

What is modernity?

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We are living in the so-called modern society. This framework, the modern society regulates the way in which we have done as countless as we can imagine under the name of modernity. Some people might reflect that the modernity seems to be gaining almost all the omnipotent power all over the world, when spinning a terrestrial globe. Others might clench a fist and tremble, when reading a history book because of brutality of the modernity. Different faces of the modernity make us remaining questionable on its real essence.

As soon as we decided to make our way out of confusion and complication in the sea of the modernity, not to mention, we need the compass leading us to the real core of the modernity. That's Max Weber. With a broad understanding of law, economics, religion, and history, Max Weber produced what many regard as the greatest individual contribution to sociology. Weber's sociology reflects the philosophical approach called idealism, which emphasizes how human idea shape society. He understood the power of technology, and he shared many of Marx's ideas about social conflict. But he departed from Marx's materialist analysis, arguing that societies differ primarily in terms of the way in which their members think about the world. For Weber, ideas - especially beliefs and values - have transforming power. Thus he saw modern society as the result of not just new technology and productive systems but new ways of thinking.

Rather than categorizing societies in terms of technology or productive system, Max Weber highlighted differences in the ways people view the world, concluding that members of preindustrial societies embrace 'tradition', while people in industrial capitalist societies endorse 'rationality'. By tradition, Weber meant sentiments and beliefs passed from generation to generation. Thus social patterns in traditional societies are guided by the past. Traditional people evaluate particular actions as right and

proper precisely because they have been accepted for so long. Modern society takes a different view of the world, argued Weber, because it encourages rationality, deliberate, matter-of-fact calculation of the most efficient means to accomplish a particular goal. Sentiment has no place in a rational world view, which treats tradition simply as one kind of information. Ideally speaking, modern people choose to think and act on the basis of present and future consequences, evaluating jobs, schooling, and even relationships in terms of what we put into them and what we expect to receive in return. Weber viewed both the Industrial Revolution and capitalism as evidence of a historical surge of rationality. He used the phrase 'rationalization of society' to denote the historical change from tradition to rationality as the dominant mode of human thought. Modern society, therefore, has been 'disenchanted', as scientific thinking and technology have swept away sentimental ties to the past.

Two major aspects of rationality characterizing the modernity as Weber's words loom large into view: predictability and consistency. In history, what may be called 'the economic problem' is the orchestration of productive activities into a coherent social whole - coherent in the sense of providing a social order with the goods or services it requires to assure its own continuance and to fulfill its perceived historic mission. The mode of accomplishing the basic task of production and distribution in capitalism relies on 'market', which is a very effective and efficient method to solve the problem of massproduction. The more colossal productive power grew, the more desperately bourgeois needed the stabilization of their wealth. The desire was, no doubt, the main motive power for them to organize national states and choose political framework from absolutism to democracy. The modern democracy seems, at least, to manage to control capitalism, not like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells. No one would object, to cut a long story short, that the real attribute of the modernity is the rationality and the rationality needs consistency and predictability, which ordain our present economical and political paradigms.

One of dangerous pitfalls we should not be trapped into when we discuss the modernity is a hidden logic of dualism: the center VS the periphery, the leading role VS the assistant one, the way in which Cartesians wanted to achieve perfect freedom from the rule of a pope by means of conceptualizing

'cogito ergo sum' - I think therefore I am. The question still remains that we as the so-called periphery have inevitably to follow the same step of the western countries as the so-called center, while considering that our so-called modern history has almost said to be on the same trajectory.

Now, the turning point of the new millenium, is the time, I think, demanding us to make up our minds to define newly the word 'modernity'. Through that efforts, we can get our just and rightful foundation to regard our process of modernity as continuous in the sense of our own view. Accomplishing universal agreement all over the world in terms of newly-interpreted modernity shall be our remaining historical mission. Even Max Weber, I suppose, would have no objection to this mission.

PS. Prof. Kim, I cannot thank you enough for your exciting lectures. I hope to see you again next semester.