

Influences of Polanyi's thought on Yoshiro Tamanoi and the friendship with Ivan Illich

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Abstract

The first section looks back the life history of Yoshiro Tamanoi sketching his two backgrounds. The second section explores how Polanyi's thought encouraged Tamanoi and gave him a theoretical strength in taking a stride forward to act not only as a scholar but also as a practitioner of people's economics. Then, in the third section, the friendship between Tamanoi and Illich is focused. The last section asks what baton Tamanoi has handed over us and which possible tool we have now, thirty three years after his death.

Appendix is a reference paper written by Makoto Maruyama.

1. Two backgrounds

1.1. Family background

Yoshiro Tamanoi was born in 1918 in Yanai, an old town facing the inland sea, once flourished as an important port connecting the route between Osaka and Shimonoseki. Back in Edo period, this part of Japan was called Choshuu where Shouin Yoshida, a theoretical leader of the Meiji Restoration, opened his school known as Shoukasonjyuku. Yoshida was certainly a local hero to every boys grew up in this region. Blessed with natural and historical environments, Tamanoi spent his happy boyhood in this old commercial town.

Being born as an eldest son of four children, he was expected and raised as to take over the family business, a long established merchant engaged in both manufacturing and distributing glass products. As he grew up, however, his intension of learning higher level of education expanded significantly. Contrary to the family's expectation, he decided not to inherit the family business, but left his beloved hometown and took the foot toward the central part of Japan to pursue his carrier in an academic world.

He did not mention much about his youth, but I felt from time to time, that he bore in him deeply, a sense of apology to the members of his family, and also to his fellow countrymen not having stayed in the place where he was born and worked with them.

1.2. Theoretical background

Economics was the only possible field of study that his parent permitted him to carry out. He studied very hard in this field and became a stuff of the Department of

Economics at Tohoku University. In 1951, he eventually moved to the University of Tokyo as an assistant professor specialized in history of economic thought. In the earlier part of his career, he gained his economic attainments through Kozo Uno, one of the most important theorists of the Marx's theory in Japan. In 1958 to 1960, a big change had come as he had a chance to study abroad at Harvard University supported by the Rockefeller Foundation. He studied there under Professor Gottfried von Haberler. This academic experience led him to develop his ideas not only from the Marxian point of view, but to open eyes widely and think relatively on the various states of society. After returning from the USA in 1966, he published his epoch-making book, *Marxian Economics and Modern Economics* (1966). It certainly was a memorable and courageous turning point for him taking off the Marxian circle. However, this was not well accepted in the academic world at that time, and that he was bitterly criticized as a scholar who changed hat. This reputation made him suffer physically and mentally for a while, but he persistently continued to venture and hang around in the history of economics thought various perspectives.

Later in his book (1975a), Tamanoi wrote a note addressing students "For freshmen who are studying Economics, I put those five books as must on your reading list". The five books he suggested were:

- * Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*
- * Karl Marx, *Capital*
- * Max Weber, *The Spirit of Capitalism and the Protestant Ethic*
- * Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*
- * Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*

In addition he mentioned, "Why I put the books on your list is that those five scholars are extraordinary intellectual giants who pursued widely and deeply the fundamental root and framework of social science developed in two hundred years history of economic theory after Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*. Tamanoi worked hard translating and introducing the works of those intellectual giants. In 1975, he with Kenichiro Hirano edited the important works of Karl Polanyi and translated them into a book titled, *Keizai no Bunmeishi* (1975b) which is still available on Amazon with five star reputation. He spent much of his time in his study room trying to build and form his background of thoughts.

2. Influence of Polanyi's thought on "Research and Discussion Unit on Regionalism"

2.1. Setup of "Research and Discussion Unit on Regionalism"

It was on October 25th 1976, when the first meeting of "Research and Discussion

Unit on Regionalism” was held in Tokyo. Ten years have passed since Tamanoi published *Marxian Economics and Modern Economics*. In this ten years, he gained intellectual stimulation through discussions with many new friends who specialized not only in Economics but also in European History, Agricultural History, Japanese History, Sociology, Anthropology, Physics and et cetera. With three of his new friends, Tamanoi planned and prepared to realize, so called, the interdisciplinary meeting on “regionalism”. The purpose of this workshop was to set discussion chances open widely to anyone who found interests and had opinions on a region and regionalism, regardless of their status or professions. The responses they received were far more than what they have expected beforehand. Their attempt started smoothly and workshops were held many times in various places in Japan where people discussed energetically on topics such as; what is poverty? how people spent days in cold winter time in Tohoku? and what is wealth?

2.2. Three pillars of “Regionalism”

Let us now explore how Polanyi’s thought influenced Tamanoi in this launching of the “Research and Discussion Unit on Regionalism”. It was a year before this action was made, he edited the works of Polanyi which I mentioned above. In the book, he categorized Polanyi’s papers into three parts entitled:

- (i) What is Market Society,
- (ii) Pathology of Modern Society,
- (iii) Nonmarket Society Reconsidered.

To his readers, he selected four papers of Polanyi as distinct and most important:

- * “The Self-regulating market and the Fictitious Commodities: Labor, Land, and Money” (1944)
- * “Our Obsolete Market Mentality” (1947)
- * “Aristotle discovers the Economy” (1957a)
- * “The Economy as instituted Process” (1957b)

This alone may be enough to understand that he had great sympathy to Polanyi’s thought and that Polanyi’s words encouraged him in carrying out the action.

In Tamanoi’s collected works (1990), we can find the definition of what he called “region”. The region is the place, he wrote, which acquires following three pillars;

- (i) a community (gemeinschaft) where information flows from bottom to top spontaneously, as well as side to side horizontally
- (ii) a community (gemeinschaft) which is formed within the natural ecological system
- (iii) a community (gemeinschaft) which has their own local market embedded

Here again you can see the strong theoretical influence of Polanyi’s thought.

There are two special phrases of Polanyi which Tamanoi often mentioned in his articles and papers. One is “I plead for the restoration of that unity of motives which should inform man in his everyday activity as a producer, for the reabsorption of the economic system in society, for the creative adaptation of our ways of life to an industrial environment” (1977). The other is “Local markets are, essentially, neighborhood markets, and, though important to the life of the community, they nowhere showed any sign of reducing the prevailing economic system to their pattern. They were not starting points of internal or national trade” (1957).

Eventually in 1978, with Polanyi’s books in his bag, he decided to move his pivot foot from Tokyo to Okinawa to expose himself to the community in where human livelihood is deeply embedded. He himself used to call this adventure “Copernican transformation”. He meant to stress that he wished to act not only as a scholar but also as a practitioner of people's economics.

3. Consciousness shared with Ivan Illich

3.1. Their acquaintance and things common

Ivan Illich’s *Shadow Work* (1981) appeared in Japanese bookstores in 1982. The book was translated by Tamanoi and Akira Kurihara(1982), four years after Tamanoi and his wife had moved to Okinawa. During these four years, he became acquainted with many local people and researchers there, and successfully organized Okinawa branch of “Research and Discussion Unit on Regionalism”. Therefore it is easily imagined that the words Illich often used in the books, such as convivial, vernacular, subsistence stayed deep in his heart as keywords for understanding local people. Tamanoi invited Illich to his house in Okinawa and they had their first meeting.

It seemed that there lie not a single difficulty between the two to understand each other. Since this meeting, they fostered friendship and deepened their ideas through occasional dialogue and correspondence. Some people might be puzzled and ask why this chemistry happened. An answer to this question is, as far as what I have observed, that they are similar in three ways. A greater or lesser degree may be, both lacked the sense of belonging to one particular hometown or native place as well as a specific academic circle. Both are thinkers, who grew and cultivate themselves in the world of books, and spent the most of their time with the wisdom of predecessors. Their common mentor was Karl Polanyi.

3.2. Discussion they looked forward but never realized

In 1985 October, Illich and Tamanoi planned to meet again hoping to continue and deepen their discussion at Tamanoi’s house in Kamakura. But this meeting had

never been realized, due to Tamanoi's untimely death. The scheduled day turned out to be his funeral day. Nevertheless, Illich appeared and knocked the door saying "I came here as I promised Yoshiro. Today is our discussion day". That day was a beautiful autumn day with clear blue sky, I recall.

I just cannot help imaging what would it be like if the discussion had taken place as they had planned. Without doubt the main theme was "historical uniqueness of capitalistic market economy". Probably Yoshiro started a conversation pointing out the similarity of Uno theory and Polanyi' theory clarifying this historical uniqueness. He would have spoken "Kozo Uno and his students of the Marxian political economy, consistently focused on the so-called pure capitalism whose economy was methodologically divided into the form and the substance. They delved into the formal aspect of the capitalist economy and illuminated the historical uniqueness of the capitalism in the 18th and 19th centuries, especially the commodification of labor power as well as of money and land, with the extremely systematic framework of the logic of capitalism." (1975b). Then, they might have a great conversation over Polanyi's approach of relativizing different societies to analyze this uniqueness. Most probably, they shared their deep sympathy to this methodology of Polanyi; relativizing the capitalistic market economy and put it in a larger framework of economy. Illich had relativized labor work and domestic work in his *Shadow Work* and women and men in his *Gender* (1982), as well as Tamanoi had relativized Marxian economics and Modern Economics in his book. By the time tea were served, perhaps they enjoyed a chat over the conviviality of villages in Mexico and Okinawa where local markets were embedded.

4. What baton Tamanoi handed over to younger generation

4.1. Unfinished task

Seven-year living experience in Okinawa and through the acquaintances of many local peoples from all over Japan, he was, in some sense, overwhelmed by the fact that how strongly each region and its people were tied to local relationship and taken into the national trade and its market economy. He was so sad when he found that the time left for him was not long enough to think profoundly how to motivate people to let themselves belong to the "region" where he theoretically drew and envisioned as place happiness lay. He wanted to pass on a new lifestyle of living in the "region" not by telling them to return the hands of clock back, or by persuading them ethically.

Being very positive and a hopeful kind of person he was, he died in hope that the next generation would give answers to this big issue.

4.2. The Internet, a tool we have

Now that thirty three years have passed since Tamanoi passed away, I have a feeling that we have a powerful tool in our hands in answering the task he handed over us. It is the Internet: a tool which was not available to everyone at that time, a tool everybody uses now in our dairy life.

Local population, especially in rural areas, began to decline constantly in Japan from around 2000. The word “limit village”¹ was proposed in 1991 by Akira Ohno, a sociologist, and actually in 2005 two villages and a town were defined as “limit village”, seventeen places in 2015 and much more in the future. Local governments all over Japan are paying great efforts to set a brake on this tendency without much success. However, after the experience of the financial crisis of 2007–2008, a small migration flow from city to region has been observed, slightly, like a brook in a foggy forest. In 2011, we experienced the Great East Japan Earthquake. This moved the situation forward a little more. People who decided to leave the bustling urban life and select the quiet and safe local places to settle down have been seen here and there.

Happy Local People’s Map (Figure 1) indicates the settled places of fifteen groups of young people appeared in the book, *We Seek Happiness in Region* (2016). This reportage tells us that the young people settled in the local places because they wished to work together with friends, work for people who need them, work to find their own happiness, but work not for money. With my friends, I post a note of computer programming to the Facebook twice a week. Usually our post reaches to about 30 persons at most. But number of reach increased drastically when I started to post programming codes for “making of a happy local people’s map”. Along with posting JavaScript code, I also introduced their activity and their URL to link them. Figure 2 shows the number of persons my post reached. You may be amazed with the increase of reach number. Although this is just a case, however, we can view that the Internet is already used as a powerful and needed tool for living in regions. It helps to connect people horizontally while belonging physically to a region.

Perhaps we are witnessing a starting point of restoration of that unity of motives of living as Polanyi wrote in his book (1977). I may conclude this paper hoping that a new lifestyle in the region will be shared with many people, where life is formed within the natural ecological system, where local market embedded, where wide open communication within a region as regions.



system is equipped well as between

Figure 1. Happy Local Peoples' Map

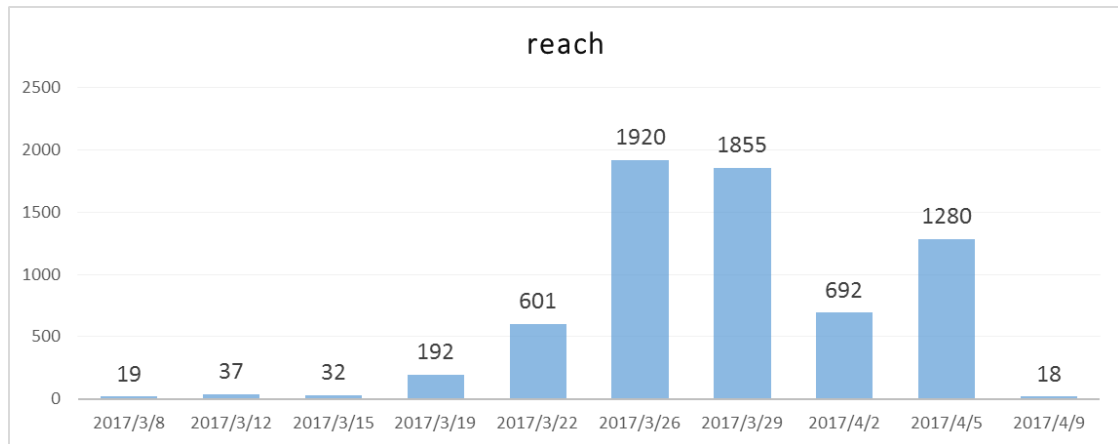


Figure 2. Number of Reach

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Notes

¹ Ohno, Akira, first defined in 1991, a village as a “Limit Village” when half of its population is occupied by people over 65.

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Appendix:

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Gender and species-being

Tamanoi, who translated Polanyi's *The Livelihood of Man* into Japanese, delved into the essence of human being in the substantive economy. According to Polanyi, the substantive economy is completely different from the formal economy. The formal aspect of the economy springs from the logical relation between ends and means. The human being in the formal economy is *homo economicus* or economic man who looks for the maximization of material want satisfaction. By contrast, the substantive aspect is based on the empirical facts that human being depends on nature for his/her material want satisfaction regardless of whether scarcity exists or not.

Polanyi further suggested that the substantive economy is integrated into certain forms, such as reciprocity, redistribution and exchange. Especially in the cases of reciprocity and redistribution, human being appears not as economic man but as community-oriented person. In such societies, markets are peripheral in terms of

economic integration. Nevertheless, markets sometimes play important role for human life. Polanyi emphasizes that the “typical local market at which housewives procure some of their daily needs, and growers of grain or vegetables as well as local craftsmen offer their wares for sale, shows an amazing indifference to time and place.” [GT, p.62]

These local people are the concrete image of human being in the substantive economy.

Now what is the essence of human being? Inspired by Ivan Illich’s *Gender*, which Tamanoi also translated into Japanese, Tamanoi elaborates Illich’s explanation as follows: human being is not reduced into human being in general whose secondary attribute is either male or female. He also emphasizes that humans consist of men and women and that every one of us was born as man or woman but not as human being in general. In *Gender*, Illich originally wrote as follows:

Gender is something other and much more than sex. It bespeaks a social polarity that is fundamental and in no two places the same. What a man cannot or must do is different from valley to valley. [*Gender*, p.68]

The oldest traditions place the fundamental trait of our existence into this singular kind of bifurcation. It constitutes an ambiguous complementarity, different from both a mirror image and a shadow. [ibid., p.73]

Since Tamanoi was learned in Marx’s writings, he obviously associated Illich’s gender with Marx’s *Gattungswesen*, i.e., species-being. According to Marx, “Man is a species-being not only in the sense that he makes the community (his own as well as those of other things) his object both practically and theoretically, but also (and this is simply another expression for the same thing) in the sense that he treats himself as the present, living species, as a universal and consequently free being.” [100] Marx also wrote that the “immediate, natural and necessary relation of human being to human being is also the *relation of man to woman*.” [Marx, p.126] Marx further stated that the nature of this relationship will explain how further human becomes species-being.

What Illich wrote in his *Gender* was that in capitalist society sexism did not exist because of paternalism but of the very nature of labor-power as commodity. Women were assigned as shadow-workers who would produce and reproduce labor-power. In capitalist society, therefore, the relationship of man to woman would not illustrate human as species-being.

When Polanyi wrote *The Great Transformation*, he convinced that the commodification of human activities was one of the key elements of the fictitious and

historically-specific aspect of capitalism. In *The Livelihood of Man*, Polanyi sought for the clue to the de commodification of human activities by utilizing comparative economic history and economic anthropology.

Illich and Tamanoi in a sense further elucidated Polanyi's approach to human activities and suggested that men and women in the pre-industrialized period were not human-being in general but people of species-being. Tamanoi by advocating regionalism tackled the rehabilitation of gendered-relation in local societies in the modern industrialized world.

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