the confluence of the “cultural turn” in sociology and the rise of cultural studies in the West in the 1990s, the approach to the study of culture in the East Asian region shifted from a conventional approach based on the sociology of culture to a call for cultural sociology. The former largely takes culture as an object of study, whereas the latter considers culture in a hermeneutic sense in terms of symbolic and collective meaning. In part, this reflects a trend in the US, the UK and worldwide and draws sustenance from the local social and political contexts in which a variety of identity politics began to arise. Such developments can be traced in research papers, academic journals, teaching and professional associations and in the intellectual profiles of individual scholars. For example, in line with Alexander’s idea of the relative autonomy of culture, scholars in Hong Kong have studied the interplay between culture and politics locally and between culture and the economy or religion in mainland China. In Taiwan, scholars trained in different disciplinary backgrounds have spearheaded a new trend of cultural sociology. In Korea, the *Korean Journal of Cultural Sociology* has been launched by the Korean Association of Cultural Sociology. What are some of the theoretical challenges posed by cultural sociology in East Asia, and what new ideas, perspectives and lines of analysis have been developed? This essay will review the trajectories of cultural sociology in three East Asian societies, namely Hong Kong, Taiwan and Korea, and provide some preliminary reflections.

Hong Kong

Previously, Hong Kong was an outpost of British imperialism and served as the world’s gateway to China. Its unique history has contributed to a distinctly hybrid culture with varying degrees of Chinese influence, cosmopolitanism and localism. Early scholarship on Hong Kong society was initiated by a handful of foreign anthropologists who took an interest in studying the legacy of Chinese heritage in some rural areas. By the 1970s, the rise of modernity began to bring about a shift in the research focus among homegrown scholars. Drawing on modernization and development theories, sociologists explained how prevailing values, beliefs and attitudes gave rise to political stability amid very rapid economic changes in society (Lau 1982; Lau and Kuan 1988). The epistemological assumption was one of empiricism, and the scholars relied on the survey method to depict culture in a generalized fashion. Scholars inspired by British sociology later turned to class analysis and surveyed the impact of class-related ideational factors on political attitudes (Wong 1992; Wong and Lui 1993), thus echoing previous work

on attitudes toward labor (Mitchell 1969; England and Rear 1975; England 1989). Overall, these earlier studies of values and attitudes concluded that amorality, pragmatism and utilitarianism were the hallmarks that characterized Hong Kong culture in the heyday of economic modernization.

The mid-1990s saw the rise of several new directions in the study of culture. On the one hand, in society, the continued growth of popular culture and the rise of identity issues in response to China's takeover of the city in 1997 provided the backdrop for such developments. Claims to local identity, nationhood and globality were highly contested, and freedom, democracy and the rule of law became issues of primary concern (Abbas 1997; Law 1997; Ku 2002a). On the other hand, the theoretical influences of various forms of scholarship from the West reached Hong Kong. These included overlapping developments in cultural sociology, media studies from the Birmingham School, poststructuralist theory and the emerging field of cultural studies. For instance, a research group spearheaded by faculty members and graduate students in English literature, film studies, sociology and anthropology was formed under the banner of cultural studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Their collaboration came to fruition in a pioneering book series on identity politics and popular culture published in 1997. Moreover, new departments and programs were set up under the banner of cultural studies.

As media and consumption cultures were becoming popular topics for research within sociology (Ng and Cheung 2002), Agnes Ku was among the first to use perspectives in cultural sociology to study issues with broader political significance. Ku had her first interaction with cultural sociology when she received her doctoral training under the mentorship of Jeffrey Alexander in the United States in the 1990s. Alexander, an early advocate of cultural sociology, endeavored to establish what he now calls the "strong program." By referencing late-Durkheimian sociology as a theoretical resource (Alexander 1990), he emphasizes the relative and analytic autonomy of culture, and examines its variegated boundary relations with the other social spheres. Ku's works have been inspired by both the strong program and critical discourse theories. She has focused on Hong Kong politics and culture, and has elucidated the relationships of cultural meanings and processes with power and resistance. In her earlier work, she expanded on Habermas's theory of the public sphere and outlined an alternative approach that pays greater attention to the cultural realm of symbols, meanings, values, discourses and representations (Ku 1999, 2000). For Ku, a major problem concerns how political discourses are articulated, contested or deconstructed in the public sphere, which in turn helps to reproduce or transform the undemocratic structures of power relationships (Ku 2001a).

In her effort to broaden the repertoire of cultural analysis, Ku has incorporated such notions as code, narrative and dramaturgy into the study of political conflict and social movements. Her first book introduced the concept of using narrative to analyze cultural and political dynamics in the public sphere (Ku 1999). Through a detailed case study, it showed how the democratic discourse, among others, was coded in a culturally specific way through certain narratives that informed, guided and constrained political practices. Ku has also explored issues related to secrecy, hegemony, political crisis and identity politics through in-depth discourse analyses (Ku 1998, 2001b, 2004a, 2018). She has also combined analyses of discourse and

dramaturgy to explain the dynamics of civil disobedience protests (Ku 2004b, 2007, 2019). Ku has further integrated dynamic discourse analysis with spatial analysis to explore discursive formation and place-making from below (Ku 2010, 2012). The former focuses on the contestatory process of multi-vocal claims and interpretations, whereas the latter sheds light on the material embodiment of meanings, as well as tactics and action, in places.

Ku has sought to tie cultural analysis to broader issues relating to civil society. She revisits the classical theories of civil society and highlights issues of both political freedom (vis-à-vis tyranny) and social inclusion, which have been downplayed in the Marxist and the liberal theories, respectively (Ku 2002b). In her renewed framework, she emphasizes the dual impetus of civil society—civil society versus the state, and civil society as a contested sphere—and the cultural workings (Ku 2009). Beyond Hong Kong, she has compared the coping responses of civil society in Hong Kong and Taiwan during the SARS Crisis of 2003 (Ku and Wang 2004). Her most recent co-edited book, *The Civil Sphere in East Asia*, represents another collaborative endeavor in cultural sociology to address issues of civility, institutions and politics in the broader context of East Asia (Alexander et al. 2019).

Ku's overall theoretical position is to consider the structured yet relatively open and dynamic relationship between the symbolic realm and the political sphere. Specifically, she considers meanings on their own terms while situating them sociologically in the interstices of institutions, relations and processes. She explores the interplay between structure and agency, between culture and institution and between culture and power. This distinguishes her approach from both functionalism in conventional sociology—which tends to under-emphasize meaning, agency and process—and from poststructuralism in its strong version, which collapses any meaningful analytical distinctions.

Besides studying the local society in Hong Kong, sociologists have also taken an interest in exploring the vast nation of China more broadly. For instance, Cheris Chan's works have focused on the Chinese economy. The opening-up of the Chinese economy in 1978, which ushered in an extensive process of marketization, brought with it enormous changes in people's social lives in this vast nation. Chan has applied concepts and theories from cultural sociology to depict the economic relations and political action in contemporary China in rich ethnographic detail. Her studies of the life insurance market in China consider not only economic practices but also social networks, morality and trust. Her book, *Marketing Death* (Chan 2012a), grappled with major themes and debates in cultural sociology about the nature of culture and how it works. More specifically, she examined how and why the commercial life insurance industry managed to emerge in a society with a deeply entrenched cultural stigma associated with the subject of death. Her analysis detailed the processes and micro-politics by which foreign and domestic life insurers negotiate local cultural resistance. She posed larger questions regarding how values and practices are intertwined in shaping the trajectory of the Chinese life insurance market, specifically how Chinese people perceive life and death, how cultural values are expressed and how people draw on the available cultural tools to organize individual and organizational practices (Chan 2009a). Chan subsequently expanded this study to Hong Kong and Taiwan (Chan 2012b). Through comparative analysis,

she included the role of the state and its interaction with cultural values to shape the divergent development and characteristics of these two Chinese markets.

Chan further explored the cultural contents of social ties. Based on the case of life insurance transactions in China, she demonstrated how cultural rules generate a pattern of expectations regarding the types of obligations associated with ties of various strengths. Through the enforcing power of meaning, cultural rules mold the pattern of the relationship between the strengths of ties and forms of economic transactions (Chan 2009b).

Chan's work encompasses two more threads. One applies an interactionist framework to examine the role of ideology in collective action. Through the case of the Falun Gong movement in China, Chan seeks to understand how its followers dealt with cognitive dissonance to sustain the movement, despite political suppression and the disappearance of their leader (Chan 2013). The other thread addresses the issue of morality and trust in the healthcare domain by focusing on doctor–patient interactions in Chinese hospitals (Chan 2018). Her research shows that although culture plays a central role in constituting exchange behaviors, institutions shape the form of the exchanges. Chan's ongoing work explores how the Chinese define and classify “moral” versus “immoral” behaviors through both public and commercial social credit schemes. Overall, Chan's works, which are characterized by a strong Durkheimian thrust, have shed light on how values, codes and underlying rules have shaped social relations and micro-social practices in various spheres of contemporary Chinese society amid rapid social and economic changes.

David Palmer's work on modern Chinese religions, while rooted in anthropology, has also engaged deeply with cultural sociology. Palmer received his doctoral training at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris, which is home to venerable traditions of French anthropology (Marcel Mauss and Claude Lévi-Strauss taught there) and of Sinology and Daoist Studies. He nonetheless pursued a line of inquiry quite different from the classical anthropological or Sinological methods, as these were not well adapted to studying the changes in contemporary China. For instance, he saw a decidedly modern and contemporary phenomenon that was deeply connected with the cultural and political transformations of post-Mao China in the Qigong movement in China in the late 1990s (Palmer 2007). The movement culminated in the rise of new sectarian religious movements and a state crackdown in 1999. Palmer's work drew the interest of sociologists of new religious movements, civil society and contemporary China. In the early 2000s, the revival of religion in China attracted many scholars from different disciplines and, by organizing a series of international conferences, Palmer brought together anthropologists, sociologists and historians to form an interdisciplinary academic community of researchers on religion in contemporary China (see Palmer et al. 2010; Goossaert and Palmer 2011).

Palmer's approach is particularly inspired by Richard Madsen, one of the founders of the contemporary sociology of China. This approach stresses the role of values, moral codes and rituals in all domains of social life, thus blurring the distinctions between the religious and the secular. It takes an interest in localized indigenous voices and cosmology while seeking to describe and analyze macro-social transformations. Religious groups and movements, however, never fit well into the prevalent

academic theories of civil society. Palmer's recent work on religion and civil society has profited from the insights of Jeffrey Alexander's civil sphere theory, notably in the conceptions of spheres of solidarity, codes of morality and the performance of the sacred and profane (Alexander 2006). His collaborative work with Alexander and other scholars in Asia further shows how social tensions, conflicts and transformations revolve around contested values or moral codes (Palmer and Alexander 2019; Palmer 2019a). To date, Palmer has developed a non-state-centered, micro-sociological approach to informal associations driven by moral values in China. His recent and ongoing research focuses on Daoism and ritual traditions in rural China and among ethnic minorities in the borderlands of China, Laos and Vietnam.

Palmer's intellectual lineage in cultural sociology and classical anthropology can be traced through different genealogies back to the Durkheimian tradition (Palmer 2019b; Weiss 2019). The Durkheimian paradigm has been energized by Alexander's cultural sociology regarding social solidarity, conflict, deep moral structures and historical change. Research on rituals, ancient manuscripts and social performance fully engages him with the classical anthropological and Sinological traditions. However, his work views ethnic minority communities as composed of plural, overlapping, contested, evolving and interpenetrating solidarities, rather than undifferentiated "mechanical solidarities," as traditional societies are often imagined to be. The approaches of cultural sociology, which have modified classical concepts to understand highly differentiated, pluralized and rapidly changing contemporary societies, can thus be mobilized to understand the cultural dynamics at play in communities that we tend to view as quintessentially "tribal" and "traditional."

In summary, the works of Ku, Chan and Palmer have explored Hong Kong's politics, identity and civil society, China's changing economy and politics and Chinese religion in less developed areas, respectively. They are similar in terms of drawing sustenance from Durkheimian cultural sociology, albeit to varying degrees, and from the strong program advocated by Alexander, while simultaneously engaging other intellectual and theoretical lineages. The latter include, but are not confined to, critical discourse theory and theories about dramaturgy, narrative and space (as in Ku's works); symbolic interactionist theory (as in Chan's works) and classical anthropology and Sinology (as in Palmer's works). Their works have addressed salient issues related to identity, subjectivity, morality, social ties, resistance and community formation in a context where state power and market forces have increasingly encroached on social and civil relations.

Taiwan

Cultural sociology has never become fashionable in academic circles in Taiwan and can be considered at most an undercurrent in Taiwanese sociology. There are linguistic and historical reasons for this. In the Chinese language, which is the working language in Taiwan, there is no distinction between cultural sociology and the sociology of culture because both terms are translated as "*wenhua shehuixue*." Nowadays, however, *wenhua shehuixue* is understood almost exclusively as the sociology of culture, a subfield in the discipline that regards culture as merely a dependent

variable to be explained by other independent variables such as class, ethnicity and social status. However, this is certainly not what cultural sociology, especially understood in terms of the strong program advocated by Alexander and Smith (2001), refers to. An alternative translation of cultural sociology would be “*wenhua de shehuixue*,” but this rarely used term has never become popular.

Furthermore, sociology as a discipline has been characterized by a high degree of reflexivity; that is, sociologists tend to be more attentive to reflecting on the socio-historical situation of their society. Because of its multicultural history, sociologists in Taiwan have perhaps been more sensitive to such concerns. Before the Han Chinese took control of Taiwan in the 17th century, the island had been home to Austronesian-speaking aborigines, and both the Spanish and the Dutch had built settlements for a short period. After colonization by Japan for 51 years, Taiwan was handed over to the Chinese government in 1945 but has remained separate from mainland China since 1949, when the ruling Kuomintang (KMT) regime was defeated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the Chinese Civil War. Such a complicated historical background makes sociologists in Taiwan quite sensitive to the problem of culture. Genealogically speaking, sociology in Taiwan has multiple cultural roots: the first generation of sociologists in postwar Taiwan was either trained in Japan (e.g., Shao-hsin Chen) or in China (e.g., Kuan-hai Lung). Both schools were quite aware of how Taiwanese/Chinese society differed from Western societies, and such differences were usually explained in terms of culture. Although this is not exactly what is understood as “cultural sociology,” culture as an explanatory factor has not been excluded from the horizons of sociology in Taiwan, although it is often treated as a “residual category.”

When the KMT regime retreated to Taiwan after losing the Chinese Civil War in 1949, sociology was repressed because it was considered to be closely related to socialism which, in turn, was regarded as equivalent to communism. The establishment of sociology departments in selected universities in the region during the 1950s and 1960s occurred under strong influence from the United States and was shaped by the Cold War regional dynamics. Throughout the 1970s and up to the mid-1980s, structural functionalism, modernization theory, positivist surveys and behavioral science were the dominant paradigms. Under the impact of structural functionalism, culture was taught in sociology departments in the name of cultural anthropology, reflecting a Parsonian attitude toward the subject; that is, culture, after all, is to be studied by anthropologists, not sociologists. Within sociology, culture was mostly studied in terms of values and/or beliefs to be measured using different quantitative scales. Sociologists who addressed culture in a non-positivist manner tended to focus on issues such as how traditional (namely, Chinese) culture could adapt to new values during the course of modernization, or how modernization could affect or even erode Chinese culture (Wen 1977; Yeh 1984). Meanwhile, there was a call to “Sinicize” (i.e., to “make Chinese”) the social and behavioral sciences, as the proponents believed that these sciences, which originated from the West, should be adapted to Chinese culture/society in Taiwan (Yang and Wen 1982). In such an intellectual movement, culture was considered only in terms of “cultural differences” and was not yet endowed with full autonomy to explain social life in general.

The turning point came in the late 1980s, when socio-political and intellectual currents coincided during this pivotal era in Taiwan. Since the late 1980s, Taiwan has undergone dramatic socio-political transformations in terms of democratization and indigenization. Whereas democratization involved the transition from authoritarianism to democracy, indigenization entailed a deeper, more fundamental change in the collective consciousness, in the Durkheimian sense, in Taiwan. The rise of Taiwanese consciousness and Taiwanese identity has led to a shift from a China-centered to a Taiwan-centered paradigm. Taiwanese culture, which was suppressed by the authoritarian KMT regime and regarded as nothing more than a branch of Chinese culture, gained legitimacy in its own right. A new Taiwanese identity was rising while the old Chinese one was waning. The ensuing identity politics involved a soul-searching process in which meaning, values and new cognitive frames were fervently contested, leading eventually to the overall transformation of the collective consciousness. In addition to booming cultural industries, culture has become a practical issue in everyday life, as people need new symbols, narratives, icons, canons and songs to conceptualize and express their new identities.

Along with this cultural boom, we witnessed a cultural fever in academic circles. A new generation of scholars in the social sciences and humanities returned to Taiwan around the same period after completing their doctoral training overseas—mostly in the US and, to a lesser extent, in Europe. While the cultural turn in the US certainly had an impact on these scholars to varying degrees, the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies in the UK also had a substantial influence. New theories and schools of thought were introduced to Taiwan, including Marxism, neo-Marxism, critical theory, structuralism, poststructuralism, postmodernism and post-colonial theory. Subsequently, culture gradually became a buzzword in the 1990s and 2000s, as the study of culture flourished to the point of being a fad of the time. Scholars and their students swarmed to study local culture, popular culture, urban culture, consumer culture, media culture, postmodern culture, gay/lesbian culture, ethnic culture, class culture, and the like, all of which were loosely understood to fall under the umbrella term “cultural studies.” In 1998, the Cultural Studies Association was founded, attracting many scholars from a variety of disciplines such as literature, mass communication and media studies, history, anthropology and sociology. Although cultural studies cannot be equated with cultural sociology, the active role of sociologists in cultural studies circles should not be overlooked. For instance, the US-trained sociologists Yuan-horng Chu and Horng-luen Wang are two of the founding members of the newly introduced journal *Router: A Journal of Cultural Studies*. While Chu was the editor from 2005 to 2010, many sociologists published their culture-related research in this journal. This was partly because previously there had been no intellectual hub for sociologists studying culture, either in the fashion of the sociology of culture or cultural sociology, to gather in terms of professional associations and/or academic journals.

If the “cultural turn” gave rise to the strong program of cultural sociology in North America, then we may say that the cultural fever among academics, along with the cultural boom in the socio-political sphere, made Taiwanese sociologists consider culture more seriously in their research. Although most of this type of research was done in the fashion of the sociology of culture (namely, *wenhua*

shehuixue in Chinese), some of it may well be regarded as cultural sociology when judged using the criteria set by Alexander's strong program, although such a term does not have a Chinese equivalent for expression in Taiwan. In other words, some sociologists have carried out studies that can be characterized as cultural sociology, but they may not claim that their work is cultural sociology (as the term *wenhua shehuixue* has been preempted by the sociology of culture). As noted above, democratization and indigenization mark the two fundamental socio-political transformations in Taiwan since the late 1980s. Consequently, identity politics, which results from indigenization, and civil society, which has played a key role in the process of democratization, are the two major subjects that have been researched fruitfully by cultural sociology. The following is a preliminary examination of some representative works in this field.

Since the 1990s, the rise of Taiwanese consciousness, along with the emerging fever in Taiwanese culture, has led to a growing body of literature on identity politics in Taiwan. As culture has played an essential role in Taiwan's identity politics, the study of culture has received more and more attention from the sociological community. A-chin Hsiau's works can be said to be representative of this trend. Hsiau was trained at UC San Diego under the supervision of Richard Madsen, and his research places cultural autonomy at the center of his accounts of social change. In his oft-cited book on cultural nationalism in contemporary Taiwan, Hsiau analyzed how intellectuals and cultural elites endeavored to "re-invent" tradition in Taiwan through various efforts to rebuild Taiwanese literature, language and history. By asserting the autonomy of Taiwanese culture, their collective efforts not only substantially changed the cultural landscape in Taiwan but also evoked a new Taiwanese subject, along with an emerging community that imagines Taiwan as a nation (Hsiau 2000). In his later work, Hsiau shifted to the concepts of generation, narrative identity and collective memory to examine how postwar generations used Taiwanese literature and history to construct a new identity that, in contrast to the "unrealistic" Chinese identity, more truthfully reflected the reality of Taiwan (Hsiau 2008).

The research of Horng-luen Wang, an advocate of cultural sociology, has focused on meaning and affect, echoing Alexander's strong program in many ways. In his early work, Wang investigated the seemingly paradoxical phenomena in which four major globalizing forces—namely, flows of people, flows of culture, flows of capital, and international/transnational institutions—gave rise to the awakening of national identity in Taiwan during the 1990s (Wang 2000). Furthermore, by viewing culture as an institution that is both shaped by structural factors and shapes people's identities, he analyzes how institutions of national culture in Taiwan failed to sustain the old Chinese identity and how such institutional crises have given rise to a newly emerging Taiwanese identity (Wang 2004). Later on, by drawing on the heritage of phenomenological sociology, particularly the works by Max Scheler, Alfred Schutz, Peter Berger, Thomas Luckmann and Erving Goffman, Wang developed three levels of analysis with which to investigate nations and nationalism: institutions, cognitive frames and structures of feeling. This analytical framework, which unfolded over different stages of the research, has been applied to the study of nationalism in Taiwan, China and Japan (Wang 2009, 2010, 2014a). Wang's research touches on not

only these three nationalisms in themselves, but also how they are interconnected and interactive, which has eventually led to a multilayered structure of resentment in East Asia (Wang 2014b, c). Recently, Wang demonstrated how Alexander's civil sphere theory can be applied and expanded to the transnational level and how people bearing conflicting historical memories and contradictory structures of feeling can reach reconciliation through historical dialogue in such a transnational civil sphere (Wang 2018, 2019).

The study of civil society and the public sphere is another important field where cultural sociology has been fruitful. For instance, Ding-tzann Lii and his colleagues have shown that local culture and intimate relations can play positive roles in the formation of civil society in Taiwan by facilitating various discourses in the public sphere (Lii 2004). Kuo-ming Lin, a devoted scholar of deliberative democracy, points out that cultural codes, social ties, collective identities and memories can account for different patterns of participation in state-initiated activities in civil society (Lin 2019).

Outside of Taiwan, Ming-cheng Lo, a sociologist of Taiwanese origin currently based at the University of California, Davis, has played a salient role that can hardly be overstated. Her first book, *Doctors within Borders*, explores how Taiwanese physicians developed their ethnic and professional identities during the Japanese colonial period (Lo 2002). Although culture was not placed at the center of her argument, her sophisticated analysis of the changing relations between Taiwanese medical professionals and the colonial state paved the way for her later studies of civil society and political culture. Indeed, Lo has been actively engaging in direct dialogues with Alexander's cultural sociology in various ways; in so doing, she also demonstrates that Taiwan, as an empirical case, can contribute to our theoretical understanding of civic solidarity, social capital and cultural codes in a young civil society. In the works collaborated with Yun Fan, a Yale-trained Taiwanese sociologist, Lo both challenges and extends Alexander's civil sphere theory by analyzing how marginalized groups hybridize diverse and sometimes contradictory cultural resources to cope creatively with challenging socio-political milieus (Lo and Fan 2010, 2019). In a book symposium on *Civil Sphere in East Asia* (Alexander et al. 2019), Lo (2020) points out that Alexander's civil sphere theory can be fruitfully employed to understand East Asian civil societies through rigorous mutual articulation, as demonstrated in the works of this groundbreaking edited volume. Recently, Lo and Hsieh (2020) draw on Alexander's theories of cultural trauma (Alexander 2012) and societalization (Alexander 2018) to explain how and why Taiwan's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic has been remarkably effective.

What is more, Lo has been a vital proponent of cultural sociology in the US and beyond. She co-edited the *Handbook of Cultural Sociology* with Laura Grindstaff and John R. Hall, which was revised and enlarged for a second edition within nine years, thus indicating the success of this ambitious volume (Grindstaff, Lo and Hall 2010, 2019). In an agenda-setting tone, Lo and her colleagues advocate a "broad program" of cultural sociology, which emphasizes the connection between the life-world and globalization with the aim of expanding the scope of cultural sociology on a global scale by including additional authors who address with non-Western subjects and/or perspectives. For instance, Pei-chia Lan, another Taiwanese sociologist,

contributed an article to this volume that examined how cultural frameworks have profoundly shaped different practices of carework across the globe (Lan 2019).

In summary, cultural sociology has silently taken root and is gradually expanding its territory in Taiwan. As noted above, the meaning of *wenhua shehuixue* has been preempted by the sociology of culture, and thus cultural sociology has never become a programmatic intellectual movement as it has in the US. Prospectively, however, the growing number of published works that adopt approaches associated with cultural sociology leads us to expect that sociologists will increasingly give serious consideration to cultural autonomy, along with the attention to meaning and affect, when explaining social, political and economic phenomena in their research, albeit not necessarily under the banner of cultural sociology.

Korea

When Korean sociology began after Korea's liberation from Japanese imperialism, it was strongly influenced by mainstream American sociology. Korean sociology focused on conducting social research in rural areas, particularly after the introduction of modernization theory and social research methods in the mid-1950s. At that time, Korean sociology aimed not only to get rid of the remnants of colonialism and thus recover Korean national pride, but also to heal the suffering from the Korean War and proceed toward the path of modernization. For Korean sociologists, modernization did not refer solely to economic growth, but also to development into a country with a highly advanced national culture. Korean sociologists attempted to rediscover and reactivate Korea's "unique values" from its long tradition in the hope that they would motivate modernization. Gyeong-dong Kim (1979), who represented this trend, substantiated culture as "tradition" and used it to explain social change. Here, culture as tradition becomes an independent variable that causes social change, but the internal driving force is idealized as unique to Korea. Kim also tried to identify tradition empirically as an independent variable through social research on the Korean people's attitudes toward modernization. Culture thus becomes a "substantial value" that drives the process of Koreanized modernization, or it becomes a "subjective attitude" of the individual that can be measured through empirical research. The naive assumption of a one-to-one correspondence between substantial values and subjective attitudes is implicit in Kim's research. Kim laid the foundation for two mainstream trends in Korean sociology: historical sociology, which constructs the indigenous theory of Korean modernization, and positivistic sociology, which conducts quantitative social research. *The Korean Journal of Sociology*, which embodies these trends, has occupied the position of a representative academic journal in Korean sociology since its first publication in 1964.

Meanwhile, Young-shin Park (1978) introduced Weberian value analysis to Korean sociology. Park, who studied under Robert Bella, used Bella's version of Parsons's theory to explain why Joseon, the last Korean kingdom, did not modernize itself and instead became a Japanese colony. In Joseon, filial piety, the core value of Confucianism, was perfectly internalized in the personality system and institutionalized in the social system. Thus, a lifestyle based on familism was established.

Accordingly, no fundamental tension arose between the cultural and social structures, and Joseon was unable to transform into a modern society independently. In this explanation, culture is so “fused” with the social structure that it becomes a dead symbol that cannot have any other meaning. The limitation of this explanation is that it is impossible to see culture as a system of symbols; this is a weak point of Weber’s cultural sociology. Weber argues that when a specific ultimate value is institutionalized into a specific lifestyle (*Lebensführung*), the behavior of the actors who live according to that lifestyle is constituted in a specific way. If this routinization continues, culture loses its autonomy and becomes part of the lifestyle. To fundamentally change this routinized world, a new and strongly charismatic value system must be introduced. Following this Weberian framework, Park tried to construct an ideal value that would create a fundamental tension with the lifestyle of familism, morally criticize Korean society using that value and finally open a new Axial Age. Park’s efforts were embodied by the establishment of *The Korean Journal of Humanities and the Social Sciences* in 1977, and the journal has continued to strive to realize Park’s moral project.

As the tragedy of the 1980 Gwangju Uprising became known to the public, the desire for transformation in Korean society spread rapidly among young people. The spirit of the age required scientific explanations of social change and optimistic belief in the future utopia. When academic sociology failed to satisfy this demand, a research group was organized by graduate students to study Marxism, as young people thought that this philosophy would satisfy their demand. At that time, there was little interest in cultural structure because the unequal social structure was regarded as the cause of all social evil. In the late 1980s, when the Soviet Union collapsed, however, the prospect of socialist transformation no longer provided hope, and civil society theory was introduced as an alternative. Young Marxists then noticed the relative autonomy of culture, which was considered a superstructure that passively reflected the real basis of the economy. Althusser’s theory of ideology was also introduced to explain the reproduction of class inequality; according to this line of thinking, culture loses its autonomy and becomes an element that functions to promote social integration. Gramsci’s theory of hegemony was introduced in the process of criticizing this functionalist cultural theory. Culture was reduced to political strategy and tactics for social transformation at a specific historical juncture. As functionalist and instrumentalist cultural theories dominated, discussions of cultural autonomy disappeared from Marxist sociology (Jeong 2018). Various post-isms influenced by poststructuralists such as Foucault, Bourdieu, Deleuze and Guattari were introduced to theorize the autonomy of culture. Ironically, however, the more Marxist sociologists relied on these poststructuralists to guarantee cultural autonomy, the more that sociological studies of culture were overwhelmed by cultural studies focused on textual analysis. Most Marxist cultural sociologists tried to counter this textualism by relying again on Marx’s superstructure–base metaphor. Marxist sociology gained an academic foothold in 1988, when the journal *Economy and Society* was created, and it is still an active focus of this journal.

In the 1990s, some sociologists who had studied in France criticized Korean sociology for excluding everyday life as a research subject by focusing only on “special events” and “abstract structures.” They formed a research group called the

“Everyday Culture Research Society” in 1993. These sociologists were mainly from Seoul and attempted to identify the “cultural archetypes” of Korea hidden in the clichéd and familiar everyday culture and to describe the various manifestations of these archetypes. In addition, an attempt was made to reveal the complex nature of everyday life as a matrix of time and space that not only reproduces but also changes humans and society. Another research group centered around Jaehwan Park, a student of Michel Maffesoli, was organized at Pusan National University. This research group argued that it is impossible to understand events or structures without exploring the “concrete reality” of everyday activities that are constantly repeated. The two research groups tried to defamiliarize everyday life from the perspective of strangers. During this process, the two research groups eventually paid attention to the analytic autonomy of culture and explained that everyday life is given meaning by cultural codes (Park 2004; Cheong 2007). Although they made an effort to explore Korean society through several cultural codes, they did not apply cultural pragmatics to explain how the actors use cultural codes to construct everyday life. The sociologists of everyday life did not launch their own journal. Today, the tradition continues in the Department of Sociology at Pusan National University.

There is a decisive divide in the development of Korean cultural sociology before and after the establishment of the Korean Association for Sociology of Culture in 2005. After the early 1990s, when the debate about postmodernism swept through Korean society, most Korean universities did not offer courses on cultural sociology until the early 2000s, despite growing interest in the meaning of social life aside from economic growth or equality. Although sociology failed to respond to this demand, many students of culture were attracted to leftist humanities scholars who introduced Western Marxist cultural studies to South Korea in the name of overcoming crude economic determinism, but who actually equated culture with domination. In view of this situation, some sociologists such as Sunwoong Park and Jongryul Choi proposed to establish an association to promote cultural sociology. Several sociologists supported this initiative. The association was initially named the Korean Association for the Sociology of Culture. It reflected the prevalence of an understanding of culture under the influence of the “weak program,” such as the Americanized version of Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital or European structuralist versions of Bourdieu’s theory of habitus and field and Foucault’s theory of governmentality. However, after the founding of the association, Park and Choi started to promote the “strong program” to Korean sociology.

Park, who first introduced Durkheimian cultural sociology into Korean sociology (1998a, b), translated *The Meanings of Social Life* into Korean in 2007, published an introductory article on Alexander’s cultural sociology in 2008 and applied Alexander’s cultural sociology to social movements (Park 2007; Park and Kim 2017) and crises in education (Park 2019). Choi (2004, 2005, 2006) declared the cultural turn in sociology as a valid project for a study of the postmodern condition. He also edited *Durkheimian Cultural Sociology: Theory and Method* and discussed some exemplary empirical studies from the strong program (2007a, b). In 2009, Choi published *The Cultural Turn in Sociology: Classical Sociology, Revitalized from Science to Aesthetics*, arguing that as the modern utilitarian order imploded, a crisis had struck social life, which was centered on production and growth. The beliefs, morals

and emotions that the modern utilitarian order sought to evict in the name of science were revitalized and mixed with utilitarian activities, which centralized existence, actions, symbols, meanings, codes, narratives, rituals and performances as research projects in sociology. Choi has worked to justify the strong program in cultural sociology through various empirical studies of candlelight vigils (2011, 2017a, 2019), multiculturalism (2016a), nationalism (Choi and Lee 2015), gender (2016b), local youth (2017b) and dreams (2018). As these efforts became more influential and gained a wider audience, the name of the association was changed to the Korean Association for Cultural Sociology in 2014. Since then, many younger cultural sociologists have joined and actively participated in the association. For instance, Heejeung Lee conducted narrative analyses of controversies over the minimum wage increase (Lee 2018a), credit information (2017a, b, 2019) and the electronic national identification card (Lee 2018b), using Alexander's civil sphere theory. Wang (2016) analyzed the autobiography of Ju-young Chung (the founder of the Hyundai Group) as a script strategically written for social performance and traced its historical and cultural origins to the Korean developmental state. The association established its own academic journal, *Culture and Society*, in 2005; this journal was renamed the *Korean Journal of Cultural Sociology* in 2014 and has served as a major academic venue for cultural sociology. The association also holds monthly colloquia and biannual academic conferences that offer an "aesthetic public stage" for sociologists to wrestle with the moral issues of the day.

Conclusion

The trajectories of cultural sociology in the three above-described East Asian societies have shown interesting parallels and distinctive developments within their respective social and historical contexts. Sociologists in these societies in general, and cultural sociologists in particular, have endeavored to reflect on the cultural ramifications of the social and political changes wrought by the processes of modernization, (de-)colonization and democratization. On a deeper level, they have all grappled with the intricate issues of cultural identity and moral relations amidst such changes, specifically the contested claims to localism, nationhood and global universalism in postcolonial Hong Kong; changing values and moral ties in a rapidly urbanizing China; the role of traditional rituals and religious faiths in rural China; the booming of indigenous identity and the vitality of civil society in Taiwan and the project of national rejuvenation and reflections on the cultural crisis in Korea. By building on the efforts of their predecessors and taking inspiration from new theoretical ideas from the West, cultural sociologists in these Asian societies have blazed a long trail beyond the conventional approach of the sociology of culture. By seriously considering the analytic autonomy of culture, their works have sought to wrestle with the issues of meaning, identity, morality, trust, everyday life, collective consciousness, community and resistance under the increasing influences of state power, markets and global hegemony. These remain important issues pertaining to larger sociological concerns about the changing forms of solidarity and conflicts confronting modern society.

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