Space, Society and Geographical Thought, 2025, No. 28, 3–15
空間･社会･地理思想 28 号 3–15 頁 2025 年
ISSN: 1342-3282

Translation

Looking Back on the Trajectory of Critical and Alternative Geography in East Asia

Byung-Doo CHOI [i]

(Translated by Maurice YIP [ii])

Editors' note

This article was originally published in *City and Society* (2022, No. 6: 11-20) in Japanese, which was translated from Korean by Eunhwee Jeon who was a researcher of Urban-Culture Research Center at Osaka City University at the time. This translation was prepared by Maurice Yip and reviewed by Byung-Doo Choi.

1. Congratulations to Professor Mizuuchi on his retirement

It is both a light and lonely feeling to leave the lectern where a university teacher has spent his whole life researching and lecturing with all his might. Looking back on the days that have passed, we realize that time really does fly by. However, when we count up what we have achieved academically and practically, no matter how many achievements we have accumulated, we always feel that we have not done enough. Perhaps for this reason, Zhu Xi, who was one of the top scholars since Confucius, left behind a poem like this.

> Youth gets easily old, but learning is hard to accomplish.
> Do not look lightly on even one moment of your precious time.
> Not having even awakened from a dream of spring grass beside the pond,
> the parasol tree leaves in front of the steps already signal Autumn.
> 少年易老學難成
> 一寸光陰不可輕
> 未覺池塘春草夢
> 階前梧葉已秋聲

I have read this poem again, and I would like to sincerely congratulate Toshio Mizuuchi on his retirement, and hope that he will continue to engage in free and passionate reflection and research, and that the achievements he has cultivated will shine even brighter in the future.

I met Mizuuchi about twenty years ago and we shared our experiences working for critical and alternative geography in East Asia. For an individual's life, twenty years is certainly not a short time. Of course, it was not as close as everyday relationships with neighbors or colleagues at work, and we only met once or twice a year, but it can be said that it is a special relationship that researchers with similar interests in critical perspectives on similar themes in the shared academic field of geography have met and continued to interact with each other to the present day. In particular, the record of our joint experience with Mizuuchi is significant as a description of the process of

[i] Professor Emeritus, Daegu University; President, Korea Urban Research Institute.
✉ bdchoi@daegu.ac.kr
[ii] Specially Appointed Assistant Professor, Osaka Metropolitan University.
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0435-9849 ✉ mauriceyip@omu.ac.jp

forming the foundations of critical and alternative geography in East Asia and the formation of academic and practical exchange across national borders.

2. The Inaugural International Conference on Critical Geography as a starting point for change

From August 1996 to the end of July 1997, during my sabbatical with my family, I was a visiting researcher in the Department of Geography at Johns Hopkins University in the United States, when the world-renowned David Harvey was still affiliated there. Prior to that, I had translated and published Harvey's books *Social Justice and the City* and *The Limits to Capital* in Korean. In 1995, when Harvey visited Korea, I met him in person and told him that I wanted to take a sabbatical at his university, and he kindly accepted me. At the time, the Department of Geography at Johns Hopkins University was integrated with environmental engineering and belonged to the Faculty of Engineering, and there were only three faculty members specializing in pure geography. There was no undergraduate program, and there were not many graduate students either.

I did not have many opportunities to meet Harvey for academic conversations. However, I was able to attend his "Reading Capital" lectures and other seminars and discussions. In particular, I had the opportunity to meet Lisa Kim Davis, a graduate student in the doctoral program, who was one of Harvey's students. Her mother is Korean, and because of this, she was considerate towards me as I got used to the atmosphere of the department, and she also got along well with my family. She forwarded to me an email from Neil Smith about the Inaugural International Conference on Critical Geography (IICCG) that was to be held in Vancouver, Canada, in August of the following year. She asked me to widely publicize the event to critical geographers in East Asian countries, including South Korea, and to encourage them to participate.

The IICGG was established by faculty members and graduate students from Simon Fraser University and the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, and Neil Smith, a student of Harvey and the author of *Uneven Development*, was actively supporting the secretariat. I first sent out information about the IICGG to my colleagues and junior colleagues (mainly doctoral students) in Korea, and sent emails asking for their presentations or participation in this conference. At the time, the Korean Association of Space and Environment Research (KASER) had been established in Korea, and it was made up of relatively young researchers studying in the fields of geography, urban sociology, urban planning, regional development, and urban engineering. About ten of the association's members showed a positive response and said they would attend. In addition, I informed people involved in the association and Korean students studying in the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, etc. of the relevant information and invited them to participate. At the same time, I asked them to introduce critical geographers from their respective countries who could participate or who had influence.

At the time, the person in charge of liaising with the IICGG in Japan was Martin Brennan, but I had never met him before and, although I sent him an email, I never received a reply. I emailed Kim Doo-Chul (currently a professor at Okayama University), who was a junior of mine in the Department of Geography at Seoul National University and was in the doctoral program at the Graduate School of Geography at Tohoku University, and explained the situation and asked for an introduction to critical geographers in Japan. He recommended Kenji Tsutsumi (currently a professor at Osaka University) from Shimane University and Fujio Mizuoka (currently a professor emeritus at Hitotsubashi University) from Hitotsubashi

University to me, and told me about their areas of interest and specific research themes.

According to the documents I have, I sent my first email to Tsutsumi on February 19, 1997, asking about his interest in critical geography and his wish to participate in the IICGG. In particular, I asked him to participate and present in the special session I had in mind, "Uneven Processes of Globalization: Experience and Role of East Asian Countries". Even though he was concentrating on his research on depopulation in Japan, he kindly agreed to participate, and I am still very grateful to him. As I did not receive an immediate reply from Mizuoka, I mainly exchanged emails with Tsutsumi several times to exchange opinions on the progress of the IICGG and my session. I was aiming to have more critical geographers from other countries in East Asia participate in this session. I extended the registration deadline and looked through several channels, but I was unable to find any more participants. In the end, the session I organized ended up with about ten critical researchers from Korea in the field of geography and related fields, in addition to Tsutsumi. The session was divided into three sub-sessions for presenting papers.

In April 1997, I attended the annual conference of the American Association of Geographers (AAG) in Fort Worth, Texas, where I met Neil Smith, Nick Blomley, and Joe Painter, who were key members of the IICGG. Despite it being the first time we had met, they were kind and helpful, and we exchanged opinions about the preparation process for the IICGG and discussed anecdotes from that process. I mentioned that around ten people from Korea were scheduled to attend the IICGG, but that there were almost no participants from other countries, and I expressed my feelings that it was quite difficult to conduct research from a critical perspective in the fields of geography and related fields in East Asian countries, focusing on the situation in Japan and Korea that I had understood up to that point. In particular, I pointed out that the lack of awareness among researchers in East Asian countries of the formation process and background of critical geography as it is developed in the West, as well as the language barrier in discussions with geographers from the English-speaking world, are obstacles. In addition to discussions with them, I had the opportunity to talk a little about the IICGG with geographers from East Asia who attended the AAG conference, but I was unable to secure more participants.

In early August 1997, I was on my way back to Korea after completing my sabbatical at Johns Hopkins University, and I headed to Vancouver with my family, where the IICGG was to be held. The participants from Korea who I met there had arrived a few days earlier and had already completed excursions to the surrounding areas, and were somewhat excited about attending the conference. Park Bae-Gyoon (currently a professor in the Department of Geography Education at Seoul National University), who was enrolled in the doctoral program at Ohio State University, also joined us. In addition to the geographers I had met at the AAG conference in Fort Worth, I also made new acquaintances in Vancouver. While checking the participants in the sessions I had organized, I also had to consider the papers to be presented in other sessions. My session was held on the second day, and although it was held throughout the day, it was specialized in research on the East Asian region, particularly research on the Korean situation, so I remember that there were almost no interested observers, and as a result, the discussion was not very lively[1].

At the venue, I met Tsutsumi and Mizuoka for the first time since they arrived from Japan, and we exchanged greetings. I was very grateful to

[1] I participated in the session moderated by Swyngedouw and reported on a paper on the theme of Marx's ecology and environmental justice. Mizuoka did not participate in my session, but I do not remember which session he presented in.

Tsutsumi for not only giving a presentation on the third sub-session that I had organized, but also for acting as the session chair. I discussed the process of the formation of critical geography in Japan and the current issues with Mizuoka, and we agreed on the points that we needed to work on so that more geographers and researchers from related fields from East Asian countries could participate in the future. After the formal presentations and discussions during the day, there is usually a chance to get together over dinner and drinks to have a good time and talk openly, but I was staying with my family, so I regret that I was not able to fully participate in these informal opportunities for exchange.

At the IICGG held in Vancouver, around 300 geographers, activists and other researchers from 30 countries around the world gathered to recognize the necessity and significance of this academic conference, and to engage in earnest discussion and camaraderie[2]. At the time, the process of neoliberal globalization was spreading across the world, and the IICGG was held at a time when serious problems were being caused in various parts of the world, including the East Asian currency crisis of 1997-1998. As Neil Smith noted in his report on the IICGG, "the time is ripe to build on these many national political seeds and to fashion an international grouping of geographers committed to a critical and geographical response to the global and local events that are now reshaping our worlds" (Desbiens and Smith 1999: 379).

3. The Inauguration of the East Asian Regional Conference in Alternative Geography

By the way, at the panel discussion session that took place just before the conference closed, 16 ICG steering committee members were selected, and in East Asia, Mizuoka and I were included. At that time, South Korea was proposed as a candidate venue for the 2nd International Critical Geography Conference. I could not refuse the offer, and I accepted it without thinking. The official reason given for proposing Korea as the venue for the 2nd conference was that the International Geographical Union (IGU) was planning to hold its 29th International Geographical Congress (IGC) in Seoul in August 2000, and it was thought that holding the 2nd ICCG in Korea just before that would have various meanings. However, the problem was that there was no consideration as to whether the critical geographers in Korea had the ability to hold the 2nd ICCG, overcoming the tacit opposition with the mainstream geographers preparing for the IGU academic conference in Korea[3].

Neil Smith states that "Many countries already have a long tradition of organized critical geography—including Japan, the Nordic countries, South Korea, and more recently the United Kingdom" (Desbiens and Smith 1999: 379), but this statement is quite an exaggeration, at least with regard to the situation in South Korea[4]. As mentioned above, at the time in Korea there was an organization called

[2] For more on this, see the article that Tsutsumi published in the newsletter of the Space and Social Research Group at the time (Tsutsumi 1997).

[3] At the 29th Seoul International Geographical Congress, not only were most of the Korean geographers mobilized, but the Prime Minister served as the chair of the organizing committee, and President Kim Dae-jung gave a congratulatory address to the approximately 3,000 geographers from around the world who participated.

[4] According to Mizuoka et al. (2005), the origins of critical geography in Japan can be traced back to the 1920s. In Korea, there was a communist nationalist movement under Japanese imperial rule, but after liberation from colonial rule and the subsequent division of the country, Marxism was taboo in all academic fields, not just geography, in South Korea. Until the mid-1980s, Marx's *Capital* was a banned book that could not be read or owned, and furthermore, the book I translated, Harvey's *Social Justice and the City*, was printed and published, but was banned from sale in the market for five years.

the Korean Association of Space and Environment Research (KASER) that supported critical geographical perspectives, and it held regular academic conferences and irregular workshops, and also published the academic journal *Space and Society*. However, there were only five or six university faculty members among the society's members, and most of them were graduate students in master's or doctoral programs. As the leader of the society, I myself was excluded to a certain extent by mainstream geographers, and moreover, as a professor at a university that was considered to be relatively low-ranked even in the local area, I did not have much influence in terms of attracting many participants from the fields of geography and related fields, or in securing the financial resources necessary for holding conferences.

For this reason, on the final day of the IICGG, I spoke with Neil Smith and Mizuoka about the considerable difficulties involved in holding the 2nd ICCG in Korea, and the need for active support. In particular, I asked Mizuoka if the critical geographers of Japan and Korea could hold a regular academic conference and cooperate in the preparations for the 2nd ICCG, and he kindly agreed. Following this, about a month after returning to their respective home countries after the academic conference in Vancouver, Mizuoka agreed to hold a mini-conference co-hosted by a group of critical geographers in Korea and the Space and Society Commission of the Association of Japanese Geographers. He wrote the following in an email on September 13, 1997.

> Dear Dr. Choi,
> It is my pleasure to express my sincere appreciation once again for the invitation you had made to the IICCG. This was indeed an excellent occasion, where I could feel and learn a lot of the state-of-art of the society-and-space debate on the global scale; as well as meet many geographers in the world who mutually share one or another common research interests. I strongly hope that this tradition continues into the future, with strong support from the steering committee, where you and I are members. After what we agreed in Vancouver, I have arranged the venue for our joint 'mini-conference' in Himeji, Hyogo-ken.

Some details of the mini-conference he proposed were:
(1) Venue: Shingu So, a kind of Japanese-style inn, located a short distance from JR Harima Shingu station on Kishin Line;
(2) Date and time: 2 pm, November 14, 1997 to 11 am on the 15;
(3) Post-conference schedule: either a visit to Himeji Castle or participation in the annual conference of the Human Geographers' Association of Japan to be held at Osaka City University on November 15 and 16;
(4) Cost: the Japanese side shall be responsible for the cost of accommodation and food during the mini-conference for Korean participants (but transportation costs are to be borne on the Korean side).

Mizuoka was planning to have formal presentations and discussions with around ten people in total, five or six from Japan and five or six from Korea, but he also hoped that there would be plenty of informal discussions, and in particular, he asked the Korean participants to give presentations on the process of the formation of critical geography in Korea and its current situation. After this meeting, the mini-conference was held. I remember that five or six people from the Japanese side participated, including Tsutsumi, Takagi, and Mizuoka (I do not remember clearly whether Mizuuchi participated or not). The two geographers from Korea were Kim Deok-hyeon, who also participated in the IICGG, and myself. I gave a presentation there titled "Retrospect and Prospect the Development of Critical-

alternative Geography in Korea" [5]. In the subsequent discussion, we generally agreed on the proposal to hold regular academic conferences where critical-alternative geographers from not only Japan and Korea but also other countries in East Asia could gather, and Korea was suggested as the venue for the 1st conference. After the mini-conference, we participated in the annual conference of the Human Geographical Society of Japan, which was held at Osaka University.

When I returned to Korea, I felt that my shoulders had become even heavier. In 2000, the organization of the 2nd ICCG was preceded by the holding of the 1st East Asian Conference in Alternative Geography in 1999, and while this in itself was an organizational experience and we could expect publicity effects, as an individual I had to prepare for two academic conferences in succession. Furthermore, from the second half of 1997 to 1998, the economy of South Korea was in a serious slump due to the East Asian currency crisis (or the IMF economic crisis), and the country was in a state of social turmoil. Many workers lost their jobs, and the government was cutting back on public expenditure.

In this situation, I exchanged opinions with Mizuoka via email, and he recommended a number of critical geographers active in Japan, Korea and other East Asian countries. So, the name of the academic conference was proposed as the "East Asian Critical Geography Conference" as it was a regional meeting of the ICCG, but Mizuoka's suggestion was to rephrase it as "Critical / Alternative", and in the end, the word "critical" was removed and it was decided to be the "East Asian Regional Conference in Alternative Geography". The conference was scheduled to take place from January 24-26, 1999, during the winter break period of most universities in East Asia, with a preparation period of about one year.

The overall theme of the conference was proposed as "East and Southeast Asian Economy in Transition under the Process of Globalization: from the Alternative Geographical Perspective", but in order to encourage more researchers to participate, a more inclusive theme was set, and we decided on the more inclusive theme of "Socio-spatial Issues for East Asian Countries in the 21C". It was also implicitly agreed that the scale of participants would not be limited to East Asia, but would also include Southeast Asia. As a result, the list of expected participants included critical geographers from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore[6].

We sent out information about this to not only Japan and Korea, but also to East Asia and ICCG members. Neil Smith, who we had lost touch with for a few months, also replied by email and kindly accepted our invitation for a keynote speech.

In this way, the 1st East Asian Regional Conference in Alternative Geography was held as scheduled. The first day was held at the Education and Culture Center Hotel in Gyeongju, and the second day was held at the Daegu University campus in the suburbs of Daegu. The reason for the split was that in order to obtain some financial support from Daegu

[5] This manuscript was translated into Japanese by Mizuoka and published in the newsletter of the Space and Society Research Group (Choi 1998).

[6] There was some controversy about this after that. At the 2nd EARCAG conference, held in Hong Kong, Henry W.C. Yeung of the National University of Singapore proposed expanding the scale of the conference from "East Asia" to include South Asia, including India, or even the whole of Asia. At the time, I strongly opposed this proposal at a meeting of the steering committee. This was because I thought that while the scale of the conference participants and the scale of the region of interest would increase and diversify if the conference were expanded in this way, at the same time, the commonality of interests and the intimacy between participants would decrease, and furthermore, communication problems through English would increase.

University, it was necessary to hold the event on campus. The theme of Neil Smith's keynote speech was "Global Economic Crisis and the Need for an International Critical Geography", and the conference consisted of six general sessions and one special session. The main themes were: research methods and perspectives in East Asian geography; rethinking East Asian regional issues; the changing significance of urban planning and spatial forms; urban and regional policies and development ideologies; local urban development in a global context (the case of Daegu); and nationalism, locality and the politics of place. The special session was on the state of critical geography in Japan and the preparation of teaching materials, which was Mizuoka's own research topic.

Looking at the presenters at the 1st East Asian Regional Conference in Alternative Geography, a total of nineteen papers and reports were presented and discussed. Among them, the presenters from overseas included Neil Smith and five people from Japan (Kenji Tsutsumi, Satoshi Fujita, Toshio Mizuuchi, Fujio Mizuoka, Naoki Oshiro), two people from Hong Kong (Wing-Shing Tang, George C.S. Lin), one from Thailand (Chatchai Pongprayoon), and Robert Hassink from the Netherlands, who was doing research in Korea at the time. There were nine Korean presenters, including myself, and in fact, only two of them were studying geography at the undergraduate level or belonged to the geography department, with the others being faculty members from the economics department, public administration department, urban planning department, and urban engineering department. In addition, there were around ten other faculty members and researchers who attended the conference but did not make presentations, and many students from the Department of Geography Education also attended the event on the day it was held at Daegu University. We also invited Lily Kong, Kristopher Olds, Brenda Yeoh, and Henry W.C. Yeung from the Department of Geography at the National University of Singapore to attend the event via email, but although they expressed an interest in attending, they did not participate.

The 1st East Asian Regional Conference in Alternative Geography ended successfully. Although the number of participants was not large, at around thirty, everyone presented their papers with great sincerity and actively participated in discussions. After the formal schedule had finished, we spent a pleasant time interacting with each other on a personal level. Looking at the collection of materials from the 1st conference, it is presumed that there was no separate official session on the organization and development prospects of this regional conference, and that the election of the steering committee had not yet taken place, but that the participants had agreed to hold the next conference in Hong Kong. In particular, I am very grateful for the many geographers who participated from Japan, and I still vividly remember the time we spent together at lunch before they returned to Japan from Gyeongju, eating spicy seafood hot pot with a drink while sweating despite the cold winter weather. Some of the Japanese participants entered Busan Port from the ferry and returned to Japan by the same sea route. I remember that Tang and Lin, who participated from Hong Kong, were picked up at Busan International Airport and came to Gyeongju in my car. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who participated from Japan and to Wing-Shing Tang, who participated from Hong Kong, and also to Chatchai Pongprayoon, who participated from Thailand but with whom I have not had any contact since then.

4. The 2nd International Conference of Critical Geography

After the 1st East Asian Regional Conference in Alternative Geography, I began preparations for the 2nd International Conference of Critical Geography. For this reason, I attended the ICCG Steering Committee meeting held in Mexico

City, Mexico in April 1999. Many researchers were present, including Blanca Ramirez of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, Neil Smith, and Mizuoka. At this meeting, a draft of the main text of the ICG was discussed. In addition to the steering committee, there was also an attempt to hold a mini-conference at the university, but this did not come to fruition. In order to participate in the steering committee, I had to spend a week traveling there and back, which was a big burden for me both in terms of time and finances. It is written that other steering committee meetings were held in Honolulu and Venice, but I was unable to attend those. That winter, on December 18, 1999, Mizuoka held a seminar at Hitotsubashi University, the university where he worked, called "The Asia-Pacific Economy in 1997 and into the 21st Century", and I was invited to give a presentation on my paper, "The East Asian Crisis and its Social and Environmental Impacts". I discussed the preparations for the 2nd ICCG in Daegu with Mizuoka.

However, for me personally, the preparations for the 2nd ICCG were quite demanding. As mentioned above, there was a limit to the recognition of critical geography in the Korean geographical academic community and my own position, but I also had to devote a considerable amount of time to practical social and political movements. At the time of the 2000 conference, I was co-chair of the National Council of Professors for Democracy, and I was also the head of a citizens' group and two affiliated research institutes in the Daegu area. Not only that, from January to June 2000, there was a nationwide citizens' movement in Korea calling for the disqualification and defeat of inappropriate candidates involved in corruption and other wrongdoing in relation to the parliamentary elections, and the main body of this citizens' movement was the "2000 General Election Solidarity". I was the permanent co-representative of the regional organization of this solidarity, the Daegu Gyeongbuk General Election Solidarity, and I had to hold meetings with the activists almost every day and go out onto the streets to publicize the movement to the citizens. Even now, I still wonder what kind of power led us to organize the 2nd ICCG following the 1st EARCAG under these circumstances.

I can hardly remember whether a separate local organizing committee was set up to organize the 2nd ICCG, but most of the tasks were carried out through my own work. Mizuoka created a mailing list (icgg-ml@econgeog.misc.hit-u.ac.jp) and a website, and there was no further online work. Members of the KASER also helped a lot with the call for local participants. However, I had to respond to hundreds of email inquiries, organize and reclassify the submitted themes and abstracts, and create dozens of sessions. I also reorganized the abstracts and created a collection of materials. The conference was officially supported by Daegu University and the Korea Foundation for the Advancement of Humanistic Studies, as well as by registration fees paid by the participants, and it was also supported by a small grant from the city of Daegu and the Korea Tourism Organization which wanted to attract international academic conferences. One of the biggest problems was accommodation. Daegu University is located in the suburbs, and there were no suitable places to stay nearby that could accommodate more than a hundred people. We had no choice but to use the Daegu University student dormitories, which were empty because of the summer vacation.

Thus, without any major problems, the 2nd ICCG was held at Daegu University from August 9-13, 2000. The overall theme was "For Alternative 21st Century Geography". Around 150 people from over twenty countries participated, and around eighty papers were presented and discussed. In the opening session, I gave a keynote speech on the theme of "Dialectics of Utopian Space" in relation to the aims of critical geography, and Blanca Ramirez, who participated from Mexico, gave a keynote speech on the theme of "Politics of Constructing an International Critical Geography Group". On

the final day, David Harvey gave a presentation on the theme of "Uneven Geographical Development and Universal Rights".

The themes of the papers presented at the approximately thirty sessions were extremely diverse, ranging from neoliberal globalization and the economic crisis to urban planning and the role of the state, and from environmental crises to political ecology, and included film screenings and poetry readings on themes related to critical geography. In particular, Don Mitchell's presentation on the "People's Geography Project of the United States" aimed to make (critical) geography more accessible to the general public. The discussion also covered what is meant by the term "critical" (and "alternative" and "radical") in critical geography, and how the term is used in different contexts in different countries[7]. Furthermore, the main concern was the changes brought about in relation to neoliberal globalization, particularly the currency crisis of 1997-99 and its impact on East Asian countries.

There were several excursion courses suggested at the beginning of the conference, but in the end, they were consolidated into one. The course took participants to the area around the US military base in Daegu City and to the site of a strike at a local industrial complex on the outskirts of Daegu. Swapna Banerjee-Guha from India, who accompanied the group, expressed her great surprise at the fact that a US military base was located in the middle of a large city. The participants were able to see for themselves how the spatial structure of major cities in Korea had been distorted by the experience of Japanese colonial rule and the subsequent stationing of US troops. At an industrial park on the outskirts of Daegu, they walked around the workplaces of the branch factories of multinational companies and their subcontractors, and also conducted brief interviews with workers who were on strike at the time.

There were many reasons why the 2nd ICCG, held in the Korean city of Daegu, was able to attract so many participants. One of the main reasons was the enthusiasm and active participation of critical geographers from around the world. In fact, the summer weather in Daegu is so hot and humid that the temperature often reaches around 35 degrees Celsius. Despite this, most of the overseas participants stayed in the student dormitories at Daegu University, where they had to endure the extremely cruel inconvenience of having to use the shared facilities, as there were no showers in their rooms. I feel truly sorry about this. However, no one raised any complaints about it, and they actively participated in the sessions the next day, continuing with their reports and discussions. And every night, a drinking party was held at a pub near the university, where everyone had a great time and enjoyed chatting. Neil Smith livened up the atmosphere with a song called "The Socialist ABC", based on a folk song from northern England.

[7] While there was some opposition to prescribing what "critical" geography means, the limitation of losing "focus" rather than gaining it by not prescribing it was also pointed out. Relatedly, the main statement of the founding of the ICCG explicitly states that it is "critical" in four aspects. That is: we are "Critical" (1) because we demand and fight for social change aimed at dismantling prevalent systems of capitalist exploitation; oppression on the basis of gender, race and sexual preference; imperialism, national chauvinism, environmental destruction; (2) because we refuse the self-imposed isolation of much academic research, believing that social science belongs to the people and not the increasingly corporate universities; (3) because in opposing existing systems of exploitation and oppression, we join with existing social movements outside the academy aimed at social change; and, (4) because we seek to build an alternative kind of society which exalts social differences while disconnecting the economic and social prospects of individuals and groups from such differences.

I think another reason why the 2nd ICCG was such a success was the participation of many geographers from East Asian countries, especially Japan and Taiwan. In this regard, I would like to express my gratitude once again for the many geography teachers, graduate students, and researchers in related fields from Japan and Taiwan who participated. In particular, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Chu-joe Hsia and Jinn-yuh Hsu, who did not participate in the 1st EARCAG but participated in the 2nd ICCG with many graduate students. They also actively participated in the 2nd EARCAG held in Hong Kong, and since then they have continued to play an important role in the ongoing success of the EARCAG as key members. I do not know how many of the overseas geographers who participated in the 2nd ICCG also went on to attend the IGC academic conference held in Seoul, but it may have been a good reason for deciding to hold the 2nd ICCG in Korea. The 1st EARCAG and the 2nd ICCG were successfully held in Daegu, and each conference has continued to develop to the present day, probably because we all keenly feel the need to seek alternatives to resolve the problems of the capitalist socioeconomic system and the spatial organization that conditions it as a product of that system, especially in East Asia.

5. My personal thoughts afterwards

In July 2001, about a year after the 2nd ICCG was held smoothly, I visited London to attend the steering committee meeting held at the Open University of the United Kingdom to discuss the holding of the 3rd ICCG. There were no academic conferences to collaborate with, and it was just the steering committee, so it was quite a burden in terms of time and finances. The 3rd ICCG was held in Békéscsaba, Hungary, and I had already prepared my presentation and booked my flight to attend, but I was unable to attend due to my mother's illness. Since then, the ICCG has continued to be held in Mexico City, Mexico (2005), Mumbai, India (2007), Frankfurt, Germany (2011), Ramallah, Palestine (2015), and Athens, Greece (2019). However, I did not participate in the 3rd conference onwards. There were personal reasons, but I also decided not to participate in the ICCG any more due to time and financial issues, as well as communication limitations with participants from non-English speaking countries. Instead, I decided to attend the EARCAG as much as possible and contribute to the continued holding of this conference in the East Asian region. I had to make strategic choices and focus on a few things.

Since the 1st EARCAG conference was held in Daegu, the 2nd was held in Hong Kong (December, 2001), the 3rd in Tokyo and Osaka (August 5-9, 2003), the 4th in Taipei (June 24-30, 2006), the 5th in Seoul (December 13-15, 2008), the 6th in Kuala Lumpur (February 13-16, 2012), the 7th in Osaka (July 22-26, 2014), the 8th in Hong Kong (December 6-8, 2016), and the 9th in Daegu (December 10-12, 2018). The 10th conference was scheduled to be held in Taipei in 2020, but due to the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19 Pandemic), it has been postponed. Of these, I was unable to attend the 7th conference held in Osaka due to caring for my parents, but I attended all the other conferences, and served as a presenter and moderator for the keynote speeches and general sessions. I would like to thank the local secretariat for their efforts in organizing and successfully holding this international conference despite the difficult circumstances they were in. The fact that EARCAG has been able to continue to be held and develop is thanks to the selfless efforts of the local staff.

In addition, we also appreciate the efforts to expand the organization's outer edges and create a practical foundation through various activities derived from or related to this organization. As a representative example, the Department of Geography at Osaka City University, where Mizuuchi was affiliated, holds workshops together with EARCAG, and the 4th workshop

was held on the theme of "The Geopolitical Economy of East Asian Developmentalism" from November 26-28, 2019. Furthermore, at the invitation of the Osaka City University Urban Research Plaza, where Mizuuchi serves as Deputy Director, the "East Asia Inclusive CITYNet Workshop" has been held since 2011 in cities across East Asia, including Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong, in solidarity with public and private research institutes and activist groups that are conducting critical research in various countries in East Asia[8]. Wing- Shing Tang of Hong Kong Baptist University also holds various workshops related to EARCAG or in which its members participate.

Twenty-three years have passed since EARCAG was established in 1999. EARCAG has already entered a period of consolidation, and welcomes the participation of researchers who are interested in East Asian people and socio-spatial issues[9]. However, Chu-joe Hsia from Taiwan, who was a key member of the steering committee and made a great effort to hold EARCAG in his own country, Mizuoka from Japan, Wing-Shing Tang from Hong Kong, and I have already retired, and Mizuuchi will be retiring this March. For the future sustainable development of EARCAG, the Steering Committee needs to be supplemented with younger, more energetic, and more capable critical geographers above all else. Furthermore, in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, when most international academic conferences have been canceled, it is also a task for critical geographers to seek ways to overcome this problem. If the current situation continues and cultural and especially academic exchange between nations declines, and moreover, a trend develops in which the very need for exchange is denied, we will fall into the pit of nationalism.

In this connection, I would like to tell you a story about Neil Smith, who is now deceased. It happened in April 1999 at the ICCG Steering Committee meeting in Mexico City. I was enjoying a chat with Neil Smith and the other Steering Committee members on the terrace of a café in the city center. As he watched the Mexicans passing by, Smith said that Mexicans want their skin to be whiter. As is well known, the Mexican people were formed through the intermixture of their indigenous ancestors and white people, and the degree of intermixture differs from region to region. So I asked him: "Which is better, for one people to intermingle with another and have the same skin color, and have a unified culture and identity, or for each people to have their own unique skin color and maintain their own distinct ethnicity and lifestyle? Neil Smith did not hesitate for long

[8] Meanwhile, in February 2008, I conducted fieldwork in the Osaka area with one of my colleagues and several graduate students for my own research project. In our research on the migration and adaptation processes of transnational migrants and government policies, we received active support from Mizuuchi and his graduate students, and we were able to visit the Osaka City Hall and receive an explanation of related policies from the staff in charge. Furthermore, we were able to obtain a lot of materials by visiting an organization that supports foreign migrants and meeting with activists. In this connection, I would like to express my deep gratitude to Mizuuchi and his graduate students. My research group also visited Hiroshima in March of the same year for fieldwork with the same objective. As a result, we were able to publish several papers and a book entitled *Multicultural Conviviality: Japan's Transition to a Multicultural Society and the Role of Local Communities* (2011).

[9] Relatedly, Wing-Shing Tang (2016) wrote in his report on the results of the 8th Hong Kong Conference, where more than eighty papers were presented: "Since its inauguration in Kyungju and Taegu, South Korea, in January, 1999, EARCAG has been a forum for concerned people in East Asia to interrogate local issues roughly once every two years. Realising that we are living in an interconnected world, EARCAG has always welcomed scholars across the world to join the debates, exchanging views on the latest developments".

before choosing the former. It seems that he did not properly recognize the dialectic between the universal and the particular in this issue. As someone who is very aware of the history of colonial nationalism, this was a surprising answer. I soon realized that the question was an oversimplification of the issue.

I believe that Neil Smith played a crucial practical role not only in the establishment of the ICCG, but also in the establishment of the EARCAG. As Harvey stated in his memorial article, he fell into the contradiction of being a critical geographer who was unable to criticize himself in terms of his own death from drinking too much (re-quoted from Wachsmuth 2013; see also Cowen et al. 2012), and indeed his untimely death was a great loss to the critical geography community. My colleagues and I in Korea mourned his death, and we published a translation of his major work, "Uneven Development," and edited a memorial special issue of *Space and Society*. I deeply sympathize with his critical geographical arguments, and I cannot deny that he made a great contribution to the formation and development of critical geography, both academically and practically.

Having said that, regarding the episode I mentioned earlier, I believe that all cultures and knowledge require a dialectical relationship of difference and commonality. This is true not only of ethnicity and culture, but also of critical geographical knowledge. Unlike the tendency in the episode above, Neil Smith would also have understood this point well. He expresses it in a slightly different context as follows: "Our ambition for an International Critical Geography (ICG) is to express an alternative social dialectic of the local and the global, while affirming the importance of scale in our attempts to connect and organize politically" (Desbiens and Smith 1999: 379). I would like to emphasize that what is needed for critical geographers is to develop the ability to solve the problems that countries and peoples face in a democratic way, while on the one hand protecting and developing their own unique cultures and knowledge, and on the other hand recognizing the problems that other countries and peoples face in common, and seeking out academic and practical alternatives for mutual exchange and cooperation in solving them. It is not easy to realize this dialectic of difference and commonality in reality.

Another important fact is that the countries of East Asia are geographically adjacent to each other. We must not be confined to the physical adjacency of space, but at the same time, we can never escape its limitations. No matter how much relational space is emphasized, physical space conditions the possibilities of human life and consciousness. We are geographers. All of humanity living in this space of the earth is a geography. Not only that, but our social space is also never flat. Just as the social world continues to be dynamically unequal, the space of the earth also constantly fluctuates, creating inequalities between here and there. We are not utopianists who seek to make this world and the earth flat. We are critical geographers who reject such inequalities and seek to confront and fight them. If socio-spatial inequality is a condition of human life possibility that can never be overcome, critical geography will never cease to exist.

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