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Finding the Identity of Korean Sociology in Functional Differentiation: Is Korea-Specific Social Theory Possible in World Society?

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The concept of world society implies more than just the expansion and synchronization of communication; it also signifies that the social operates beyond boundaries as experience form of human order based on functional differentiation. Niklas Luhmann defined this as the operation of functionally differentiated systems without regional boundaries and argued that concepts of society tied to regional boundaries represent an epistemological obstacle. Many sociologists in Korea argue for the creation of "our own" sociology, but it remains unclear what this entails, and theories of sociology that focus solely on regional specificities can be seen an epistemological obstacle from the perspective of functional differentiation. This study proposes that modern society should be regarded as functionally differentiated and argues that "our" sociology should not be constrained by regional boundaries but should instead be analyzed through functional methods.

Keywords: *Niklas Luhmann, World Society, Functional Differentiation, Korean Sociology, Semantic and Social Structure*

Introduction

"No one, I think, will dispute the fact of a global system," wrote Niklas Luhmann in 1997. Whether or not society has become globalized has gone from being an age-old debate to an archaic one. We can now instantly observe the Israel-Palestine conflict from Korea, Brazil, or South Africa, just as we could during the September 11 attacks in 2001 or the 2002 FIFA World Cup in Korea/Japan. At the same time, no one questions the idea that *everyone's* circumstances were somehow connected. Anthony Giddens (1991, p. 14) describes this phenomenon of globalization as "time-space-distanciation." According to that concept, the constraints of space and time disappear, leaving only a global network of actions to come to the forefront. Manuel Castells (2010, p. 18) conceptualizes the new global social structure of modern society as the "network society." Here as well, simultaneity emerges as a key concept.

Most theorists agree that globalization "redefines the relationship between production and territoriality, economic organization, institutions and social processes" (Robinson 2019, p. 6). Niklas Luhmann was the one to explain the process and results of globalization based on changes in the social structure, namely, functional differentiation. Luhmann's concept of world society is primarily explained through functional differentiation, a key characteristic of modern society where society is viewed as a whole composed of communications. The world political system is differentiated as a subsystem of world society on the basis of a functional differentiation of the social system (Luhmann 2000, p. 222) and the legal system of world society is, of course, a worldwide functional system (Luhmann, 2004, p. 481). Some forms of religion indicate a global social connection between religions of various kinds (Luhmann 2002, p. 342). Despite all economic, political, and linguistic restrictions, research and scientific criticism operate in a worldwide communication network, and the special social references (*sondergesellschaftliche Bezüge*) of the sources of knowledge are neutralized (Luhmann 1975a, pp. 53-54). It is important to note that functional differentiation is not the only form of modern society but rather the predominant form, alongside others like segmental or hierarchical differentiation. Nevertheless, modern society has become a world society composed of the whole of communications. Since Giddens emphasizes the importance of expanding communication by linking society to the nation-state dimension, he is left only to explain it in terms of the development of broader communication technologies (Luhmann 1992, pp. 18-19), and this

critique can also apply to the sociologists who explain world society as only expanding and its consequences. However, without analyzing globalization at the social-structural level, we have nothing meaningful to say about its reality and consequences for world society. Ronald Robertson's concept of the world system of national societies appears to address this requirement (Nassehi 1998, p. 153). However, his concept focuses on globalization as a process originating within societies, which fails to explain the multiplication of each functional system (Luhmann 1998, pp. 149-150). This raises questions about the concept of society itself. Immanuel Wallerstein also discusses the "world system," emphasizing increased economic interaction between regions, thereby constraining modern society to a narrow focus on the potential for capital accumulation. In contrast, Luhmann's argument for understanding society as functionally differentiated traces the globalization process of social differentiation through functional systems, encompassing both the concept of society and globalization. Therefore, this article uses Luhmann's concept of world society, which derives globalization from the social structural level, namely, functional differentiation, as its theoretical background.

Despite the globalization of science, which does not strictly adhere to regional boundaries through its functional systematization of world science, there exists a lineage advocating the necessity of "Korean sociology" for Korea. Having traversed historical processes such as US military governance, dictatorship, and democratization, some Korean sociologists argue for a Korean social theory infused with a unique Korean historical consciousness.[1] For instance, Park Youngsin (1985, pp. 26-27) argued,

> Since our country's sociology must understand and explain "our problems," it must be critical of our problems and have our own perspective. The independence that our sociology must establish means nothing less than raising and explaining "our own" problems, and critical reflection and analysis of our historical and empirical world. The sociology we aim for should be an academic derivation of our society in the world and the world in our society.

Since the 1970s, many Korean scholars have discussed the localization of Western theories (Oh 1973; Choi 1979). And this discussion of a sociology of

[1] For the history of Korean sociology in English, refer to Lee Mangap (1970) and Im(1999). For research on the sociology of knowledge that deals with the flow of historical sociology in Korea, refer to Kim Baekyung (2011). For a recent book summarizing the history of Korean sociology in Korean, refer to Jeong Subok (2022b).

"our own" has continued to the present (Kim Sunggook and Im 1972, p. 85; Han 1984, p. 2; Lee Hanwoo 2022; Jeong Subok 2022b, pp. 395-403). Some have argued that Western universal theories do not adequately fit the unique circumstances of Korean society (Kim Pildong 2002). There is also an argument that we must establish Korea's own theoretical tradition (Seon 2010) and seek an "alternative modernity" (Kim Gyungdong 2005). Their argument can be summarized as follows: Korean society must be analyzed from a different perspective than European or American society. Absolutely correct! Korean society is different from European or American society and must be viewed from a special perspective. However, when we juxtapose Luhmann's concept of world society with the calls from Korean sociologists for a distinct theory of our own, further explanation becomes necessary, framing world society as one without regional boundaries.[2]

How is a specialized Korean social theory possible and how can it be achieved in functional differentiation? In other words, how should we find something Korean in world society? While there has been significant advocacy for a Korea-specific social analysis independent of foreign theories, a precise definition of this approach remains elusive. What exactly constitutes "our theory" in functional differentiation? This article explores Luhmann's concept of world society and the potential for Korea-specific social theory, examining how the notion of "ours" emerged through historical processes. This primarily aims to introduce Luhmann's concepts and briefly suggests their application in theorizing Korean society. First, I introduce the different forms of differentiation and functional differentiation to explain Luhmann's concept of world society. Next, I analyze the trajectory advocating for Korean sociology through historical processes. Lastly, I argue for the impossibility of a sociological theory with regional boundaries.

System Differentiation

Niklas Luhmann's concept of world society is explained through functional differentiation, a primary form in modern society, alongside segmental

[2] Kim Deokyeong (2016, pp. 15-20) argues that Western and Korean theories are not separate entities. He suggests that Western theory is not opposed to Korean theory, but rather serves as a framework for modern cognition and thought. If theories were truly separate, we would have numerous distinct theories, such as Korean theory, Russian theory, and Japanese theory. Instead, both Western and Korean theories belong to the same system of modern cognition and thought. However, he still believes that there can be a Korean adaptation of this system.

differentiation and hierarchical differentiation.

According to Luhmann, differentiation is defined as the process reproducing systems within systems, boundaries within boundaries, and, for observing systems, frames within frames, and distinctions within distinctions (Luhmann 1997, p. 71).[3] A system can only operate, observe, and sustain itself within its boundaries, continuously reproducing itself. As a system forms, everything outside it becomes its environment, allowing the system to develop complexity internally. Here, the system is completely indifferent to the environment and therefore does not absorb the complexity of the environment and operates completely closed from the environment. For instance, "only communication can communicate" (Luhmann 1995, p. 113). Consciousness cannot communicate; it can only be conscious. Cells cannot be conscious. Communication continually reproduces itself through communication, and consciousness through consciousness. Thus, through this operational closure, the system continually makes its boundaries in every moment. If society is reproduced through communication, which is its element, the concept of society has to be defined not by an idealized state with compensatory functions but by a boundary—that is, by a boundary-drawing operation (Luhmann 1997, p. 71). So, by this boundary, the system is the difference between the system and its environment.

The difference between a system and its environment can be observed. This difference between a system and its environment can reenter[4] the

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[3] Unlike Luhmann, many sociologists have not emphasized differentiation as differentiation of the "system." What makes this article unique is its specific definition of differentiation as differentiation of the "system," aiming to explain how our society evolved into a world society through functional systems, enabling comparison with other forms of differentiation. To see why differentiation is understood as differentiation of a system and environment and how it differs from the understanding of differentiation by other sociologists, refer to Luhmann (2013, pp. 1-4). Here Luhmann says that all (recursively) connecting operations to operations produces differences between the system and the environment. And that is why differentiation should be understood as differentiation of a system and environment.

[4] *Luhmann-Lexikon* describes "reentry" as follows: "Reuse/repetition of a distinction within a distinction or re-entry of a distinction into itself or self-enabling of a distinction as a distinction or re-entry of a form into a form. In any case, [re-entry is] a form of paradox unfolding.

"The following operation is observed: A system distinguishes itself as a system from its environment. It uses a distinction, namely that of system and environment, in order to be able to distinguish itself as a system from its environment. In short: The system presupposes its distinction as a system in order to be able to distinguish itself as a system. The system that uses a system-environment distinction cannot of course see all of this at the moment it does so. It operates at the level of first-order observation. If the system observes itself, or is observed by another system, which in any case takes time, only then does it see how it does what it does, namely using a distinction to distinguish. Re-entry is a second-order observation. Re-entry is an observation term exclusively for

system, making system's operation becomes self-referential and recursive; a system's operation is referenced by its own operation. There are no independent external observers, nor arbitrary internal observers. Self-referential systems use their own output as input. They are "autopoietic" systems (Luhmann 1997, p. 71). The system is continuously actualized through its operations, which involve remembering, forgetting, and recalling memories, and oscillating in between. The recursiveness and continuous actualization of the system relativizes the past through observations, creating uncertainty about the future, and yet the system continues its operation. All this is possible only through reentry forms that allow the observation of operations, thereby allowing differentiation between systems within systems and boundaries within boundaries. The dominant type of differentiation in modern society can be discovered through an analysis of its semantics.[5]

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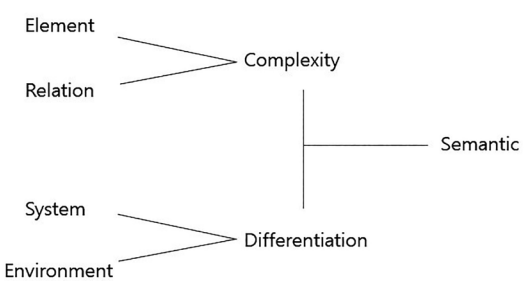
this level.

"Re-entry is paradox development or paradox management. A distinction is made although/because a distinction cannot be made. Re-entry is paradoxed paradox management. What is distinguished is different and yet the same: the same is different" (Krause 2005, pp. 214-215).

[5] For the connection between differentiation and semantics, refer to Luhmann (1980a, pp. 9-71). The following diagram (Luhmann 1980, p. 34) shows the interconnection between differentiation form and semantics.



Luhmann goes beyond Koselleck's study of the conceptual history by grasping the relation between social structure and semantics. He argues that the differentiation of system/environment relations, and the resulting changes in social structure due to this differentiation, create "semantic-needs" (Luhmann 1980, p. 29). For instance, in a stratified society, expressions of love vary depending on whether they occur upward or downward, and love between individuals of different social statuses requires careful consideration. In a functionally differentiated society, access to functional organizations becomes pivotal, leading to the emergence of values such as freedom and equality based on the principle of inclusivity in each function. According to this theory, semantic research serves as a tool for assuming forms of differentiation and, conversely, enables the anticipation of new semantics resulting from the differentiation forms. In essence, through this approach, we can analyze the type of social structure in which we live. "The world semantics evolve alongside the structural evolution of social systems" (Luhmann 1998, p. 156). Therefore, it would be more accurate to estimate the type of differentiation in this study by combining it with semantics research. I am preparing follow-up research in this regard.

Depending on the form of system differentiation, there are different projections of possibilities in systems and therefore a different selectivity of events in their past horizon (Luhmann 1975b, p. 106). Therefore, we can infer the form of differentiation of a society through the semantics that society describes.

Differentiation Forms of Society: Segmental, Hierarchical, Functional

This chapter and the next will demonstrate that modern society is primarily functionally differentiated by comparing it with other forms such as segmental and hierarchical differentiation. Therefore, a concept of world society based on functional differentiation will be derived.

Segmental differentiation arises when society is divided into basically similar subsystems, which mutually constitute environments for one another (Luhmann 2013, p. 27). The unit of a segmentally differentiated society is the family or horde. It consists mainly of kinship groups, and communications must take place among the participants. Since segmental differentiation is made up of equivalent systems, it is important to demarcate their boundaries. These boundaries are mainly drawn by kinship units, which share the same semantics, that is, social memory. In other words, social memory assumes topographical forms (Luhmann 2013, p. 32).

Hierarchical differentiation has a clear upper stratum based on family order. Under the guise of "order," this hierarchy divides society into upper and lower classes based on wealth disparities, rendering the entire society more complex than a mere kinship system. Individual status is primarily ascribed according to family lineage, and the upper echelons of society also must semantically "distinguish" themselves from the lower classes (Luhmann 2013, pp. 54-55).[6] Thus, the upper class is distinctively separated; the class

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For further explanation on the relationship between social structure and semantics, refer to Stäheli (1998, pp. 315-340) and Stichweh (2006, pp. 157-171). Stäheli expands on Luhmann's concept of linear retrospectivity (linear *Nachträglichkeit*), where social structure is first established and then appropriate semantics complement it, by introducing constitutive retrospectivity (*konstitutive Nachträglichkeit*), suggesting that semantics constructs the social structure later. Stichweh argues that the relationship between semantics and social structure can be better understood through the concepts of structural coupling and differentiation (*Ausdifferenzierung*).

[6] For an analysis of the communication patterns of the upper levels in hierarchical differentiation, refer to Luhmann (1980, pp. 72-161). According to this article, people belong to a social group or status because they can communicate in an orderly manner. In a hierarchical society, unequal

hierarchy is linked to family hierarchy; class is perpetuated through endogamy; and resources are controlled by the upper class, thereby maintaining societal structure.

Our main topic, functional differentiation, means that the perspective of *unity* under which a "difference" between system and environment is differentiated out is the *function* that the outdifferentiated system (and not its environment) fulfills for the system as a whole (Luhmann 2013, p. 88). Social systems are outdifferentiated into distinct functional systems such as science, politics, economy, law, religion, and so on. Although unequal in their specific functions, which cannot be fulfilled by other systems, these systems are equal in their functional importance. Each functional system is specialized to perform an individual function, thereby giving it functional primacy. As a result, each system prioritizes what is crucial for its own function. For instance, the economic system focuses solely on economic progress and interprets political or legal decisions, such as factory closures due to wastewater issues, from an economic perspective.[7] This suggests that there is no hierarchy of functions or stratification within the societal system, as none of these systems can control society as a whole. Therefore, functional differentiation results in a society without a top or center, a society that evolves but cannot control itself (Luhmann 1997, p. 74). Thus, functional systems operate in a functionally closed state and do not share their operations with one another. They operate self-referentially. Just as communication is connected only to communication, in an economic system, payments are connected only to payments, and in a legal system, legal decisions are connected only to legal decisions.[8]

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conditions maintained social order, but this inequality was thematized as a semantics in the transition to modern era.

[7] For the pathological phenomena of communication that occur because of this, see Luhmann (1989). "Society faces the problem of incommunicability because the communication of individual functional systems operates in different ways, that is, because they operate with different codes, and communication between each system is functionally closed" (Kwon 2024, pp. 106-107).

[8] To delve deeper into self-reference, I need to introduce the concept of binary code. The self-reference of functional systems is based on the fact that each system is binary-coded. This binary code reduces complexity to a choice between two codes, thereby contributing to the functional simplification that leads to subsequent linking operations. The assignment rule to one of the binary codes is determined by the program. For example, the scientific system operates on a truth/false binary code, and the connection to the truth code is determined by the theory and methodology inherent in the scientific program. Once more, self-reference in functional systems is facilitated by binary codes that reduce complexity. For the binarization of codes and its process and results in functional differentiation, refer to Luhmann (1987a).

As mentioned earlier, if society is reproduced through communication,[9] the concept of society must be defined by a boundary-drawing operation. Society presupposes a totality of communication that is mutually accessible. In operational terms, society continually updates itself through a totality of communications that are constantly evolving (Krause 2005, p. 154). Individual communication is attributed to functional systems according to the type of communication. For example, political communication is attributed to the political system, payment communication is attributed to the economic system, and religious communication is attributed to the religious system. Here, fundamentally, functional systems have no boundaries. More precisely, the boundaries of functional systems do not converge locally. The boundaries of functional systems are simply drawn between the self and the environment as what is not the self.

Functional differentiation occurs continuously in the history of world society, and it may take place in a number of phases (Stichweh 2009, p. 13). The religious system was built upon beliefs established since primitive times, while the arts and sciences are linked to the artisan tradition and the Greek era, but they became functionally differentiated after the 17th century. Education and medicine transitioned from hierarchical differentiation to functional differentiation, functioning as systems that include all members of society.[10]

The Concept of World Society

In the history of "contact," communication with other regions initially did not proliferate in segmented differentiation. While such relationships did exist, they were time-consuming and had limited impact. In hierarchical differentiation, extensive contact was managed by a select few individuals, whether nobles or influential families. The advent of new communication technologies, such as mass media, enabled global simultaneity, facilitating the shift toward functional differentiation. As a result of this connectivity,

[9] For the point that society is constructed and reproduced through communication, refer to Luhmann (1998, pp. 81-91) and Luhmann (2009, pp. 56-61). Luhmann references Bachelard's epistemological obstacles and critiques the theory that society is composed of humans as agents of action. The argument is that humans, as organisms performing actions, cannot be simply included in society. The complexity of defining society through action theory can be simplified by recognizing that society is fundamentally constituted by communication as social action.

[10] This part is only covered very briefly here. For the historical process of outdifferentiation of functional systems, refer to Luhmann (2013, pp. 65-87). Especially, regarding the outdifferentiation and globalization of science system, refer to Stichweh (1996, pp. 327-340).

regional boundaries in social concepts began to blur, a phenomenon well-documented in numerous studies on globalization.[11] Nevertheless, at the core of world society lies functional differentiation—more specifically, the differentiation of functional systems without regional boundaries.

"When we refer to modern society as a world society," writes Luhmann (1998, p. 156), "we mean that within the entire world reachable through communication, there can exist only one society. This represents the structural and operational aspects of the concept of world society." The terms "structural" and "operational" do not delineate regional boundaries because they establish functional *system boundaries* instead. Numerous social processes occur across regions, linking them. This signifies more than just simultaneous communication; it raises the question of whether the social structures of a society are understood solely within their own context or if a unified social structure transcends regional distinctions. The boundary of the social system lies between it and its environment, not between countries or cities. For instance, Korean and Vietnamese societies are not isolated but are encompassed within a single social framework at a functional level. They share similar forms of payment, organizational structures, religious beliefs, and repeat similar operations. Differences in regional living conditions stem from these functional aspects rather than the other way around. We cannot assume a singular social concept for each specific society; doing so would necessitate applying different social concepts to countries A and B, region C, and district D. This raises the question: Should we perceive differences first and then infer regional societal characteristics, or should we adopt an alternative approach? One such approach considers the standpoint of a world society, aiming to explain why functional differentiation and the rational operation of functional systems reinforce differences rather than diminish them. Luhmann views the idea that society is divided by regional boundaries as an epistemological obstacle in this regard (Luhmann 2005, pp. 64-82), and claims that modern society is a functionally differentiated society, namely, world society, neither segmented nor hierarchically differentiated societies.

Segmental differentiation could occur once more in functional differentiation, although functional differentiation remains as the

[11] However, many sociologists often emphasize regional social concepts rooted in developmental disparities among regions. Taking the Soviet Union as an example, it seems that regional boundaries had already begun to yield to functional differentiation. Instead of treating regional differences as issues of inequality and class, we should explore why such differences exist through functional comparisons. "The argument for inequality can be reframed as a case for supporting world society" (Luhmann 1998, p. 162).

predominant form, as differentiation is further differentiation of a system within a system. This is especially true in political countries (Luhmann 2013, p. 129).[12] However, from the perspective of global communication, all functional systems can be viewed on a global scale. For instance, due to UN sanctions, North Korea must change its export methods, unaffected by local considerations that cannot influence payment patterns, similar to the situation with the Soviet Union. Scientific arguments are generated universally and subject to critique worldwide. The US presidential election is a globally significant political topic. Regional and central-peripheral differences observed here can be historically and functionally compared.

Luhmann advocates the method of functional comparison rather than beginning with regional societies; otherwise, the analysis will remain limited to the level of combining regional differences, he argues (Luhmann 2013, pp. 127-131). Research and theorizing on world society should, therefore, focus primarily on these function systems and their process of globalization (Stichweh 1996, pp. 327-328). Although Luhmann does not delve into this point in detail, we can begin with functional differentiation. This approach helps us explain why different causal relationships arise in specific regions based on the operations of each functional system, and how functions may deviate or strengthen in these regions. Rather than starting with regional analysis, it aims to explore the functional impact of the world social system on various regions.[13] Through this lens, Korean society can be viewed anew

[12] Luhmann says that in the case of political and legal systems, regional boundaries are valued due to their functional characteristics, but if we recall the concept of society that encompasses functional systems, he says that regionalizing this aspect is nonsense. Furthermore, segmental differentiation will ultimately diminish because functional systems cannot be confined by spatial boundaries (Luhmann 1998, p. 166-167).

[13] Luhmann (1998, pp. 167-170) mentions several aspects regarding the regional variations and functions of world society, as follows: (1) The rationality of functional systems acts to reinforce variations. For example, the scientific system loses its connection if it cannot access new information. (2) Different effects can be observed as the structural conditions of world society intersect with regional, geographical, and cultural specificities. (3) Hierarchical structures collapse and are replaced by differences of inclusion/exclusion. (4) Differences of inclusion/exclusion are primarily described by sociologists as hierarchical differences, but its consequences clearly contrast with the confusion in hierarchical stratification. (5) The universalism of functional systems stimulates all kinds of particularism. (6) Problems of communication caused by language differences do not oppose world society but represent a path toward recognizing world society's diversity. For the functional method of system theory, refer to Luhmann (1970, pp. 31-53). “The benefit of functional analysis does not lie in the certainty of the connection between specific causes and specific effects, but in the fixation of an abstract reference point, namely the "problem", from which different possibilities of dealing with social facts that appear very different on the surface can be treated as functionally equivalent” (Luhmann, 1970, p. 35). The epistemological benefit of this is

within the context of world society.

Korean Sociology – Background Review

This chapter provides a brief overview of the history of Korean sociology and the semantic background from which "our" sociology emerged. The central question addressed is: What processes within Korean sociology prompted the emergence of the movement to create "our" sociology?

In the early 1900s, sociology began to enter Korea through scholars such as Kim Hyeonjun, Han Chijin, and Ha Gyeongdeok, who had studied in Europe and the United States. However, the institutionalization of sociology in Korean universities started in 1954, with Lee Sangbaek establishing the Department of Sociology at Seoul National University. Subsequently, sociology departments were also founded at Kyungpook National University, Ewha Womans University, and Korea University. Korean sociology during this period was heavily influenced by American sociology, shaped by the Cold War context and American academic aid to underdeveloped countries in Asia.[14] The Population and Development Institute at Seoul National University serves as a notable example of this academic support.[15]

Critical sociology emerged to question the reliance on "imported" sociology, advocating a reconstruction of sociological theory rooted in Korean experiences. As political oppression in Korea intersected with a growing awareness of the limitations of Western theories, there was a shift away from mechanically adopting Western theories. However, during the intensified political and social movements of the 1980s, labor issues in Korean society took center stage, propelling sociology into a pivotal role in fostering social change. During this period, Korean sociology was heavily influenced by Marxist theories.

Following democratization in 1987, Korean sociology underwent reorganization to lessen political influences. Western theorists such as Habermas, Giddens, and Luhmann were then actively introduced. Despite the coexistence of various paradigms, Korean sociology eventually specialized once again in positivist approaches, which often lack a deep

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comparability (*Vergleichkönnen*).

[14] For a general description, refer to Subok Jeong (2022b, pp. 264-291). For a study of the global influence of American sociology and a background explanation, refer to Paul (1976, pp. 104-114).

[15] Until 1980, the Population and Development Institute received support from the United States and the United Nations (Jeong Subok 2022a, p. 307). This is an example showing one route through which American sociological methodology was imported into Korean sociology.

theoretical background.

Amidst these developments, there has been a persistent effort to establish "our" sociology, shaped by historical processes such as American influence, political oppression, the wholesale adoption of Western theories, and the unique aspects of Korean modernization, which continues to this day. This issue was first raised as early as the 1960s, primarily critiquing sociology that merely mimicked American sociology (Lee Hyojae 1968, p. 141; Kim Jingyun 1996, pp. 64-73). By the 1970s, with the rise of critical sociology, there was a growing demand for "our" sociology, influenced by Korea's specific modernization and political circumstances (Kim Sunggook and Im 1972, p. 85, 88; Hwang 1977, p. 239). For instance, in the 1980s, Han Wan-sang advocated the *jungmin* theory, focusing on the dynamics of the middle class in Korean society (Han 1991). During this decade, the call for a sociology of "our own" peaked, challenging the uncritical adoption of foreign theories (Jeong Jaesik 1982, pp. 114-118; Jo 1985, p. 137; Park Youngsin 1985, p. 24-25; Kim Jingyun 1986). The pursuit of "creating our own theory" (Sin 1994, pp. 19-26; Kang 2003, p. 10) continues to this day, albeit with a gradual decline, as noted by Jeong Subok (2022b, pp. 40-42).

Throughout the history of Korean sociology, we observe the emergence of a semantics of "ours" in response to foreign domination and a tendency to subordinate to Western theories within a specific historical process. However, it is important to determine whether it refers to a Korea-specific social theory or the Koreanization of social theory. A Korea-specific social theory establishes regional boundaries and explains Korea's "unique" circumstances, prioritizing specificity over universality. In contrast, the Koreanization of social theory moves from the universality of functions to explain regional differences, starting from the social concept, which is composed of the whole of communication. However, this does not simply refer to an extension of communication, as Giddens suggests, but rather signifies the globalization of functional systems that operate through communication. Considering world society through functional differentiation, only the possibility the Koreanization of social theory, which compares regional differences through functional analysis, remains viable. This approach neutralizes the special social references of knowledge, starting from social concepts (Luhmann 1975a, pp. 53-54). Functional analysis does not exclude specificity; rather, it enhances understanding through comparison. On the other hand, Korea-specific social theory aims to derive universality from specificity. While emphasizing the uniqueness of Korean society, it employs multiple analytical frameworks that vary regionally, leading the concept of "society" to become

arbitrary. As a result, the possibility of comparison diminishes, and it remains confined to acknowledging the diversity of disparate realities.

The Semantic of "Ours"

Luhmann identifies the semantic of nations as a transitional semantic that focuses on segmental differentiation as a phenomenon accompanying functional differentiation (Luhmann 2013, p. 283). This phenomenon occurred in Europe from the 15th to the 18th centuries, when the names of countries were given to predominantly ethnic groups. As an imaginary unity, nations defined themselves through history, treating territorial segmentation naturally. Thus, the concept of nations encounters a paradox where it is perceived as particularistic externally and universalistic internally. Despite the emergence of a world society where territories cannot be separated by ethnic differences, the inclusive forms of functional systems transform into semiotics under the name of nations. Ethnicity forcibly includes people by esteeming particularism as a higher value. However, individuals already exist not as ethnic/external entities but as "other citizens," such as government/subject, producer/consumer, teacher/pupil, and doctor/patient. Ethnicity provides a strong motive to unify diversity under one identity. Despite losing its functional value, ethnicity persisted and continued to be summoned. Luhmann argues that opportunities to form ethnic nations are limited to very few territories, and racially or religiously heterogeneous countries fail to confine existing antagonisms territorially as ethnic nations.[16] Individualism has developed to the extent that it cannot be merged with ethnicity. The concept of ethnicity has become a temporary semantics losing credibility and now poses an epistemological obstacle (Luhmann 2013, pp. 283-289).

It appears that Luhmann's analysis of ethnic semantics in European society can also be applied to the "ours" semantics in Korea. The symbol of unity represented by ethnicity would have been particularly significant in Korea, which suffered oppression under colonization and foreign powers. The "ours" semantics fundamentally aimed to move away from the uncritical adoption of foreign theories. According to Hwang (et al. 1988, p. 206), "Korean sociology began as a mimicry-oriented discipline from the outset." Therefore, "the question of whether foreign theories and methodologies are

[16] Luhmann (2013, pp. 289) cites South Africa, Lebanon, Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union, India, and Ireland as examples to illustrate that pure quantitative representation relying solely on electoral procedures is insufficient for mediating existing conflicts through the semantics of the nation.

suitable for understanding our society was posed as a challenge from the beginning" (Kim Jingyun 1986, p. 156).

As a counterproposal to this, the central theme of "ours" semantics aimed to transcend categories such as "the influence of the Cold War system" (Hwang 1977, p. 239), "sociology lacking practical relevance to Korea" (Han 1984, p. 2), "the academic system of the United States" (Kim Jingyun 1985, p. 15), and "remaining within the realm of accepting foreign theories" (Park Jaemuk 1986, p. 15). However, during this period, Korean sociology has been integrating into the so-called world scientific system through the adoption of foreign theories and methodologies. Following global standards of paper writing and methods (even if a paper makes claims about "our" sociology), "truth" has been serving as a medium within the scientific system in Korea, and theory and methodology have been functioning as a program.

In the operation of the scientific system itself, "ethnicity" cannot play any role. Unity cannot be defined in terms of ethnicity or externality not only in the scientific system but also in other systems; operations produce operations. It should be defined solely through the functioning of the functional system. While the "ours" semantics may have been justified through Korea's historical process of being under foreign influence, it ultimately remains an epistemological obstacle.[17]

Conclusion

This study presented Luhmann's concepts of functional differentiation and world society and explored how a semantics of "ours" emerged in Korean academia. Luhmann's concept of world society maintains that functional systems encompass the entire society, going beyond the communication expansions or simultaneity proposed by other sociologists. In other words, it implies that society is functionally differentiated. The dominant form of differentiation in modern societies is neither hierarchical nor segmental. While many Korean sociologists have argued for creating a theory unique to "us" and establishing a tradition in Korean sociology, the meaning of this

[17] Kim Deokyoung (2016, pp. 20-28) presents a clear vision on this issue. Since sociology originated in the West and its theories and methodologies are based on Western traditions, reinterpreting Korean traditional ideas or values alone does not make sociology Korean. Instead, transforming and critiquing Western theories is the way to develop a Korean sociological theory. This paper agrees with the view that Korean sociology should not be confined to a regionally limited Korean context, but should start from the concept of society.

claim has not been clear. Additionally, when viewed from the perspective of functional differentiation, regionally bounded societies represent an epistemological obstacle and are insufficient for analyzing modern societies. Attempts to integrate society through the concept of the nation are no longer viable. Therefore, the advantage of analysis through functional methods lies in examining and comparing why the operation of functional systems deviates and strengthens in specific regions. This can only be achieved through historical analysis and by estimating the correlation between semantics and forms of differentiation. This study did not advance into a functional analysis of Korean society but provided possibilities and directions for such an analysis. These aspects should be revealed through subsequent research. While this study presents a brief background on the history of Korean sociology, more in-depth research combining semantics and social structures is also needed. Starting from functional analysis rather than regional particularities, can actually clarify what is meant by "ours" more distinctly in a Korean analysis of social phenomena.

Sociology is stuck in a theory crisis. This dilemma has split the very concept of theory. Nevertheless, sociology cannot give up the claim that it checks its statements against data drawn from reality (Luhmann 1995, p. 46). To achieve that, a unified theory explaining social concepts is necessary. This cannot be done sporadically or arbitrarily; it can only be accomplished through a theory that elucidates universal social order.

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