

Qualitative Social Research in Japan

Kazujo Suzuki

Key words:

Japan, qualitative research, psychology, historical view, present situation, social science

Abstract: This contribution aims to introduce the situation of qualitative research in social science in Japan, with an emphasis on qualitative research in psychology. At first, the history of psychology in Japan is briefly discussed and qualitative research in the history of the Japanese psychology is described. Then trends and problems of qualitative research in present-day psychology are mentioned. Finally, qualitative research in the other social sciences are briefly touched on.

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1. Brief History of Psychology in Japan

"Psychology" was introduced into Japan after the Meiji Restoration¹ of 1868. As summarized by SATO and MIZOGUCHI (1997) and others, the history of psychology in Japan is briefly shown below. [1]

It is said that NISHI (1829-1897) was the person who introduced the discipline and concept of psychology into Japan for the first time. He studied at Leiden University in the Netherlands (1863-1867). In 1875 he published a book entitled "Psychology". This is a Japanese translation of "Mental Philosophy including Intellect, Sensibilities, and Will" (HAVEN 1869). [2]

Psychology as a subject arrived for the first time in Japan at Tokyo Kaisei School (the predecessor of Tokyo University) in 1873. In 1877 Tokyo University was established and a psychology class was set up in the Literature Department. The textbooks of psychology were ones by BAIN, CARPENTER, and SPENCER. From 1888 MOTORA (1858-1913) who had studied under HALL at Johns Hopkins University in the U.S. taught "Psychophysics". It was the first course on experimental psychology in Japan. In 1901, MATSUMOTO (1865-1943), who had studied under SCRIPTURE at Yale University (U.S.) and WUNDT at Leipzig University (Germany), became a lecturer and used "Outline of Psychology" (WUNDT 1896), etc., for his seminars. In 1903, the first laboratory of psychology

1 In Japan we use the Japanese era and the Christian era, but the former is more common. The Meiji period is the reign of the Emperor Meiji (1868-1912), the Taisho period is the reign of the Emperor Taisho (1912-1925), and the Showa period is the reign of the Emperor Showa (1925-1989).

in Japan was established at Tokyo University. In the Meiji period (1868-1912) scientism, positivism and orientation to Western countries became clear, and this trend influenced the research direction in psychology. [3]

In the Taisho period (1912-1925), psychology in Japan prepared its basis as a science, and from the Showa period to the end of World War II (1926-1944), psychology was established: Courses in psychology with laboratories were equipped at each university, "The Japanese Psychological Association" as a national scientific organization was established (1927), and the application field of psychology became wider because of social demand. After World War II, Japanese psychology came to be influenced more by American psychology than by German psychology. And Social psychology and Clinical psychology were growing up. [4]

2. Qualitative Research in Japanese Psychology until the 1980's

Psychological research in Japan developed by means of emphasizing the scientific and objective aspects (the aspects as natural science). Therefore most psychologists used quantitative research methods. But some psychologists in Developmental Psychology etc. have paid attention to qualitative research methods. Since the introduction of "Childhood and Society" (ERIKSON 1950) into Japan in the 1950's, "identity" has been researched in different ways: In the 1960's there were case studies, and in the 1970's studies using analysis of bibliography appeared (e.g. NISHIHARA 1976). There were also psychologists who were interested in Historical psychology (historical analysis of sociopsychological phenomena), Phenomenological psychology (phenomenological approach to psychological phenomena), and so on. In 1974 "Observation" (TSUZUKI & OSAKA) was published as one of ten volumes of "Psychological research methods". But in general, the qualitative research method was given only little attention. [5]

MINOURA's psycho-anthropological study (1984) using fieldwork (participant observation and interviews) gave an opportunity to notice qualitative research method to the psychologists in developmental psychology, cross-cultural psychology, etc. In 1989 "Case study" (HOSHINO), one of six volumes of "Psychology of personality", was published and "A primer in Phenomenological Psychology" (KEEN 1975) was translated into Japanese. [6]

From the end of the 1980's, reflection on popular psychological research methods, like experiments, questionnaires and statistics has accrued. For example: HARAOKA (1990) mentions that objective and positive research methods had been stressed too much in Social psychology or Educational psychology, and human beings as existences integrated in society had been overlooked. [7]

3. Qualitative Research in Japanese Psychology in the 1990's

From the beginning of the 1990's the question, "how should psychological research or research methods be?" has been discussed, and a movement which reconsiders qualitative research methods has started. [8]

Firstly, fieldwork has been getting more and more attention. At the congresses of the Japanese Psychological Association (about 6,400 members in 1999) symposiums, roundtables and workshops concerning fieldwork have been held. In the symposium "Learning neighbor science—social and cultural research" (organized by NOMURA, 1991), problems of research methods in Social Psychology (following the trendy topics in the U.S., taking university students as subjects, using questionnaires and statistical analysis) were pointed out and discussions took place about psychological research methods adopting qualitative methods (especially fieldwork). In the workshop "Fieldwork as a paradigm" (organized by MINAMI, 1991), four issues which fieldwork can suggest for present psychology were pointed out: 1) from the paradigm of researcher-subject to the paradigm of collaboration, 2) from the paradigm of "measurement" to the paradigm of communication (description and understanding as central method), 3) from the paradigm of "objectivity" to the paradigm of mutuality, and 4) interaction between theoretical structural concept and naive implicit concept. Besides the workshop "Psychological approaches to fieldwork" (organized by MINAMI, 1992), the symposium "Conception through "field"—what does fieldwork bring to psychology?" (organized by MINAMI, 1993) and then the symposium "Reconsideration of research methods in psychology—discussion about the possibility of new research methods" (organized by OMI, 1994) were held. In a series of these symposiums, workshops, etc., not only the usefulness of fieldwork compared to the hypothetical deductive method was discussed, but fieldwork was also regarded as an approach to recognize objects through various works in a field. Besides issues concerning data through fieldwork, namely fieldnotes, ethnography, etc. were treated. Since then, fieldwork has been discussed continuously: In the workshop "Practice of fieldwork: between experiences in a field and thesis" (organized by SATO et al., 1995) the roundtable "Practice of fieldwork: concerning relationships of persons in a field" (organized by SATO & MIYAZAKI, 1997), the roundtable "Reportage and ethnography: what we can learn from the work of journalists?" (organized by YAMADA et al., 1998) and so on. [9]

"Fieldwork" by a sociologist (SATO 1992) is an introduction to "fieldwork", and it also gave psychologists who question quantitative research an opportunity to consider qualitative research methods. [10]

Simultaneously, discussions about the necessity of interdisciplinary research and methodology in cultural psychology and cross-cultural psychology have started. One of the topics is the qualitative research method: e.g. in the symposium "Technique and strategy of understanding different cultures" (organized by HOSHINO & AGARIE, 1995) in the congress of the Japanese Psychological Association. In 1997 "Introduction to Cultural Psychology" (HATANO &

TAKAHASHI) and "Cultural Psychology: Theory and evidence" (KASHIWAGI et al.) were published. [11]

Various qualitative research methods (e.g. ethnography, bibliographical approach, case study, life-events research) have been also discussed at the congress (symposium) of the Japanese Association of Educational Psychology: For example, the symposium "Single case study methods and methodological problems" (organized by HAEBARA, 1996) aimed to recognize the significance of "case study" again and to understand the methodological problems. [12]

In "Developmental Psychology for a Lifetime" (5 volumes), published in the middle of the 1990's (MUTO et al. 1995), the knowledge of neighboring disciplines, like sociology, cultural anthropology, behavior science etc. is introduced, and at the same time the necessity of qualitative research methods (fieldwork, participant observation, personal document method, ethnography, etc.) are discussed. In "Psychology of Life History" (NISHIHARA 1996), usage of bibliographical data as a method investigating personality formation is introduced. In "Technique and Practice of Fieldwork" (MINOURA 1999) the research technique of fieldwork is fully described and research examples are also given. [13]

Since 1994, the studies using qualitative research methods in various fields of psychology have been presented under the grouping of "Research examples of qualitative research methods" in the section "Principles and methods" at the congresses of the Japanese Psychological Association. [14]

4. Current Trends and Problems of Qualitative Research in Japanese Psychology

In Japan, psychologists have just started to have an interest in qualitative research methods, and their meanings and problems are being discussed. The tendency to accept various approaches and methods of psychological research is also appearing gradually. At present, attention is being paid to fieldwork. The characteristics of fieldwork is that a researcher stays in a field and collects data through his own experience. This had been overlooked in psychological research until now. Therefore fieldwork is not only a research method. The trend of fieldwork contains the attempt to achieve a new psychological research method. The effectiveness of fieldwork in forming a hypothesis is also recognized gradually. Besides the growing interest in cultural psychology, the qualitative research method is being reconsidered. Nevertheless studies concerning qualitative research methods and methodology are still not discussed enough. [15]

The number of graduate students and young psychologists who are interested in qualitative research is slowly increasing. But there are a few practical problems: For example, research projects using the qualitative method are more difficult to complete, compared with experimental and questionnaire approaches, and are not easy to publish in professional magazines. [16]

5. Qualitative Research in the Other Social Sciences in Japan

Here, qualitative research in cultural anthropology and sociology will be only mentioned briefly. In Cultural Anthropology, qualitative research methods, especially fieldwork and ethnography, are generally stressed, and the problem "fieldwork and ethnography" is also discussed. In Sociology the most popular research method is the survey, but some interest in the qualitative research method can be found, for example, fieldwork, phenomenological sociology, ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, life-history research. Nevertheless there is no book in Japanese about an outline of qualitative social research in the social sciences. [17]

In the 1990's, interdisciplinary science for comprehensive research on human beings was born in Japan: for example, human science. In human science, we need new topics and research methods. Therefore, social scientists are taking a growing interest in qualitative research. [18]

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Author

[Kazuyo SUZUKI](#)

Citation

Suzuki, Kazuyo (2000). Qualitative Social Research in Japan [18 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 1(1), Art. 5, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs000153>.

Revised 3/2007