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Synthesis and KJ-method = 構築・総合とKJ法

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構築・総合と KJ 法

<https://jica-health.blogspot.com/2017/09/synthesis.html>

Hi, everyone. Today, I will at first talk about (1) two sides of research, analysis and synthesis. Then I will focus on synthesis, and will talk about (2) KJ method, a synthetic way developed by Professor Jiro Kawakita.

1 Research and knowledge

1) Basics

First, I will briefly define research and knowledge.

Research comprises "creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of humans, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications." (OECD 2002)

OECD (2002) Frascati Manual: proposed standard practice for surveys on research and experimental development, 6th edition. Retrieved 27 May 2012 from www.oecd.org/sti/frascatimanual.

Knowledge is a familiarity, awareness or understanding of someone or something, such as facts, information, descriptions, or skills, which is acquired through experience or education by perceiving, discovering, or learning. (Wikipedia)

2) Analysis and Synthesis

Next topic is 'analysis' and 'synthesis'.

In general, the analysis is defined as the procedure by which we break down an intellectual or substantial whole into parts or components. Historically, this procedure of analysis has been applied in the study of mathematics and logic since before Aristotle (384–322 B.C.).

Nowadays, the analysis still plays very important role in modern science. Then, how about synthesis? Is synthesis not important in research process?

Synthesis is defined as the opposite procedure of analysis: to combine separate elements or components in order to form a coherent whole. In general, synthesis refers to a combination of two or more entities that together form something new; alternatively, it refers to the creating of something by artificial means.

In most of the scientific research, analysis of data is understood as the core throughout the research process. However, this does not mean that researchers do not need synthesis. After obtaining an analytic outcome of a specific research, the researcher goes to the review process. In the review process, two or more research studies are assessed with the objective of summarizing and/or synthesizing the evidence relating to a particular question.

Synthesis is understood as a higher a priori process than analysis. Not only in research review process but also in our daily life, when we face a complex reality, synthesis play a more important role than analysis.

Next, I will talk about KJ-method, one of the most popular method of synthesis in humanities and liberal arts field in Japan.

2 Jiro Kawakita and Synthesis

1) Profile of Prof. Jiro Kawakita

Professor Jiro Kawakita was an eminent scholar of ethnogeography and Nepalese studies in Japan. Based on his university research studies in the East Asia and the Pacific region, he started his scientific career by establishing a climatic classification method. His primary interest was analyzing the man-land relationship of different societies. He continued to develop his methodology and systematic ethnogeographical research on Nepal. In pursuing field work, he seeks to support his belief by obtaining from the chaos in which everything coexists.

2) Fieldwork and synthesis

This book, “The Hill Magars and their Neighbours” was written based on his fieldwork from June 1963 to March 1964 in Nepal.

He starts the preface of this book as follows;

The book presented here is Volume III of a series of academic reports on anthropological fieldwork, “Synthetic Research on Rice-cultivating peoples in Southeast Asian Countries”. (preface p.1)

Here, Professor Kawakita identified his work as “synthetic research”. Then, how about his methodology of synthesis? He describes his research procedure as follows:

I utilized about seventy percent of all collected field data in this volume. I owe Dr. Sasaki on a considerable amount of raw material though the greater part of data mentioned was collected by me. These data, including Sasaki's, were arranged in the form of a bulky series of data-cards the form of which devised years ago. Starting from these data cards I adopted the procedure of the KJ method for data integration. This method, including a series of technical procedures, was devised by me around 1951 in its incipient form. Since 1965, this method has been much appreciated by the world of business in Japan. Together with this incident, it was much improved as a method of problem-solving by myself and named the KJ method. Nowadays, it began to spread speedily in the academic world and the field of education. Owing to this method, bulky data from my fieldwork were integrated into the present volume. (preface p.4)

One of the fundamental concepts of this method is “Data tell us something”, instead of data processing by means of certain preconceived ideas or theories. In the case of ethnography or regional geography, the output by means of the KJ method takes the form of “heuristic description”. The data are not arranged according to any preconceived categories such as “topography”, “settlement”, “social structure” and “religion”. Instead, various kinds of data are naturally integrated into stories with various suggestions or hypotheses generated in the process. However, objective description and subjective interpretation are distinguished as strictly as possible. Numberless ideas tentatively stated by the way will never mislead the reader, but stimulate his imaginations. (preface p.4)

Since 1964 a number of chores hindered me from devoting myself to the publication of this volume. The disturbance of the Japanese student power drove me to an adventurous project i.e. “Ido Daigaku” (Free Campus

College) by which I intended to spread the movement for participation. Therefore, my academic activities, including preparation of this volume, were almost blank between 1969 and 1973, except for development of the KJ method. Beginning with 1973 I could afford time to write down this volume. (preface p.4-5)

3 KJ method

Professor Kawakita wrote many books about KJ method. This is my favorite book, “KJ method: let the chaos speak for themselves.” I encountered this book in 1987. The end result of KJ method is concisely visualized in Figure 15. In the upper part of this figure, five labels are scattered randomly. In the lower part, voices of labels are heard, and five labels are arranged according to the hidden category revealed. The core of KJ method is “let the chaos (chaotic data) speak for themselves.”

Three steps of narrowly defined KJ method (the simplest form of KJ method; KJ method, first round) is described from page 121.

The first step is problem presentation starting from free generation of ideas regarding the problem. Participant is encouraged to write down any idea that comes to mind freely on a label (a piece of paper). After writing up enough numbers of labels, all labels are randomly scattered on a flat surface to get the whole picture.

The second step is let each label to speak its idea (actually, read all of the labels repeatedly), look for ideas that seem to be scattered on some labels, sort labels into groups.

The third step is, after grouping labels, to make a diagram arranging and/or connecting groups/chunks of labels. The fourth step is verbalizing the diagram, putting into words.

Well, this is the synthetic way Professor Kawakita analyzed his data of Nepal and wrote this book.

How about you? Are you ready to try KJ method?

Moriyama's work

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Masaki_Moriyama/

(Masaki Moriyama)