

Toward A Multidimensional Sociology: Reading Jeffrey C. Alexander's *Action and its Environments*¹⁾

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Introduction

Since the early stage of my career as a sociologist, I have been looking for a comprehensive theoretical framework of sociology, an early attempt of which was the publication of my book entitled *Taikei-Kinoushugi Shakaigaku (The System-Functionalist Sociology)*.²⁾ In determining the subject matter of sociology through the examination of abundant inheritance of classical social theorists, I found that two axes are useful to identify it; idealism versus Materialism and Elementalism versus Holism. This idea came to my mind when I engaged in the so-called 'constructivist' study of the history of sociological thoughts. In examining various definitions of 'society' or 'social phenomena'³⁾ proposed by the past theorists, I could not help but feel that what they thought as society was only one aspect of it and that integration of fragmented conceptions about society was necessary to formulate a comprehensive theoretical perspective for sociology as a mature social science. I restated this problem as how to conceptualize 'society.' It is obvious that this fragmentation of 'society' came from the fact that each classical theorist had his own particular con-

cern or focus when he engaged in sociological studies. Thus, what is essential for Marx was different from what is fundamental for Durkheim in their sociological enterprise. Simply speaking, to some sociologists 'material' aspects are very important and essential parts of social phenomena, while to others 'ideal' (spiritual) aspects are. Although materialism-idealism axis covers various aspects of human social world, a simple example is; economic activities on materialism side and religious activities on idealism side.

The second axis is also very popular and I do not elaborate it here, but the emphasis on action of individuals as member of a society is squarely opposed to the emphasis on social structure which exists beyond the control of individual actors in sociological analysis. Although it is not sufficiently precise, the former regards micro-social phenomena as more important in sociological analysis, while the latter emphasizing macro-social phenomena. The combination of these two axes yields four types of subject matter in sociology, each of which could be used to categorize classical theorists according to their main concern in sociological endeavors.

1) Materialistic Holism (ex. Marx)

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- 1) Alexander, Jeffrey C. (1988) *Action and its Environments*, New York: Columbia University Press. The copy of the book I have now is one that Jeffrey gave me with his own signature when I visited his office on UCLA campus, February, 1991. In this essay, citations only with the page number are from this book.
- 2) Nakano, H. (1970) *Taikei-Kinoushugi Shakaigaku (The System-Functionalist Sociology)*. Tokyo: Kawashima Shoten.
- 3) As for the subject matter of sociology, I would like to propose two things; one is a society, a systematic whole of social relationships, ranging from a small gathering consisting of two (or three) persons involved to national or international human communities. The other is the 'social,' certain universal characteristics which can be found wherever plural human beings live together (interact each other). These include communication, stratification and order, institutionalization and socialization, deviance and control, and so forth. Only for the convenience, I do not specify in the following part of the paper which I am talking of, a society or the social.

- 2) Materialistic (biological) Elementalism
(ex. Freud)
- 3) Idealistic (psychological) Holism (ex.
Durkheim)
- 4) Idealistic Elementalism (ex. Weber)

Furthermore, I need to put a few complementary remarks: materialism refers to two things, one is something opposite to the spiritual or mental, and the other is something 'natural' against enlightened human beings and their creation. Accordingly, instinct, desire and other biological traits of human beings are to be categorized in it. Among psychological elements, thinking, volition and value-judgment are to be nearer to idealism. Elementalism versus holism is one of the most prevalent dichotomies in sociology. Although we know that this is a false antinomy thanks to the development of psychological and social psychological knowledge concerning the formation of personality and social relationships, the classical example of this opposition was the alternative choice between individual and society. True that these four dimensions were found and elaborated by our predecessors who lived through the historical stages of modernization with different personal and collective experiences, we are now in a position to unify these four dimensions in order to obtain a systemic, analytical view of a society. At the same time, given different characteristics of these four aspects of social phenomena, they also imply the possibility of different methods in sociology, which encourages and necessitates us to search for an appropriate method of sociology.

To conceptualize a society, other axes, beside the above-mentioned two, should be taken into our consideration. Among these are; historicity versus universality, rationality versus irrationality, quality versus quantity, conflict versus consensus, and chance versus necessity. As a complex whole, society can be viewed from different angles and each angle would provide us with different aspects of it.

Consciously or not, sociologists choose their own angle to see a society and they demonstrate, often emphatically, what they see as its 'essence', ignoring what others see as the 'crucial' aspect of it. In other words, they have a kind of presupposition about what society is like before they begin to analyze it.

This is my first rudimentary attempt to develop a multidimensional sociological perspective. As was clearly shown there, the method I used in this work was a sort of the reconstruction of classical sociology, for which I was deeply indebted to Talcott Parsons, because he was an entrance gate for me, as a beginner sociologist, to enter the treasure house full of fertile classical legacy of sociological giants in modern times.

The logic of multidimensionality

Widely acknowledged or not, the social system theory of Talcott Parsons is one of the successful proposals for a multidimensional sociology, and as it is placed in a wider context of the 'Action Frame of Reference,' we understand that a social system, which is surrounded by three different environments (cultural system, personality system, and behavioral organism), has problems in adapting itself not only to its internal situations but also to its external conditions. Though implicitly, this suggests that a social system necessarily increases its structural complexity for survival and evolution along with the changing conditions, both internal and external. In a less systematic way, many other sociologists have challenged the same task although not many were successful enough so that his or her perspective would dominate the sociological circle.

In 1984, I wrote an essay dealing with some of these 'challenges,' in which I specifically investigated four sociologists; Irving Zeitlin, Jeffrey Alexander, Niklas Luhmann, and Walter Wallace.⁴⁾ I admit that the selection of these four theorists was

4) Nakano, H. (1984) "Some Theoretical Problems in Contemporary Sociology: An Old and New Problem," *Kwansei Gakuin University Annual Studies*, Vol. XXXIII, pp.49-61. The main works I treated in the essay of these four sociologists are as follows:

Zeitlin, I. M. (1973) *Rethinking Sociology: A Critique of Contemporary Theory*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.

Alexander, J. (1982) *Positivism, Presuppositions, and Current Controversies*. Vol. 1 of *Theoretical Logic in Sociology*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Luhmann, N. (1982) *The Differentiation of Society*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Wallace, W. (1983) *Principles of Scientific Sociology*. New York: Aldine.

arbitrary, but surely they provided me with abundant and interesting materials to think about the possibility toward 'multidimensionalization' of sociological perspective; Zeitlin as an orthodox (Marxist) critic of Parsons' functionalism, Alexander as a self-confident disciple of Parsons, Luhmann as a post-Parsonian social system theorist, and Wallace as an audacious proponent of a 'scientific' sociology. Due to the limit of the space, I cannot come into a detailed analysis of these four attempts except suggesting some of the features of them.

Clearly, these theorists seemed to be unsatisfied with the existing 'fragmented' view of society proposed by their predecessors. Thus, Zeitlin tried to combine Marx and Weber, which made him possible to spell out a more integrated view of a macro social phenomenon⁵⁾ on the one hand, and to complement this macro model by a 'social psychology' which was based on the ideas of Mead and early Marx on the other. Being in the position of anti-individualism, he declares that the object of social study are not individuals, but groups and organizations, which should be studied through the analysis of their struggle for power and domination in a concrete historical context. Luhmann, having appreciated Parson's efforts to conflate the old-fashioned antinomies, tried to reformulate the problem of 'individual' and 'society' as the interpenetration between two autopoietic entities, the social system and the personality system. A new perspective can be seen here as for the relationship between individual and society, where the one is a system and the other is an environment alternately. Wallace is particularly unique in that he declared sociology is a 'natural' science. In a sense, we cannot help but admit that human being is a part (and product) of Nature, including their creations, material as well as spiritual, because these are also products of the human brain which is 'definitely' natural. Although it is meaningful to distinguish the things human from those 'non-human' as in the humanist tradition of the Enlightenment, the legitimacy of this distinction is more and more suspected and the once clearly determined boundary between the two is now blurred as in the case of recycle of natural

resources and industrial products (and wastes). In asserting that sociology is one of natural sciences, Wallace pointed out, among other things, the self-contradiction and inappropriateness of this conventional distinction between 'natural' and 'human-artificial.' His perspective echoes with the recent bio-ecological movements which emphasize the co-existence of human beings and the earth (with its living and non-living things). The psycho-somatic problem in medicine is also related to his argument. It is important to recognize that Wallace's position is not a simple reductionism because he does never propose to explain human social phenomena by psychology, physiology, chemistry, and finally quantum physics. In stead of reducing some system of organization into the lower level organizational system, he treats nonliving things and living things, body and mind, and social structure and culture as a kind of 'autopoiesis,' being a system and its environments alternately among themselves (cf. Luhmann, 1982). Let us now turn to the fourth theorist, Alexander, the examination and evaluation of his work being the main topics of this essay.

Neofunctionalism and Multidimensionality

Against the background of the American sociological circle where the paradigmatic 'pluralism' was still dominant and the theoretical convergence was still to come in the early 1980s, a new backlash of Functionalist Sociology came into the main stage notwithstanding the active micro-sociology such as Symbolic Interactionism and Ethnomethodology on the one hand and the persistent macro-sociology such as neo-Marxism on the other. As the legitimate heir of Parsonian inheritance, a group of sociologists organized a movement called 'neofunctionalism' claiming that they were going beyond Parsons without negating his fundamental contributions. Among them was the young Alexander of UCLA, the author of the four-volume-work (*Theoretical Logic in Sociology*)⁶⁾, which demonstrated the way of this movement to go beyond Parsons by re-evaluating his paradigm through the examination of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber.

5) Zeitlin took Weber's macro aspect of sociological theory, not his micro Action Theory, while I took the latter in my attempt to categorize social theorists in the preceding part of this paper.

6) Alexander, J. (1982-83) *Theoretical Logic in Sociology*. Vols. 1-4. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.

In the Theory Section of the 1984 American Sociological Association Annual Convention, this group including senior Smelser and Eisenstadt opposed sharply to the epistemological and ideological critique toward the 'legitimate' Parsonian tradition. What they proposed to do was to modify the early Parsons' bend to idealism and, at the same time, to make functionalism compatible with the 'leftist ideology' on the basis of its newly introduced multidimensional perspectives. Specifically, they actively dealt with power and conflict (hitherto allegedly neglected in Functionalism) as the important aspect of social phenomena, and discarded the 'deterministic' view for the 'contingency' theory in its method. The papers presented in this Section meeting were later compiled in a book edited by Alexander himself which was eventually entitled "Neofunctionalism."⁷⁾ It is hardly possible to find any unified theoretical assumptions among the collected papers as it is a collection of many internal controversies and differences of this school itself ; multidimensionality. Then, the question is how to integrate them.

Alexander begins with the problem of action and order; how individualistic actions make an overall collective order in a society. (How is action arranged to form the patterns and institutions of everyday life?) (p. 14) However, concerning the nature of action and order, any theoretical perspective has its own fundamental assumptions. On the one hand, action may be assumed as 'rational' or 'irrational,' and on the other hand, order may be assumed as 'individualistic' or 'collective.' Because the two, action and order, are firmly related to each other, we can combine action categories and order categories, and thus obtain the following four types of action-order models;

- 1) Rational Individualism
- 2) Irrational Individualism
- 3) Rational Collectivism
- 4) Irrational Collectivism

Modern social thoughts have been dominated by type 1) assumption (exemplified by Market Theory in classical economics), with the frequent backlash of type 2) represented by nineteenth-cent-

ury Romanticism and phenomenology. Individualistic theories, although they have a great advantage of ideological appeal to modern 'free' men, tend to neglect the structural constraints on action external to (or beyond) individual actors. In this sense, Alexander stands on the collectivist side, which he later modifies by introducing some of the ideas of Symbolic Interactionism.

a) Instrumental versus Normative, then Multidimensional Forms of Social Structural Theory

In dealing with the social structural analysis of modern period, Alexander argues that collective instrumental explanation appeared as the revolt against individualistic instrumental explanation in the work of Bentham, and then of Marx and Weber. Market, capitalist society, and bureaucracy (and state) are structures which generate role stratification and conflict in modern societies on the basis of modern 'rationality' (pp. 18-20). Assessing this line of thoughts, Alexander writes:

The great accomplishment of instrumental structuralism is to demonstrate that individual action is strongly affected by the material context within which it occurs, but this very achievement points also to the tradition's great weakness. For by assuming that actors are efficient calculators of their own material environment, the instrumental approach to social structure makes action largely subservient to external control (p. 23).

In order to avoid this weakness, he examines normative form of social structural analysis, which seems to him to allow for collective order without eliminating the consideration of individual control. For Alexander, it was Durkheim (to whom the emotional bonds of social solidarity and the symbolic codes of social morality are the fundamental social structures) who translated the logic of anti-Utilitarian Romanticism into its modern sociological form. These structures, moreover, protected independence of an individual rather than eliminating it (p. 25). Thus, Durkheim conflated collective moral

7) Alexander, J. ed. (1985) *Neofunctionalism*. California: Sage Publications.

symbolism and the 'religion of individualism.'

Technically, however, I am in a position against this Durkheimian notion of social structure. Basically, the concept of social structure refers to the configuration of social relations, while the system of symbolic codes and morality should be considered as a part of culture (or cultural structure). For this reason, social structure is always the pattern of social relations combined, but actions constituting them may be motivated either by rationality or rational calculation or by emotional and/or moral sentiments or religious beliefs; yet it is true that there exists a homological parallelism between social and cultural structures. In this sense, Parsons was right in arguing that social structure marked the intersection between culture and socialization, and that differentiated roles were created by understanding how socialization and culture came to be particularized in different situations (p. 27) (cf. Pattern-variables).

Just like the instrumental structuralists demonstrating the impact of the material environment on individuals, normative thinkers forcefully indicate that action is regulated by moral structures internalized in the personality of individuals (pp. 29–30). For Alexander, both perspectives are crucial and either cannot be abandoned at the sacrifice of the other. The multidimensional theorizing by combining these two is, according to him, to be found in Parsons' concept of the social system which contains four primordial dimensions: the economic, concerned with maximizing efficiency and "means"; the political, focused on organization and "goals"; the solidarity, representing direct emotional bonds and "norms"; and the pattern-maintenance, oriented to stable symbolic patterns and "values" (p. 31). As is widely known, these four dimensions are called subsystems, each being in continuous interchange with the other three. A more general form of this idea is his conception of the "generalized media" of exchange (money, power, influence, and value commitment—each of which can be seen as a product of four subsystems of society), which is his direct response to the bargaining model of instrumental individualism. His logic is as follows: on the one hand, individuals manipulate the sanctions in an

instrumental and self-interested way to gain their ends; on the other hand, each of these sanctions is a complex product of the larger exchange between institutions within which interaction is embedded (pp. 31–32). Stimulated by this Parsonian conceptualization of reciprocity and conflict between the ideal and the material, many other ideas of this sort appeared in combination with empirical studies of different historical events, including those proposed by Smelser,⁸⁾ Eisenstadt⁹⁾, and others.

We have to remind of the fact that sociology is a product of the modern society, the leading principles of which are rationalism and individualism, and that this ideological bend overshadows the methodology in sociology. But ideology cannot guarantee the proper methodology. Only analytical reason can provide us with it. Next I'll examine Alexander's efforts to incorporate 'subjectivity' into social structural analysis (collective theories).

b) Phenomenology and Interactionism; the "individualist dilemma"

Alexander dedicated Chapter nine of the book to "delineate the positive accomplishments of the schools of phenomenology and symbolic interactionism while, at the same time, exposing the limitations that have prevented either from becoming a fully satisfactory theoretical tradition of contemporary social thought" (p. 222). He believes strongly that a successful social theory must be 'synthetic' vis-à-vis the problem of action and 'collectivistic' vis-à-vis the problem of order (p. 224). In other words, action must be explained by both individual freedom, volition, and contingency on the one hand, and collective constraint, condition, and necessity on the other, while social order must be explained by collectivist theories although they can be more elaborated and reinforced by incorporating some insights of individualistic theories. Concerning social order, individualistic theories cannot avoid the "individualist dilemma." He writes:

To maintain an approach to order that is individualistic in a clear, consistent, and honest way, a theorist must introduce into

8) Smelser, N. J. (1959) *Social Change in the Industrial Revolution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

9) Eisenstadt, S. N. (1963) *The Political System of Empires*. New York: Free Press.

—(1978) *Revolution and the Transformation of Society*. New York: Free Press.

a construction a level of openness to contingency that, in the final analysis, makes the understanding of order approximate randomness and complete unpredictability (p. 224).

One must notice, however, that “it is one thing to focus on the individual as the point of one’s empirical analysis and quite another to adopt an “individualistic” position in terms of one’s presuppositions about the sources of patterned action in general” (p. 225). Thus, he argues that “while the general framework for social theory can be derived only from a collectivist perspective, the empirical analysis of individual interaction should incorporate wherever possible the empirical insight of individualistic theories into the concrete operations, structures, and processes of the empirical interactions of concrete individuals” (p. 225).

Through the examination of traditional phenomenological theorists, Alexander finds that some of Husserl’s disciples such as Merleau-Ponty and Alfred Schutz are collectivist, for they realized that the meaningful world is possible because of things inherited and learned, the manifold sedimentations of traditions, habituality, and one’s own store of experience. He goes on to study Ethnomethodology (Harold Garfinkel), Mead’s Interactionism, and Blumer’s Symbolic Interactionism, and finds that although some of these theorists at some times revealed the collectivist tendencies or supra-individual elements, they finally returned to individualism. He concludes that being deeply concerned with an empirical aspect of order, they were trapped in the “individualist dilemma.”

The Micro-Macro Linkage

Unlike economics where the distinction between macroeconomics and microeconomics is clear and officially recognized, macro-sociology and micro-sociology are not clearly distinguished from each other. As far as social phenomena are concerned, we can discern in-between different levels (or units) of empirical reality ranging from actions of an individual, small groups, large organizations to national and international (global) communities. Smaller units often constitute elements of a larger unit, and, for example, the international (global)

community consists of many, different national communities. This suggests, I believe, that we cannot take only one of these two sociological traditions at the expense of the other. My conceptualization of this problem as elementalism versus holism indicates that we should deal with this issue through searching not ‘cause and effect chain,’ but interdependent relationships between ‘elements and the whole.’

This simple, self-evident fact has not been long recognized among social theorists and the rigorous opposition between ‘individual and society’ (action and structure) remains in certain stubborn groups of sociologists. On the one hand, “the contractual thinking of the Scottish moralists, as well as John Stuart Mill’s Liberalism, established the individualist tradition in political philosophy..... The German idealism of Fichte, Hegel, and Herder and French revolutionary naturalism of such thinkers as Rousseau provided the holistic orientations” (p. 260).

After having examined the micro-macro split in classical sociological theory, Alexander formulates the following five different presuppositions (options) in connection with the micro-macro relation.

- (1) rational, purposeful individuals create society through contingent acts of freedom.
- (2) interpretative individuals create society through contingent acts of freedom.
- (3) socialized individuals re-create society as a collective force through contingent acts of freedom.
- (4) socialized individuals reproduce society by translating existing social environment into the micro realm.
- (5) rational, purposeful individuals acquiesce to society because they are forced to by external, social control.

Then, he suggests; classical political economy and behaviorism pursued the first option, whereas pragmatism and psychoanalysis embraced the second. Durkheim largely embraced the fourth possibility, and in his later and most influential writings Marx pursued the fifth. But a more synthetic link must embrace the option 3 (p. 271).

Alexander finds the first synthetic formulation

of the micro-macro linkage in Max Weber. He believes that although Weber started with Action Theory (and action is allegedly to be the subject matter of micro-sociology), he was concerned with typical modes (uniformities) of action, not individual action as such, and uniformities are orders in the sense that they are not reducible to free and contingent acts.

"Orders" refer to arrangements that are not contingent in the framework of any given act. Such arrangements can also be called "structures," and structures, in all their historical and comparative variation, are what Weber's sociology is all about. His theorizing moves back and forth, naturally and fluidly, between the macro analysis of ideational complexes and institutional systems and the micro analysis of how individuals within such situations make interpretations and purposefully act (p. 272).

In the postwar period, we can see the renewal of philosophical (and ideological) debate between individualists such as Hayek and Popper and collectivists such as Mandlebaum and Goldstein. Around the same period, Talcott Parsons was working to transcend this long-debated antagonism, in whom Alexander finds the second synthetic formulation. Parsons not only discovered the mechanism that links micro, individual act to macro, collective context (internalization), but also elaborated it by combining two of the most important representatives of the micro-macro split, Freud and Durkheim.

The ecology and culture of an actor's environment structure the responses that can be made to his or her unfolding psychological needs. These responses, which are macro from the perspective of the personality, enter the actor's perceptual world, or micro environment. After being mediated by preexisting personality structures, they become new parts of the personality. The macro has thus become the micro. This dialectic continues in subsequent interactions. Because projections of the socialized personality affect the social world in strate-

gic ways, the micro will almost immediately become macro again (p. 279).

One of the successful concepts of modern sociology, the concept of "role," is very crucial here.

Roles are translations of macro, environmental demands onto the level of individual behavior. Roles are not collective in the ontological sense; they consist of internalizations, expectations, and resources that enter the contingent situation from some preexisting environment. The invisibility of roles allowed Parsons to insist that the apparently "pure micro" nature of individual interaction actually occurs within collective constraints (p. 280).

At any rate, Parsons as a neo-Durkheimian, left himself unconcerned with action-as-effort, and therefore unable to conceptualize option 3. Furthermore, his tendency to make action normative made it impossible to consider the possibility that order could be objectified and exert coercive control over action (option 5). This is Alexander's final evaluation of Parsons.

The dissatisfaction of Parsons' linkage rekindled the later controversies which Alexander continuously examines. On the one hand, micro analysis such as Exchange Theory (Homans), Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer and Goffman), and Ethnomethodology (the American version of Phenomenology: Garfinkel) became major micro theoretical movements, which emphasized option 1 and 2 of the above-mentioned presuppositions. On the other hand, the French structuralist school of Althusser and the German structural Marxism postulated objective social structures as above and beyond subjective consciousness (pp. 282-287).

But now, Alexander believes, a new phase of theoretical debate emerges to link micro and macro perspectives. Among those who are engaging in it, we can find Giddens, for example; although his earliest work was marked by anti-Parsonian structuralism and neo-Marxism, he later introduced the phenomenological ideas of the reflexive, contingent nature of action.¹⁰ After having investigated other theorists of this period, Alexander points out the

10) Giddens, A. (1976) *New Rules of Sociological Method*. New York: Basic Books.

nature of an ideal linkage theory as follows:

(This) inclusive model would not simply combine two or three of the theoretical options in an ad hoc manner. Rather, it would provide a systematic model in which all five of the options are included as analytical dimensions of empirical reality as such. This can be achieved on the basis of an emergentist, or collective, understanding of order, a multidimensional understanding of action, and an analytic understanding of the relations among different levels of empirical organization (p. 293).

After all, Alexander came to the conclusion that structuralist theory should positively incorporate the merits of action theory which views action as interpretation and strategization, and all of these ideas are not 'new' at all.

Some Methodological Questions

So far, I have tried to define the object of study in sociology through the examination of various attempts of our predecessors concerning the definition of society and the social. Particularly, thanks to the efforts of Alexander and others, it is now clear that the subject matter of sociology is multidimensional in nature which are far more complex than what any single past theorist thought of. Given a wide range of variations of social reality, it is easily understandable that various methods can be used to study them in sociology. It is just like you are going to catch a small fish or a big whale; in the first case you have to prepare a net with fine meshes, while in the second, a big harpoon. As a classical positivistic¹¹⁾ science (of which methodology was markedly influenced by the so-called natural sciences), sociology employed the 'scientific' methods without any hesitation. It presupposed that social phenomena are objective, 'out there,' and

regular, and that sooner or later, sociologists can discover the rules (which are the causes of phenomenal regularities) dominating their structures and functions.¹²⁾ This sociological perspective allowed sociologists to observe some aspects of society, but certainly not others, thus their construction of social reality is far from perfect. Generally speaking, the positivistic classical sociology were concerned with macro structure of society with the same logic of cause-and-effect explanation in the classical physics which were concerned with dynamics and mechanics of macro bodies. This is why Comte wanted to call his sociology 'Social Physics.' Basically, there was no room for contingency in this theoretical framework. Subjective interpretation on the part of the observer was also excluded. Quantitative, mathematical methods were highly recommended for they meant precision and logical clarity.

Bringing men back into this mechanical world was a necessity, but men came in two different figures; one is rational and instrumental, the other, irrational and consummatory. Against the historical background where modern, rational society began to reveal its contradictions and shortcomings, irrational individualism gained more power in sociology. In the midst of the present value-pluralism, individual freedom (once existed only as an ideology or a reality restricted to privileged elite classes) becomes a pervasive social reality. People live in their own 'interpreted' (constructed) life-world; this becomes possible because social and cultural arrangements (structures) are also various and plural. In addition, emotional and humanistic ideals are replacing the conventional, modern, rational, instrumental values (i. e. the rise of the post-industrial values). And many people now act accordingly.

One thing we have to learn from this fact is that; all multidimensional aspects of social phenomena are not equally important to sociologists in a given time and space. Some dimensions 'activate' themselves and attract the special attention of soci-

11) I once defined positivism with the following four characteristics: objectivism, empiricism, logicalism, and universalism. Nakano, H. (1994) *Shakaigaku towa nanika (What is Sociology ?)*. Tokyo: Kindai-bungeisha, pp. 131-152.

12) Interesting is the common nature of the term "rule" in different domains, which leads to some order of things; the rules dominating natural phenomena are the laws of 'nature,' by which we understand the cosmos. The rules in society are normative constraints which guarantee the social order. Again, the rule means domination which also secures the order (regularity) by (direct or indirect) power.

ologists, and this is possible because society itself ceaselessly changes. In functionalist terms, functional exigencies of a social system change in the process of adaptation to its environments which also continuously change. The systemic relations between various dimensions are flexible and dynamic. To illustrate this, one can cite an example of human group's phase movement. The conventional insight shows that human group is 'moving' (locomotion) in time, in the sense that certain functional exigency has priority over the others. In each phase, analysts have to pay special attention to certain dimension of the system because it is the most important thing to be accounted for at that particular moment. Or, let me show you a much macro example of the same idea. Looking back the history of sociological theories, I began to think that classical sociology (which I call 'modern' sociology, that is from Comte to Parsons) and contemporary sociology (after Parsons, including the postmodern theorizing) are based on the two different features of social conditions, namely 'want and affluence.' Sociological theory of Marx and social psychological theory of Freud, for example, are based on 'wants,' particular social conditions which were characterized by the lack of material goods and of psychological satisfaction, whereas contemporary social theories seem to be resulted from the present-day social conditions where, although it is confined in a small part of the First World, everything ranging from material goods and information to even life of human beings is 'affluent.' The relative negligence of material aspects of society (a wider popularity of 'cultural studies' today) on the part of contemporary sociological theories is, I believe, caused by this 'affluence' of our societies. Secondly, we have to realize that social phenomena at different levels of the micro-macro hierarchy should be analyzed by different methods. Social reality at a given level (as the object of certain particular study) is a 'part' of the upper level phenomena and at the same time is the 'whole' to the lower level, and as such it has a peculiar 'emergent properties,' as well as autonomy and interdependence. Alexander also discussed this point by referring to contemporary life science and said that this complex notion has not been sufficiently understood by the social sciences (pp. 302-304).

Concluding Remarks

Through the synthetic efforts of 'fragmented' sociological theories in the past, Alexander has shown us his basic premise that the true sociological theory should be established on the basis of macro-structuralism with the inclusion of micro-sociological implications of human action, particularly 'interpretation and strategization.' Although he recognizes that the world and things do not exist 'out there' without subjective human intentionality and meanings (based on their existence, freedom and contingency given to them), which are the preconditions of human behaviors, he proposed the sociology as a science of society, not of personality. In a macro-social theory, these microscopic processes are to be understood as 'parameters' by which larger units of the society are allowed to be explicitly variable (p. 306). In other words, "every macro theorist of social systems or institutions makes assumptions about how individuals act and interact; these assumptions are crucial to their large-scale theories even when they are not made explicit -as, indeed, they usually are not" (p. 307). Luhmann, in the same token, writes as follows when he explains the concept of autopoiesis:

Whether the unity of an element should be explained as emergence "from below" or as constitution "from above" seems to be a matter of theoretical dispute. We opt decisively for the latter. Elements are elements only for the system that employs them as units and they are such only through this system. This is formulated in the concept of autopoiesis (Luhmann, N. 1995. *Social Systems*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. p. 22).

This reminds me of the recent methodological trends in physics and biology. Now, in these fields, the secret of the macro bodies is to be analyzed and understood by observing and examining the micro phenomena taking place in them. Once in astronomy, scientists were watching stars through telescope. Now they are examining fine particles that emitted from these stars to understand their structure, function, and destiny. For example, a physicist in Japan is trying to count the number of neutrino

coming from the nucleus of the sun to understand the present activities of this fixed star, which are too critical to ignore to the bio-ecological system of our planet. Although light (photons) can reach the earth in around eight minutes from the sun, it takes a million years for it to come up to the surface from the nucleus of the sun, while neutrinos can travel this space instantly. Thus, neutrinos, not photons, inform us what is now going on with this star of vital importance to our lives on the earth. The theoretical implications in these fields should be appreciated in the social sciences.

Toward A Multidimensional Sociology: Reading Jeffrey C. Alexander's *Action and its Environments*

ABSTRACT

After the death of Talcott Parsons in 1979, although by that time he had almost totally been 'killed' in the American sociological circle, many have tried to expand the theoretical perspective of his once 'repudiated' structural-functional theory. Jeffrey Alexander is one of those sociologists, who named his modified and expanded version of Parsonian sociology as 'neofunctionalism.' In this essay mainly stimulated by his work, I attempt to reformulate the multidimensional sociology through evaluating and elaborating Alexander's ideas, which should be duly appreciated by all the theoretical sociologists today. My purpose, however, is not so much to introduce his discussion *per se* as to propose some of my own ideas concerning theoretical problems in terms of the subject matter and method of contemporary sociology. The principal focus is on the problem of the Micro-Macro Linkage; how to connect social action (individualistic, voluntaristic, therefore contingent) and social structure (collective, coercive, therefore deterministic), although I include much more other elements (topics) in my argument. In conclusion, I agree with Alexander that simple opposition between the micro and macro is false, because they are theoretically and empirically interrelated and complementary. At the same time, we have to expand our discussion to encompass the problem of methodology because in any field of scientific research 'what to study' is closely related with 'how to study' and it is especially true in a science like sociology in which we study 'ourselves.'

Key words: theory, neofunctionalism, micro-macro linkage