

Civil Society and Social Science in Yoshihiko Uchida

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Preface

Intention and Narrative of the Book

This book introduces the work of Yoshihiko Uchida (1913–1989), a prominent Japanese thinker, on the topic of civil society and social science. The distinctive features of Uchida’s approach to civil society are his views of the metabolic relationship between human beings and nature, and his calls for a social science rooted in the experiences and inquiries of ordinary citizens. This original approach did not develop linearly from Uchida’s early works to his mature period; therefore, this book follows the twists and turns experienced in the formation of this approach through his reflections on the relationship between “the civil” and “the capitalistic,” “the historical” and “the transhistorical,” “economy” and “ethics,” and “the science by specialists” and “inquiry by laypeople,” among others. As a historian of economic thought, Uchida pursued these topical themes by examining figures, such as Adam Smith, Karl Marx, and Hajime Kawakami (a famous thinker in prewar Japan). By highlighting these issues, this book offers the first depiction of Uchida’s body of work as a whole, and in doing so, illuminates the emergence of original democratic thought in postwar Japan.

With this intention in mind, the grand narrative of this book is as follows: First, I will give a brief description of the social scientist and thinker, Yoshihiko Uchida. I think this is a necessary first step since Uchida and his work are not well known in the English-speaking world. Based on the fundamental fact that people and Uchida himself “live,” he sought a social science that would help them solve problems that arise in their daily lives. I will provide an overall image of Uchida’s social science by introducing all his books that show his footprints. Subsequently, I will trace the trajectory of Uchida’s thoughts from his youth to his later years. In particular, I will trace how Uchida, a young man who started his academic journey in Japan just prior to World War II, struggled with developing an academic theme at that time and how that theme changed or deepened with the rise and fall of democratization and rapid growth in postwar Japan. I will then focus on three issues that are central to his academic themes and devote a chapter to each of them. The first is Uchida’s

methodological analysis of capitalism based on the transhistorical fact of the material metabolic process of human beings and nature, which overlaps with a reexamination of Marx's theory. The second issue is the relationship between social science and human beings, or the relationship between "the science by specialists" and "inquiry by laypeople." This is closely related to Uchida's study of Hajime Kawakami. Third, the problem of economy and ethics, or the problem of civil society in capitalism, is also an important issue for Uchida, which is reflected in Uchida's questioning of the relationship between self-interest and sympathy with respect to Adam Smith. The analysis of these three core issues will crucially suggest what "civil society and social science" means to Yoshihiko Uchida. In addition, beyond Smith's view of the division of labor enriching the *economic* society, Uchida questions how the division of labor can enrich *human* society. Finally, I would like to conclude this book by providing some suggestions for those of us, who are living today in a society organized around the division of labor.

Construction of the Book

The book contains six chapters.

Chapter 1 Introduction to Yoshihiko Uchida serves as an introduction to the book as a whole. It provides an overview of the ideas underlying his scholarship and his individual writings considering that it is not necessarily well known to native English readers. At the root of Yoshihiko Uchida's thoughts on civil society is the question of what it means for each person to "live" and to "live better." The question of "living" inevitably leads to the question of "learning," which in turn develops into the question of "participating," "betting," and "communicating." Uchida ultimately believes that to form a good society, human beings need to be good workers and simultaneously respect the absolute meaning of each person's life. Following the introduction of Uchida's fundamental conception, I will provide a brief overview of his major works and a short biography.

Chapter 2 The Origin and Development of Uchida's Social Science follows the formation and development of Uchida's thoughts on civil society. I will discuss the young Uchida's original understanding of civil society, which was formed through his research in various fields, such as the debate over Japanese capitalism, economic history, social policy, and technology theory, which was set on a shaky foundation. From these examinations, I will extract his original understanding of civil society. Thereafter, Uchida dived into the study of Adam Smith to shore up the foundation of his understanding on civil society. I trace the process by which his first and primary work, *The Birth of Economic Science* (1953), finds an answer. Finally, I will review how Uchida developed the concept of civil society unique to Japan and even to himself in the latter half of his life. This concept goes beyond the understanding in his first book.

In **Chapter 3, Civil Society and the Metabolic Relationship Between Human Beings and Nature**, taking into consideration the recent deepening of the environmental crisis and the new discussions around Marx's theory of metabolism, I point out how these new studies have not adequately considered the work of Yoshihiko Uchida, for whom the theory of material metabolism was the core of his work. Throughout his life, Uchida has made the "material metabolism of human beings and nature" the basic perspective of his social science. Moreover, his theory of metabolism went beyond the realm of literary research, becoming the fundamental perspective of his perception of society and history, and his theory of civil society was inseparable from the perspective of "the metabolism of human beings and nature." From this viewpoint, this chapter will first follow Marx's perception of the human-nature relationship from the early to the late period to observe how he perceived the disturbance of material metabolism under capitalism, as well as the inevitable reconstruction of metabolism. Based on this, I will present how Uchida, who learned from Marx, has been using the concept of metabolism as his primary perspective in line with the three major research interests of Smith, Marx, and Kawakami. Finally, the chapter affirms his concept of "civil society as a rational management system of metabolism between humans and nature."

Chapter 4 Science and Inquiry in Hajime Kawakami deals with Uchida's original vision of Hajime Kawakami. In contrast to the conventional view on Kawakami, Uchida depicts Kawakami as, starting from a mixed ideology of nationalism and bourgeois rationalism, a specific Marxist who adhered to the questions of "selfishness and altruism" as well as of "economy and ethics." Kawakami eventually transformed himself into a "genuine" Marxist by withdrawing from his original standpoint: the material metabolism between humans and nature, and the conscious individual. After this transformation, Kawakami came to the conclusion that he would no longer be a creator of "academic inquiry" by thinking for himself but would be a commentator and propagator of *Capital* as the "science" and "truth," established by Marx and existing objectively at that time. The creative spirit in Kawakami disappeared and he transformed into a preacher of the official conclusions of "science." Uchida describes this as "tragic". In Kawakami's tragedy, we can study the problem of "science by specialists" and "inquiry by laypeople."

Chapter 5 Invisible Hand and Manipulative Hand develops the following discussion. "The pursuit of self-interest leads to the wealth of society as a whole through the 'invisible hand' of the market. It is a market that increases the efficiency of the economy and maximizes economic welfare. Therefore, all areas of social life must be marketized. This is the lesson of Adam Smith."—Based on this hypothesis, neoliberal economics has globalized the market, resulting in the global financial crisis and rising inequality. However, did Smith really accept the selfish activities of selfish individuals as they were? The study of Smith by Yoshihiko Uchida provides an interesting insight that stands in contrast with the orthodoxy of neoliberalism. According to Uchida, the self-interest that Smith affirmed was that of the middle and lower classes, who aimed for a modest improvement by adhering to the virtues of justice and equivalent exchange as well as by gaining the sympathy of "impartial spectators." Smithian self-interest is the self-interest formed among individuals who

mutually recognize that the other person is also a selfish person, which leads to “self-interest regulated by sympathy.” This suggests that self-interest and sympathy are inseparable, and that the “invisible hand” is effective only in an economic society where they are complementary. Uchida’s discussion is consistent with recent studies on “the moral limits of markets” by Michael Sandel or on “the moral economy” by Samuel Bowles.

Chapter 6 In Closing: How to Live in a Society Organized Around the Division of Labor is the closing chapter. By reflecting on all the aforementioned discussions on civil society and social science, we can conceive that Uchida’s theories are based on a unique way of thinking about the division of labor, asking how can the division of labor enrich not only an economic society, but above all, the human society? Unfortunately, the division of labor has led to the impoverishment of human beings and society. Uchida believes that the division of labor can truly enrich human society only when science and society are based on the absolute weight of the fact that each individual is alive.

“Civil Society” in the Japanese Connotation

This book has “civil society” in its title and discusses “civil society” throughout the text. However, I am aware that there is a subtle discrepancy between the English-speaking world and Japan concerning the connotation of “civil society” or, in German, “bürgerliche Gesellschaft” (*shimin shakai* in Japanese). Therefore, as a prelude to this book, I would like to briefly review the historical background of the term “civil society” and its multiple meanings before sharing my understanding of the specific meaning of “civil society” as used in Japan. Since Yoshihiko Uchida attempts to delve further into his own conceptualization of “civil society” based on a unique Japanese connotation, it is necessary to share a preliminary understanding of the Japanese concept of civil society as a precondition for understanding Uchida. I will begin by briefly summarizing the concept of “civil society” as it has developed and changed mainly in the West.

The first meaning of civil society is the understanding of civil society as a “political community.” This usage dates back to Greek times. In other words, it is derived from Aristotle’s *koinonia politikè* (political community), which was later translated into Latin as *societas civilis* and thereafter, translated into English as “civil society” at the end of the sixteenth century. Civil society, as Thomas Hobbes put it, is “a body politic,” meaning a political community with the state at its center, which was a view largely inherited by John Locke. In their view, civil society was inseparable from modern human rights ideology, also known as the social contract theory.

The shift in the concept of civil society came in the nineteenth century with Georg W. F. Hegel, when the second concept of civil society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*), or civil society as an “economic society,” was conceptualized. In other words, Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* depicted the system of “ethical life” as “family—civil society—state,” where “civil society” was distinguished from “state” and came to imply an

economic society as a system of division of labor and exchange (system of needs) by selfish individuals. Karl Marx can also be traced back to this lineage of Hegelian civil society, although he has something beyond Hegel. In Japan, “civil society” has been accepted in economics since the wartime period, with a focus on its economic connotation. It can be said that “civil society” at that time was represented by Smith’s “commercial society” superimposed on the Hegelian-Marxian connotation.

The third conceptual type is the understanding that civil society is a group of “intermediate organizations” or “the public sphere that they form.” This is an understanding that originated with Charles Montesquieu, Charles A. C. de Tocqueville, and Antonio Gramsci in the past, but has received renewed attention in the wake of the Eastern European revolutions at the end of the twentieth century and the recent upsurge of “new social movements.” This third concept is also known as the “new civil society theory.” Notably, Jürgen Habermas conceptualized it as “Zivilgesellschaft,” which distinguishes it from the traditional “bürgerliche Gesellschaft.” This concept of civil society as an intermediary group refers specifically to various organizations and networks that are created by the voluntary participation of citizens, such as churches, labor unions, co-ops, mutual aid organizations, foundations, NPOs, NGOs, and cultural circles, which are independent of both the state and market. Therefore, under this concept of civil society, the socio-economy as a whole is often represented in the triangle structure of “state—market—civil society.” Insofar as this civil society refers to intermediate organizations, it is located at the meso level as one area or sector within the whole of the socio-economy. On the contrary, the first two concepts of civil society are conceived at the macro level, which covers the entire society, whether political or economic.

Based on the general conceptual history of “civil society,” I will now discuss Japan’s unique concept of “civil society.” In contemporary Japan, civil society in the third sense of the term is quite widespread, which is perhaps common across the world. However, the mainstream concept of “civil society” in wartime and postwar Japan, and even today in Japan, was originally derived from the second of the above. In other words, it is an understanding of civil society that superimposes the Hegel-Marx-derived “bürgerliche Gesellschaft” with the Smith-derived “commercial society.”

The image of “civil society” drawn from this is that of a society that may include class domination but has not fully manifested it yet (or that, for the time being, the class aspect has been dismissed). It is formed by mutual negotiation and exchange among free, equal, and independent individuals who have been freed from feudal bondage. Notably, the *Kōjien* (Japan’s leading dictionary of the Japanese language) has for years (even in its most recent 2018 edition) described “civil society” as follows: “*Shimin shakai* (civil society): A society in which privilege and domination-subordination relations by status are abolished, and in which life is conducted through discussion and agreement by free and equal individuals, unregulated by state power. Basic human rights and freedom of conscience are guaranteed. A concept born out of the Enlightenment.” The explanation in other Japanese dictionaries is similar. This is the representation and connotation of “civil society” that is unique and universal in Japan. In this case, the connotation of civil society indicates something normative

rather than something historical. Perhaps there is a certain discrepancy with the dominant concept of civil society in the English-speaking world today.

Yoshihiko Uchida started by sharing this Japanese concept of civil society with other civil society theorists. However, Uchida explores this concept further in his own way. I will discuss some aspects of this in Chapters 3 and 4 of this book, but I would like to ask you to pay attention to the nuances between English-speaking countries and Japan in the conceptualization of “civil society.”

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Explanatory Note

1. Unless otherwise noted, all emphasis (italics) has been added by the author.
2. Words in square brackets ([]) in quotation have been added by the author.
3. Ellipses (...) in quotations indicate text has been omitted by the author.
4. Citations in the body of text include the name of the author, year of publication, and page(s) on which the cited text appears. For example, “Uchida (1981: 35)” refers to a quotation from page 35 of a text published by Uchida in 1981. Full citations are given at the end of each chapter.
5. Citations from Yoshihiko Uchida are indicated in principle with the volume and page number from the *Collected Works of Yoshihiko Uchida* [CW], alongside the monograph version and its page number.

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