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Translation

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

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(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

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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 presented 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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Report

Conference Report: EARCAG 2025, Fukuoka

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The 11th East Asian Regional Conference in Alternative Geography (EARCAG 2025) took place at Fukuoka and Osaka, Japan, from February 11 to 15, 2025. Centered on the theme **"Territorial Justice in Times of Polycrisis: Perspectives from East Asia and Beyond,"** the event gathered about 150 participants from East Asia, Europe, and North America.

The term *polycrisis* framed the conference's discussions of overlapping global challenges—climate change, geopolitical tension, digital transformation, and social inequality—and their spatial consequences. "Territorial justice" served as the unifying theme: how current power relations power are distributed across (urban) spaces, infrastructures, and communities.

The program began with a field trip in Fukuoka's Tenjin and Hakata CBD areas to witness the ongoing urban redevelopment projects that are to maintain the city's extraordinary population growth tract (Figure 1). We also visited the inner-city-like spaces in between, such as the newly emerging popular spaces in and around Haruyoshi and the night economy scene in Sumiyoshi. We ended with a post-conference excursion to Osaka, including the Expo 2025 redevelopment sites and newly emerging ethnic spaces in Nishinari and Ikuno Ward (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Group photo in front of Hakata Station

Figure 2: Excursion venue in Osaka (Ikuno Park)

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Between these excursions, three days of presentations addressed themes such as **care and everyday life, migration and precarity, infrastructure and mobility**, **new concepts for urban redevelopment, the translation of geographical knowledge, and digital and cyber geographies**, all with a strong focus on the East Asian context. A unifying current across sessions was the emphasis on local resilience, people's ingenuity, and spatial transformation. Case studies of grassroots activism, participatory mapping, and alternative urbanism showcased the creative strategies communities employ in times of crisis. This focus on praxis reflected EARCAG's broader commitment not only to radical critique but also to imagining alternative forms of place-making. The conference was hosted by Kyushu University's Graduate School of Integrated Sciences for Global Society, with support from the Human Geography section of the Japanese Geographical Society and *Kakenhi* projects (#22K01047, #23K20548).

At the start of each conference day, we had keynote speakers who shared their expertise perspectives on the overall theme:

Takashi Yamazaki (Osaka Metropolitan University) explored the concept of *territorial justice*, tracing its philosophical roots and development within critical and political geography. Using Okinawa as a case study, he argued that political narratives often legitimize territorial injustice and called for stronger theoretical foundations to link spatial justice with the lived realities of post-colonial territories.

Christian Schmid (ETH Zürich) discussed *planetary urbanization* and the need for new vocabularies to understand contemporary space. He argued that urbanization now extends far beyond city boundaries, producing hybrid and uneven territories. Schmid urged to rethink what counts as "urban" and to study the spatial characteristics emerging in these expanded, crisis-ridden landscapes without merely depending on established concepts such as gentrification.

Takashi Nakazawa (Meiji University) examined *population decline as a crisis of capitalism*, focusing on Japan's regional revitalization policies. He contended that demographic shrinkage exposes capitalism's dependence on reproductive labor, which neither the state nor the market can easily control. Nakazawa warned that extreme capitalist attempts to commodify the human reproduction for renewed rounds of growth risk deepening inequality and diminishing free will.

Despite its breadth, the conference maintained a coherent focus on how various territorial forms and scales—material, digital, and social—are being renegotiated amid overlapping emergencies. In overall, EARCAG 2025 succeeded in maintaining a shared commitment to critical, situated, and just geographies informed by East Asian and other regions (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Group photo in the conference room

Further details about the conference are available at https://sites.google.com/view/earcag-2025-fukuoka

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Population Decline as the Crisis of Capitalism: The Japanese Experience

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between capitalism and population decline, arguing that stable labor reproduction is essential for capitalism. Since neither the state nor capital can directly control reproductive decisions, declining birth rates in mature societies signal a crisis. Japan's population policies, particularly "Regional Revitalization" initiated in 2014, aimed to counteract declining birth rates by redistributing populations to rural areas. However, this approach has failed, as the concentration of population in Tokyo continues and the birthrate remains well below the replacement level. The paper warns that if capital ultimately seeks to subsume population reproduction, it could commodify human existence itself, threatening individual freedom.

Keywords

population decline; commodification of human beings; labor; capitalism; regional revitalization; Japan

1. Sense of crisis

The sense of crisis is always perceived in relation to uncontrollable phenomena external to capitalism, namely nature and humans. In the 19th century, based on Malthusian population theory, it was believed that humans could not escape poverty and vice, as the exponential population growth would surely outstrip the arithmetic increase in food supply. This situation, known as the Malthusian trap, was overcome by the increase in productivity of staple food through advancements in capitalistic agriculture. In the mid-20th century, concerns emerged that the accelerating expansion of human activities, driven by population growth, might exceed the Earth's ecological capacity. The "Limits to Growth" report by the Club of Rome (Meadows et al. 1972) is well known in this context. However, the subsequent oil shock led to a reduction in fossil fuel consumption in developed societies. Additionally, being eco-friendly became a value-added trait, and environmental impacts such as CO_2 emissions turned into exchange value. By the late 20th century, concerns about the Earth's ecological capacity had temporarily alleviated.

However, upon entering the 21st century, these concerns have resurfaced. The term "Anthropocene" suggests that the increase in population and resource utilization has reached a geological turning point, creating irreversible

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environmental impacts (Curzen and Stoermer 2000). Against this backdrop, Neo-Malthusian arguments advocate population control, even at the expense of reproductive rights, to address global environmental problems (Ojeda et al. 2019).

David Harvey (2014) questions the notion that environmental crises are a threat to humans. Such views tend to attribute the cause of environmental crises to capitalism and argue for its revision or abolition to resolve these crises (e.g. Saito 2020). However, looking back on human history, it was the very development of capitalism that overcame environmental constraints and resolved the crises of humans repeatedly. The increase in productivity through the capitalistic transformation of agriculture and the commodification of environmental impacts are evidence of this. For Harvey (2014), the true crisis for humans is the development of capitalism itself. The inexorable progress of neoliberal capitalism intensifies exploitation, expropriation, and alienation, undermining humanity. Some scholars see signs of the end of capitalism in the pacing down of global economic growth (e.g. Mizuno 2014). However, Harvey (2014) argues that capitalism is such a robust system that it will not collapse on its own. Only through conscious, collective opposition can it be abolished and a new social system constructed.

However, I believe that the very humanity, seemingly powerless before resilient capitalism, might be shaking the foundations of capitalism today. The critical divide between humans and other species lies in the fact that human reproduction is based on individual free will. In contemporary capitalistic societies, individual decision-making regarding reproduction has aggregated and manifested as declining birthrates. In countries such as Japan, where the birth rate is well below the replacement level but is reluctant to introducing immigrants, the population decline has already materialized. The intergenerational reproduction of the labor force is essential for the long-term sustainability of capitalism. Therefore, declining birthrates and the resultant population decline signify a crisis for capitalism because this condition is not satisfied. If this understanding is correct, it implies that human freedom is the ignition point of a crisis for capitalism. If the state power recognizes population decline as a crisis for capitalism, it may implement more coercive population policies which potentially undermine the right to self-determination of reproduction. This report is based on such concerns.

Marx (1867: 718) stated, “the maintenance and reproduction of the working class is, and must be, a necessary condition for the reproduction of capital.” Without labor power, capital cannot be accumulated. Since the working class comprises the majority of the population, its reproduction is crucial for the survival of both capital and the state. Despite this, neither can generate the population on their own. Thus, the research question of how capital and the state have faced this challenge is immensely important for the political economy.

However, until recently, political economy has not actively addressed the reproduction of population. The central task of political economy has been critical analysis of the problems caused by the expansion and growth of capitalism, with poverty and social pathology being representative of such issues. Malthus argued that poverty and social pathology were not caused by specific social regimes such as capitalism but were due to the universal and scientifically determinable relationship between food production and human population growth. There is an aversion within political economy to orthodox demography, which follows Malthusian naturalism (Robbins and Smith 2017). Consequently, political economy has seldom focused on demographic phenomena such as birth, death, and migration, which are the main subjects of orthodox demography.

On the other hand, because Marx regarded the creation of surplus population as a unique demographic law of capitalism, political

economy has accumulated substantial research on the nature of surplus population. However, Marx's understanding of the mechanisms by which surplus population is biologically reproduced remained within nearly the same naturalism as Malthusian one. This is evident in his statement, "the capitalist may safely leave its fulfilment to the labourer's instincts of self-preservation and propagation" (Marx 1867: 718). In other words, the existence of surplus population was considered as a materialistic precondition.

However, recent years have seen an increase in research within critical geographies that focuses on population (Bailey 2005; Robbins and Smith 2017; Nakazawa 2023). Even during the 1980s, when various fields of human geography were influenced by postmodernism, population geography remained largely untouched. Empiricist and positivist epistemologies still dominate population geography, with a continued emphasis on quantitative methodologies. Nevertheless, the 1990s saw the emergence of new trends such as political demography and the geopolitics of population (Bailey 2005; Robbins and Smith 2017). In demography and mainstream population geography, human individuals are reduced to a plain quantity, namely, population, and then statistically analyzed. As Michel Foucault demonstrated, the socially constructed concept of population is a governance technology created by biopower of the modern state, thanks to the invention of statistics (Foucault 2007). Since population is equated with national power and military strength, maintaining the optimal size and improving the quality of the population are vital for the state. In this process, biopower draw a fine line in the population, dividing "make live" and "let die". Furthermore, Marxist-inspired population geography has also developed, focusing on surplus population (Tyner 2013, 2015, 2016).

Since surplus population is a concept related to labor, it has attracted interest from labor geography (Strauss 2018, 2020a, 2020b). Labor geography emerged from similar critical perspectives as critical population geography. Labor geography criticizes the reduction of workers to mere labor force as a production factor and claims the fair evaluation of workers as active agents shaping the economic landscape of capitalism (Herod 2001). As labor geography developed, reflective studies emerged, focusing on workers whose inherent agency was constrained and oppressed (Coe and Jordhus-Lier 2011; Mitchell 2011). It is these workers that are regarded as the surplus population inescapable from precarity. Here, the notion of precarity unites the interests of critical population geographers and labor geographers.

Appropriately, a series of critical geographical studies have highlighted how people, as populations or labor forces, are lumped together under capitalism and burdened with precarity as a class. Nonetheless, the biological reproduction of humans constituting the population is often taken for granted. Therefore, the idea that self-determination in reproduction could undermine the sustainability of capitalism is missing. This report aims to fill this academic gap, based on experiences in Japan.

I have chosen this topic for the plenary speech because the notable decrease in birthrates is a common characteristic across East Asia. Although Japan's birthrate is often said to be remarkably low, it is relatively high among East Asian countries and regions. In this context, numerous demographic studies on declining birthrates have been certainly conducted in each country and region. However, there is little research on population from a critical geographical perspective: My intervention counts for something.

2. Intervention in reproduction and mobilization of labor

As in many countries, in Japan before the end of World War II, the population was considered the source of national strength and military power. Therefore, the primary goal of

population policy was to encourage births, or pronatalism. However, due to Japan's limited land and scarce natural resources, population growth inevitably led to overpopulation. This led Japan towards colonialism, and many geographers ended up supporting the imperial regime through commitment to geopolitics (Shibata 2016). Japan expanded its territories in East Asia and sought to solve the overpopulation problem by exporting surplus population to its de facto colonies and importing staples produced there. The defeat in the war resulted in Japan losing its colonies. The food imports from the colonies ceased, and many people returned to the mainland. The combined total of repatriated soldiers and returnees from the colonies exceeded 6.6 million. With men returning to society and a period of peace beginning, a baby boom occurred in the late 1940s. Thus, overpopulation became the most pressing issue for post-war Japan.

Facing overpopulation, the government completely reversed its pre-war pronatalism and shifted towards birth control. The key measure for birth control was legitimization of induced abortion (Norgren 2001; Tama 2006; Ogino 2008). In 1949, abortion for economic reasons was legalized in Japan, although certification from the eugenic authority was required at that time. By 1952, abortion for economic reasons could be performed at the request of pregnant women. Consequently, the number of abortions surged, exceeding one million annually. This caused a sharp decline in birth numbers and total fertility rate (TFR), and Japan's demographic transition was completed in less than a decade. Thus, in Japan, the national-scale issue of overpopulation was overcome by intervening in women's bodies and reproduction (Nakazawa 2019).

From 1955, when the demographic transition was being achieved, Japan entered a period of high economic growth that continued until the oil shock. The challenge for the state during the high growth period was the spatial mismatch of labor between urban and rural areas. The major metropolitan areas, particularly the Tokyo metropolitan area, promoted Japan's high economic growth. In these metropolitan areas, labor shortages emerged due to the expansion of industries. On the other hand, in rural areas, industrial growth lagged: The labor market was underdeveloped and thus surplus labor was there.

The institutionalization of the new graduate labor market bridged employment opportunities in metropolitan areas with the labor supply from rural areas (Yamaguchi 2016). Until the mid-1960s, most young people entering the labor market were junior high school graduates, followed by an increase in high school graduates from the late 1960s. Junior-high and high schools functioned as employment agencies, selecting pupils on behalf of companies. The important selection criteria were pupils' academic performance and conduct, for schools wished to build strong and trustful relationship with good employers by sending diligent recruits each year.

At that time, there were substantial differences in living standards between metropolitan and rural areas based on the regional income disparities. Therefore, many junior high and high school graduates from rural areas chose to migrate to metropolitan areas. Reflecting the mobility of young people, the metropolitan areas experienced significant net in-migration during the high growth period.

Junior high and high school graduates from rural areas were transported to metropolitan areas by train exclusively for them (Yamaguchi 2016). They migrated to metropolitan areas, envisioning a better life. However, there was structural discrimination between them and metropolitan natives. Rural-origin graduates were employed by significantly smaller companies than their Tokyo-native counterparts, even with the same education level (Kase 1997). Thus, the structure of the new graduate labor market included a system where job vacancies that could not be filled by metropolitan natives were filled by graduates with rural origins.

As population concentration in metropolitan areas progressed during the high growth period, the main agents of population reproduction in Japan shifted from extended rural families to urban nuclear families. Urban nuclear families were modern heterosexual families based on gendered division of labor. Many of these families lived in the suburbs, with the breadwinner husband commuting to the city center and the wife taking on all the reproductive duties. This gendered division of labor corresponded to the spatial structure of Japan's metropolitan areas, where city centers and suburbs were clearly separated (Nakazawa 2019). Supported by high marriage rates and stable employment exclusively for men, Japan's birthrate almost retained the replacement level until 1974.

During this time, it was clear that "not giving birth" for women and their families and "moving to the cities" for rural-origin individuals led to a better life in terms of material living standards. Therefore, such state interventions in reproduction and labor mobilization, accompanied by unfairness, were accepted by the public. In other words, it was a rare period when individual pursuits of happiness and societal benefits aligned.

3. Implementation of "Regional Revitalization": Pronatalism as progrowth

The stable growth period between the oil shock and the bursting of the bubble economy was a transitional phase, and this report does not delve into it in detail. However, it can be noted that clear state interventions in reproduction and labor mobility were absent during this period. Declining birthrates were not yet a clear concern, and the pressing issue recognized then was the aging population. However, as soon as the stable growth period began, the birthrate fell below the replacement level, and this state has continued to the present. From the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, net in-migration to metropolitan areas decreased sharply, approaching a balance between in-migration and out-migration. This period, often called the "Era of Regions," saw an increase in employment opportunities in rural areas due to the dispersion of manufacturing plants. In Japan, a real estate bubble emerged from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, during which net in-migration to the Tokyo metropolitan area increased again.

In 1991, the real estate bubble burst, and Japan entered a low-growth period that continues to this day. The 1990s to the 2000s were characterized by the recognition of youth problems. In 1990, the TFR fell below the anomaly recorded in 1966 of hinoeuma year[1], leading to the recognition that declining birthrates were a serious issue. This is known as the 1.57 shock. In 1994, the national master plan for addressing declining birthrates (Angel Plan) was formulated.

With the burst of the bubble, companies refrained from hiring new employees to reduce personnel costs, thus youth unemployment and unstable employment became apparent. Consequently, the period from 1993 to the mid-2000s was known as the "Employment Ice Age." The younger generation of this period, the "Ice Age Generation," tended to delay economic independence and marriage, further lowering the birthrate. The increase in unmarried young people living with and dependent on their parents led to the term "parasite singles" (Yamada 1999). Youth represented strength until then, but this period marked the discovery

1 There is a Japanese superstition that women who are born in a specific zodiac year (Hinoe-Uma) are destined to harm the husband, with its origin being unsure. The number of births in 1966 was 25% lower than the former year (Ito and Bando 1987).

of socially disadvantaged youth (Miyamoto 2002). In the early 2000s, active labor market policies targeting young people were initiated to address youth issues. This was a kind of workfare scheme (Peck 2001) targeted at young individuals who faced difficulties (Nakazawa 2014). At that time, the sense of impending structural problems was still weak.

In contrast to the 2000s when companies were keen on reducing surplus personnel, the 2010s saw the emergence of labor shortages, leading to the resolution of youth problems. Simultaneously, population decline, the concentration of population in Tokyo (Tokyo overconcentration), and the low growth of the national economy emerged as significant structural issues facing Japan. Social policies until the high growth period were designed to address the distortions caused by population and economic expansion and growth. However, once expansion and growth were disrupted, social policies began to explore measures to mobilize social elements—particularly the youth and regions—to return to the path of expansion and growth. The most emblematic of these is the "Regional Revitalization" initiative that began in 2014. Despite various twists and turns, this series of policies continues to be led by the Cabinet Office. The salient feature of "Regional Revitalization" is that the demographic issue, i.e., population decline due to low birthrates, and the geographical issue, i.e., Tokyo overconcentration and the unsustainability of rural municipalities, have been treated as two sides of the same coin.

Historically, the flow of people from rural areas to metropolitan areas (especially the Tokyo metropolitan area) has been continuing with fluctuations. Since 2000, the concentration in Tokyo has tended to increase, particularly among young women. Because the Tokyo metropolitan area's TFR is far low compared to the national average, the concentration of the population of reproductive age (particularly women) in Tokyo accelerates the overall population decline. Meanwhile, in rural areas, the absolute number of the population of reproductive age has decreased along with the population outflow, leading to a reduction in the number of births. This situation is creating municipalities that may become unsustainable due to population decline in the future (Masuda 2014).

Based on these future projections, four goals were set for the first phase of "Regional Revitalization." Namely,

1. Create jobs in regional areas and ensure a secure working environment
2. Establish new flows of people to regional areas
3. Fulfill the marriage, childbirth, and child-rearing aspirations of the younger generation
4. Develop regions that are in tune with the times, ensure safe and secure living conditions, and foster cooperation between regions

As mentioned, when the population concentrates in the Tokyo metropolitan area, the national population decline accelerates. To overcome this, time-honored promotion of marriage and childbirth is installed. However, past experiences have shown that these policies alone are not effective. Therefore, the main framework of "Regional Revitalization" is to encourage migration to rural areas with relatively higher birthrates and to establish economic and living foundations that support childbirth and child-rearing there. This indicates that the main goal of "Regional Revitalization" is not to revitalize regions to improve the welfare of people living in declining rural areas. Rather, it is a set of measures to overcome population decline to boost the national economy (Nakazawa 2024).

"Regional Empowerment for Japan's Growth" presented by Cabinet Office underwrites the validity of this interpretation:

> A decrease in consumption and manpower places a heavy burden on the Japanese economy. To counter this decline, and to maintain the population at 100 million by

> 2060, the Japanese government has designed a series of policies aimed at revitalizing the local economy, a key factor in overcoming population decline.[2]

Evidently, the decline in population is considered problematic because it hinders the growth of the national economy. Thus, pronatal policies are progrowth policies.

It should be also noted that policies concerning immigration constitute an important context for "Regional Revitalization." Although Japan has already accepted many foreign workers, prime ministers to date repeatedly declared that the government will not adopt immigration policies that grant citizenship or permanent residency to foreigners to maintain the population size. In other words, when discussing population decline in Japan, the implicit assumption is the decline of the ethnic Japanese population. Thus, prenatal policies reflect ethnocentrism.

4. Reproduction boycott

The "Regional Revitalization" policy is currently ongoing with minor tuning, thus its success or failure cannot be evaluated yet. Although the first phase of "Regional Revitalization" has already ended, it coincided with the expansion of COVID-19, making it difficult to purely assess the policy's achievement. However, the government's assessment report states, "Significant progress has been seen in job creation and town and regional development. On the other hand, the effects of creating new flows of people to rural areas and marriage, childbirth, and child-rearing have not yet fully manifested."[3] This means that the government itself acknowledges that there were areas in the first phase of "Regional Revitalization" where policy effects were insufficient. Contrary to the policy intentions, the net migration to the Tokyo metropolitan area has increased since the start of the first phase of "Regional Revitalization." During the outbreak of COVID-19, there was a trend of people moving away from densely populated metropolitan areas and the popularization of remote work, leading to a temporary decline in net migration to the Tokyo metropolitan area. However, as COVID-19 subsides, the net migration to the Tokyo metropolitan area is increasing again. The government encouraged people, especially the youth, to relocate to rural areas to mitigate the Tokyo overconcentration that accelerates population decline. However, this recommendation seems to have been boycotted.

How about measures against declining birthrates? The justification for marriage and birth promotion lies in the reality that people wish to marry and have children but cannot realize these desires. The Japanese government justifies the implementation of countermeasures against declining birthrates, saying that while the non-marriage rate is rising and birthrates are declining, young people's desires for marriage and childbirth remain strong. However, since 2000, the percentage of unmarried individuals who say they "do not intend to marry for life" has been increasing[4]. Additionally, the desired number of children for unmarried women has fallen below two in 2022 for the first time since the survey (see footnote 4) began. Since the start of the first phase of "Regional Revitalization",

2 https://www.japan.go.jp/regions/_userdata/pdf/A4_12P.pdf (last accessed 6 July 2025).

3 Minutes of the Fifth Meeting of the Expert Council on Formulating the Second Phase "Town, People, and Work Creation Comprehensive Strategy", pp.2-3. https://www.chisou.go.jp/sousei/meeting/senryaku2nd_sakutei/r01-05-23-gijiyoushi.pdf (last accessed 6 July 2025).

4 https://www.ipss.go.jp/site-ad/index_japanese/shussho-index.html (last accessed 6 July 2025).

Japan's TFR has significantly declined. This is partly because people's desires for marriage and childbirth themselves have diminished. Merely fulfilling people's desires is no longer enough to maintain the population size. In other words, the government's promotion of marriage and childbirth has been boycotted.

Research focusing on the phenomenon that I have termed "Reproduction Boycott" has just begun. Many states recognize the declining birthrate and resulting population decline as crises and strengthen pronatal population policies. Feminist population researchers see potential in birth strikes as resistance to pronatal policies aimed at maintaining or increasing the population (Brown 2019; Davidson 2025). In fact, in South Korea, a women's social movement called the "4B movement" has emerged, which boycotts marriage, childbirth, dating, and sex as a protest against the deeply rooted patriarchy and misogyny in Korean society (Lee and Jeong 2021).

In response to situations that can be termed "Reproduction Boycott," the Japanese government has established the Children and Families Agency in 2023. In addition to a set of cliched childcare policies, this agency also carries out mild propaganda strategies such as designating "Family Day" and holding family photo contests. As such, Japan's birth promotion measures are not very coercive thus far.

In authoritarian countries, there are cases of blatant interventions in reproduction. In Russia, the number of births began to significantly decline around 2015. Amid the labor shortage exacerbated by the prolonged invasion of Ukraine, the Russian government banned the dissemination of information related to being "child-free."[5] They also tightened regulations on abortions. As part of propaganda, President Putin revived the Soviet-era title of "Mother Heroine," awarded to women who bear ten or more children, equivalent in status to the "Hero of Labor."[6]

5. Humans neither for the state nor capitalism

Since the Industrial Revolution, the world's population has continued to increase rapidly. Therefore, population problems have commonly been understood to mean Malthusian overpopulation. However, the global population growth rate is expected to decline, and it is estimated that the world's population may begin to decrease as early as around 2050. In the near future, the meaning of population problems on a global scale is likely to change to the opposite.

This global trend underlies Japan's experiences. During the high-growth period, Japan's population problem was Malthusian overpopulation. In response, birth control measures were enforced through the legalization of abortions. The geographical issue was the spatial mismatch of labor between metropolitan and rural areas. This was addressed by institutionalizing logistics that sent new graduates from rural schools to metropolitan employers. During the low-growth period, the population problem changed to be the population decline due to decreasing birthrates. In response, pronatal population policies were implemented. The geographical issue was the Tokyo overconcentration and the disappearing municipalities. This was addressed by encouraging migration from metropolitan to rural areas. This comparison reveals that the state's policy requests on people through policies were completely opposite during the high-growth and low-growth periods. Such requests were accepted during the high-growth period but boycotted during the low-growth period.

5 https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-battling-birth-rate-dip-is-working-child-free-ideology-ban-says-putin-2024-09-24/ (last accessed 14 July 2025).

6 https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/08/16/putin-revives-soviet-mother-heroine-title-a78580 (last accessed 6 July 2025).

The policy requests were accepted during the high-growth period because complying with them was thought to pave a road to a better life. However, today, individual pursuits of happiness and rights are not aligned with the societal benefits sought, and this misalignment is unlikely to be fixed soon. Therefore, it is nearly impossible for current policies to stop population decline or reverse the concentration in Tokyo. The guardians of democracy will not overlook state powers implementing coercive pronatalism or aggressive migration policies under the guise of societal benefits. The exercise of power that treats humans as a measure to achieve policy goals should be rejected. Movements akin to the reproductive boycott are emerging in South Korea. The freedom to engage in such a movement is a hard-won result of the long and arduous struggle against patriarchy and authoritarian biopower. We must retain the right to self-determination of reproduction.

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Understanding Urbanisation Processes: An Epistemological Reorientation

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Abstract

The urban world has fundamentally changed in the last few decades. Urbanization is generating a great variety of complex and often surprising territories, which are disturbing conventional understandings of the urban. This also means that the question of the spatial units of analysis has to be fundamentally reconsidered. The challenge to scholars is thus to analyse not only the multitude of urban territories, but also the various urbanisation processes that are transforming those territories. The essential task, therefore, is to investigate the historically and geographically specific patterns and pathways of urbanisation and the dynamics of urbanisation processes. A new vocabulary of urbanisation is required to help us decipher these rapidly mutating urban territories and to facilitate discussions and common understandings of urbanisation.

Keywords

planetary urbanisation; extended urbanisation; concentrated urbanisation

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Introduction

This article introduces concepts for reframing a dynamic analysis of urbanisation processes that were developed for the research project "Vocabularies for an Urbanising Planet" (Schmid and Streule 2023). These concepts constitute a novel territorial approach, based on a decentring perspective on urbanisation. This perspective was first brought forward by postcolonial approaches that marked an important change in urban theory and research by going beyond western urbanisation models to address the great variety of urban situations and constellations developing across the planet. In an ambition to develop global urban studies, they also proposed to bridge the various divides that criss-cross our planet. This postcolonial perspective has been complemented by the introduction of the concept of planetary

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urbanisation that has exploded citycentric understandings of the urban. The term planetary urbanisation captures the observation that contemporary urbanisation processes are taking place across the entire planet, and thus can be grasped by adopting a planetary perspective. To analyse planetary urbanisation, we must abandon the idea of the urban as a bounded settlement space, and analyse urbanisation processes instead. This approach not only focuses on urban developments of sparsely settled areas, but also fundamentally reorients the analysis of metropolitan territories.

This decentring move in urban studies demands an epistemological reorientation of urban analysis. To better understand patterns and pathways of urbanisation in time and space requires new concepts and theoretical framings that are suited to a dynamic, process-oriented analysis. This motivated the development of a territorial approach to urbanisation, which has been elaborated over more than two decades in the context of several research projects (Diener et al 2006; Diener et al. 2015; Diener et al. 2016; Schmid and Topalović 2023). Starting from Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, this territorial approach has continued to be developed in the interaction between practice and empirical research. It gives a new answer to the old question: how to understand urbanisation? First of all, urbanisation has to be reconceptualised as a multidimensional process. A deeper analysis reveals that the various constitutive elements of urbanisation processes are continuously producing new urban forms, and thus the patterns and pathways of urbanisation of a territory are always specific. This observation demands for a reorientation of urban theory to conceptualise the dialectic between the general and the specific. The concept of urbanisation processes is at the centre of this reorientation, and it raises a new question: how to identify and conceptualise urbanisation processes? One answer is to contextualise specific situations in the wider territory, to diversify the sources of inspiration through comparative procedures and to enrich our language with a wider palette of terms and concepts representing the manifold emerging urban situations.

Contemporary challenges for urban research

To understand urbanisation in time and space demands a decentring of the analytical perspective on the urban. It is inspired by the postcolonial turn in urban studies that challenged the deeply inscribed geographies of theory production, particularly the Anglo-American hegemony in international urban studies. More than two decades ago, Jennifer Robinson (2002) called for a diversification of the sources and inspirations in urban theory, a suggestion that has been repeated many times (see e.g. Roy 2009; Sheppard et al. 2013; Parnell and Oldfield 2014). One important analytical and methodological starting point to address this challenge is to treat every urban area as an "ordinary city" (Robinson 2006) and thus as an equally relevant place for learning about contemporary urbanisation as well as a relevant and valuable starting point for theory generation and conceptual innovation. Our own project is strongly influenced by this invitation, and seeks to address its analytical and methodological implications.

Another consequence of this decentring move in urban theory and research is that it encourages us to go beyond conceptions of separate area typologies. The emerging patchwork of spatial unevenness can no longer be captured adequately through a typological differentiation between centre/periphery, rural/urban, metropolis/colony, North/South, or East/West. Indeed, the "southern turn" in urban studies (see e.g. Rao 2006), so strongly fostered by postcolonial approaches, has paved the way towards a more comprehensive and differentiating view of the urban world, questioning the compartmentalisation that inherited concepts inscribe and prescribe and

that implicitly and explicitly structure theories as well as research and practice (see also Simone 2010; Robinson 2022). In order to implement this decentring perspective, however, we have to go one step further and question the still dominant city-centric conceptions in urban studies that limit and impoverish our understanding of contemporary urban processes.

The second important starting point for our project was therefore the concept of planetary urbanisation, which addresses a wide range of urban transformations that have given rise to questions about many of the fundamental assumptions and certainties of urban research (Brenner and Schmid 2014, 2015; Merrifield 2014). This includes various processes that extend the territorial reach of the urban into a seemingly non-urban realm, and the development of heterogeneous and polymorphous extended urban landscapes that are characterised by the superimposition and entanglement of cores and peripheries. These processes are continually producing new patterns and pathways of uneven urban development, while urban territories are becoming much more differentiated, polymorphic and multi-scalar. At the same time, the concept of planetary urbanisation requires an epistemological reorientation of the focus of urban research: no longer to look at bounded settlements, but to examine urbanisation processes stretching out over the territory.

The perspective of planetary urbanisation questions not only conventional analyses of areas located outside a putatively urban realm, but also challenges inherited understandings of urban core areas. This conceptualisation has important consequences for long-entrenched understandings of urbanisation: it examines the debilitating effects of city-centrist approaches and the related methodological cityism (Cairns 2019; Angelo and Wachsmuth 2015) that focus exclusively on agglomerations and urban regions, which are often defined by catchment areas, commuter zones or labour markets. All these approaches are based on the "agglomeration paradigm" and thus on the assumption that cities can be defined as concentrations of labour power and means of production (Brenner and Schmid 2014; Schmid 2023). But contemporary agglomerations stretch out to form multipolar, polycentric urban configurations, leading to overlapping catchment areas, and are thus seriously challenging any attempt to place boundaries for identifying the putative basic units of both urban analysis and everyday life. To put the postcolonial turn discussed above into a planetary perspective means to assert that every point on the planet might be affected by urbanisation processes in one way or another, and thus could provide important insights into the urban process. Robinson's call to make "space for insights starting from anywhere" (2016: 5) invites us to look for inspiration and for new concepts to emerge from any place on this planet.

The perspective of planetary urbanisation has fundamentally changed inherited views on the urban. First of all, it proposes a much more dynamic procedure of analysing urban territories, focusing on the urbanisation processes that are shaping and reshaping these territories instead of urban forms. This process-oriented perspective is expressed by the introduction of the related terms "concentrated", "extended" and "differential" urbanisation, which indicate three basic modalities of the urban process (Brenner and Schmid 2015): Firstly, any form of urbanisation generates not only the concentration of people, production units, services, infrastructure and information that leads to concentrated urbanisation, but also inevitably and simultaneously causes a proliferation and expansion of the urban fabric, thus resulting in various forms of extended urbanisation, stretching out beyond dense settlement spaces into agricultural and sparsely populated areas. Food, water, energy and raw materials must be brought to urban centres, requiring an entire logistical system that ranges from transport to information networks.

Conversely, areas that are dominated by extended urbanisation might also evolve into new centralities and urban concentrations. Thus, concentrated and extended forms of urbanisation exist in a dialectical relationship with each other and can, at times, merge seamlessly. Urban territories may be marked by both concentrated and extended modalities of urbanisation.

Secondly, both modalities of urbanisation may result in various processes of commodification and incorporation, but also in processes of differential urbanisation, and thus to the creation and generation of new centralities and new differences. This requires a dynamic and relational understanding of urbanisation, taking into consideration both the extended and the uneven character of urban territories, in which new centralities can emerge in various places, in the urban peripheries, but also outside densely settled areas, creating complex interdependencies and multi-scalar urban realities (see Diener et al. 2016; Schmid and Topalović 2023). Thus, the concept of planetary urbanisation does not postulate that urban areas are becoming more homogenous or that one overarching process of urbanisation is shaping the world, as many critics of the concept purport. Instead, the opposite is true: planetary urbanisation reinforces and intensifies uneven development and leads to much more complex and contradictory urban territories. It is therefore essential to consider the specificity of these territories and hence to analyse concrete processes and manifestations of the urban on the ground (Diener et al. 2015; Schmid 2015).

These considerations have far-reaching consequences for the analysis of urbanisation, not only for territories of extended urbanisation, but also for densely settled metropolitan territories. Urbanisation has to be understood as an unbounded process that transgresses borders and extends over vast areas. This implies a fundamental shift from a centric perspective that starts from the material or virtual centre of an urban territory and then stretches out in order to define its boundaries to identify the "relevant" perimeter of analysis; instead, a decentred perspective is needed to understand the wider urban territory. Shifting the analytical perspective away from the centre enables a view on the production of urban territories from a different, ex-centric angle, avoiding the traps of methodological cityism and the illusory dualism of city and countryside. We thus have to keep open the unit of urban analysis and avoid analysing cities, urban regions or similar bounded units, focusing instead on urbanising territories.

In order to understand the rapidly changing universe of our urbanising planet, we thus have to rethink the current conditions of urbanisation. Urban forms are constantly changing in the course of urban development; they can perhaps best be understood as temporary moments in a wider urban process. The challenge is thus not only to analyse the multitude of urban territories and forms, but also to focus on the various urbanisation processes that transform those territories and generate those forms. This means that the spatial units of analysis — conventionally based on demographic, morphological or administrative criteria — also have to be reconsidered. Urbanisation processes do not simply unfold within fixed or stable urban "containers", but actively produce, unsettle and rework urban territories, and thus constantly engender new urban configurations. The essential task, therefore, is less to distinguish "new" urban forms, but rather to investigate the historically and geographically specific dynamics of urbanisation processes.

A three-dimensional understanding of urbanisation

The call to analyse urban processes is not novel and has been expressed by urban scholars many times (see e.g. Lefebvre 2003 [1970]; Harvey 1985; Massey 2005). However, to realise this call in a thorough and consistent way has many consequences and faces various

obstacles and difficulties. Many new terms and concepts intended to designate various putatively new urban phenomena have been introduced into urban studies in the last two or three decades. Most of this energy has been spent in identifying and labelling different types of cities or urban regions based on emergent urban functions, forms and configurations, such as global cities, megacities or edge cities (see e.g. Taylor and Lang 2004; Soja 2000; Murray 2017). Many of these once novel terms and concepts have already lost much of their explanatory force, as the new urban forms that they were intended to grasp have changed profoundly in the meantime. In contrast, much less has been achieved in developing new concepts to understand, analyse and define the various ways in which urban areas are being transformed. As a result, the field of urban studies is not well equipped with analytical tools to analyse urbanisation processes.

We have then to question in a more general way the concept of urbanisation itself, which is often understood and interpreted as a one-dimensional, all-encompassing, linear and universal process. For a long time, the dominant conception of urbanisation was based on a demographic definition of the population growth of cities (for a detailed discussion, see Brenner and Schmid 2014). This purely statistical definition has countless implications which are rarely discussed, and it reduces the urban to a black box in which all sorts of contradictory developments are homogenised and turned into one universal movement. Everything that happens outside this black box is treated as "non-urban" and consequently not even taken into consideration. The one-dimensional and transhistorical economic postulate that the agglomeration process follows a universal law of spatial concentration that can be applied to all cities from ancient times to contemporary global city-regions, irrespective of any concrete historical and geographical context, has a similar effect. Thus, in a widely debated text on the "nature of cities", Allen Scott and Michael Storper (2015: 4) postulate: "All cities consist of dense agglomerations of people and economic activities". Such narrow views that only take into consideration one single criterion and focus exclusively on urban centres and agglomerations reinforce a simplistic and dichotomous view of the world — in which only cities and non-cities or urban and rural areas exist. However, as urban research constantly reveals, the urban phenomenon is much more complex and polymorphic than in this characterisation (see Schmid 2023).

Urbanisation processes include many aspects of urban transformation that crystallise across the world at various spatial scales, with wide-ranging, often unpredictable consequences for inherited socio-spatial arrangements. We thus have to understand urbanisation as a multifaceted emergent phenomenon, formed by an ensemble of several interrelated dimensions that shape and transform urban territories. They are linked to processes of capitalist accumulation, industrialisation and commodification, state strategies and broader social relations at various spatial scales; but at the same time, they are always anchored in everyday life and realised through concrete constellations, struggles and tactics on the ground.

Accordingly, there is an urgent need for more differentiated conceptions of urbanisation which, instead of being based on statistical definitions, the morphology of settlements or transhistorical urban features such as size or density, analyse the urban as a multidimensional process — a process that includes the economic, social and cultural aspects of daily life. Thus, David Harvey regards urbanisation, from the perspective of political economy, as a process of the production of the built environment; that is to say, the construction of houses, production plants and infrastructure, with all their attendant social implications. However, as urbanisation unfolds, it is not only the space economy that changes, but also the understanding of the world

and the social meaning of the urban. Consequently, Harvey (1985) also analysed the urbanisation of consciousness and the emergence of an urban experience.

Such a multidimensional understanding is developed in much more detail in Lefebvre's theory of the production of space. He offers us an elaborated three-dimensional understanding based on his double triad of the production of (urban) space: perceived, conceived and lived space, and spatial practice, representation of space and spaces of representation (see Lefebvre 1991 [1975]; Schmid 2008, 2022). Firstly, we have to analyse how spatial practices produce a material space that can be perceived by the five senses, and thus constitute a perceived space. Secondly, we need to understand that we cannot see a space without having conceived of it beforehand. To be able to orient ourselves and act in a space, we need a concept, or a representation of space, which is directly related to the production of knowledge. Thirdly, we must consider the question of lived space, and thus how space is experienced in everyday life, which involves the process of meaning production. This depends on the social forces that create an urban space by initiating interaction, and hence relationships, among people and places. In this process, specific patterns of social, economic and cultural differentiation evolve and can be seen as main elements of the specificity of an urban territory. This triad can be used to differentiate urbanisation processes (see Schmid 2023).

Abstract and concrete: The question of specificity

How can we conceptualise urbanisation processes? How can we relate the process of general urbanisation to concrete processes on the ground? The relationship between the general and the specific, or in philosophical terms the universal and the singular, is a recurrent question in urban studies. It has been treated in detail in a research project of ETH Studio Basel that analyses a range of case studies across the world (Diener et al. 2015). The strategic thesis (Lefebvre 2003 [1970]) of this project postulates that each urban territory is distinguished by certain characteristics that underpin the production and reproduction of its own specificity. This means that we have to investigate how specificity is constituted and at the same time to explore how we can bring specific processes into a more general conceptualisation.

Recently, the question of specificity has been revived in the context of debates on planetary urbanisation (Schmid 2018; Goonewardena 2018). This debate has foregrounded a range of epistemological questions concerning some basic understandings, orientations and procedures in critical urban studies: How can we analyse urban developments in a planetary context without neglecting the specific determinations of concrete places and experiences in everyday life? How can we make a comprehensive analysis of urbanisation that brings together a multitude of experiences in different contexts? How should we approach and conceptualise the relationship between specific places and general processes? These questions address a range of theoretical challenges: the role of totality, the relationship between urbanisation as a general process and specific urban constellations, between the abstract and the concrete, between universals and singular cases. There are many ways to conceive such fundamental concepts and their respective relationships. Thus, the alleged dichotomy between the singular and the universal could also be conceptualised in a dialectical manner. Hegel understood these as moments of a "concrete universal" that he conceptualised with his famous triad — the universal, the particular and the singular — as an instrument to grasp the relationships between different theoretical categories. In his philosophical system, the universal moment represents a general principle of development, whereas the particular moment stands for the

differentiation of the universal. Finally, the singular moment arrives as the concrete realisation of the universal moment (see e.g. Stanek 2011).

The idea of a concrete universal as a dialectical unity of singularities and particularities deeply influenced not only Marx but also Lefebvre. It can be recognised in core concepts like labour or capital, but also in Lefebvre's understanding of the urban, of everyday life, and of space (see Schmid 2022: 422–433). However, starting from a clearly materialist position, unlike Hegel, both Marx and Lefebvre located concepts not only in thought, but also in practice, and therefore understood abstraction not only as a mental procedure but also as a material social process in and through which certain abstract principles, such as exchange value, become a concrete social reality: a concrete abstraction. Related to this understanding is Lefebvre's definition of urbanisation as a comprehensive transformation of society that he analysed as a total phenomenon. He defined urbanisation as the totality of changes that a society undergoes as it evolves from its agrarian beginnings to its urban present (Lefebvre 2003 [1970]). Lefebvre links capitalist urbanisation directly to the process of industrialisation that he understands in its most general sense as referring not only to the construction of machines, factories and infrastructure, but also to the related industrial organisation of society. This includes the ensuing financial, technical and logistics systems; the generation, processing and distribution of energy, food, raw materials and information; and the rules and agreements regulating global markets; the various economic, social and cultural networks that permeate and span urban space; and the modernisation, standardisation and commodification of everyday life that comes with industrialisation. Lefebvre famously concluded that this process tends toward the complete urbanisation of society and hence the urbanisation of the entire planet, a position he reconfirmed again in his very last published text analysing how the city dissolves in a planetary metamorphosis (2014 [1987]).

Urbanisation can therefore also be understood as a social process of abstraction — whereby a given natural space is transformed into an urban space and hence also into a technologically determined, abstract space dominated by industrialisation — a "second nature". At the same time, however, this urban space is a concrete physical reality; it has its own specific characteristics. Urbanisation is thus a process during which general social developments are territorialised, which involves the materialisation of social relations in a specific place and at a specific period of time. This materialisation is always confronted with concrete conditions — the land with its characteristics, specific political, social and economic constellations and rules and regulations — which they reshape and transform. Thus, the materialisation of general tendencies in concrete contexts leads to specific urban situations and configurations. The crucial point therefore is to understand how general tendencies and abstract processes materialise, how they become a social reality, consolidating and inscribing themselves onto a territory. Thus, we can examine a territory as the specific material form of urbanisation and trace the transformation of nature to a second nature: an urban space, produced by society. From a general point of view, urbanisation can therefore be conceptualised as an encompassing but uneven transformation of the territory that unfolds in time and space.

From a temporal perspective, each successive round of urbanisation encounters the results of earlier phases of urbanisation and transforms them anew. However, this is not to say that the traces of earlier phases completely disappear. Urbanisation is thus not — like a footprint in the sand — the direct expression of a general social development. The land, the territory, are never "empty" or "primal": they are always occupied by people and various social practices, they bear

the marks of earlier social processes and they are embedded in wider contexts and social networks. Urbanisation is crucially dependent on specific local conditions and therefore does not proceed evenly across the board but leads to differentiation and uneven urban development. However, this dialectics of general processes or universals (such as urbanisation) on the one hand and the specific urban territories or the individual on the other leaves us with a dilemma: We don't understand how a concrete situation is produced and how general processes materialise in concrete places. This is the moment in which a third term moves to the foreground: the particular. Following Hegel's triad, urbanisation could thus be understood as a universal category that contains many particularities or constituting instances; among these are many different urbanisation processes. Urbanisation is a general process with manifold particularities that finally materialises in singularities, each of which forms a concrete totality: a specific urban territory with its own features and specific patterns and pathways of urbanisation. This gives rise to the question of how the theoretical and the empirical are related. As we have explained elsewhere (Brenner and Schmid 2015; Schmid 2022), urbanisation (as well as the urban, the city and so on) are not empirical, but theoretical categories; they are theoretical abstractions constructed on the basis of general considerations.

However, what we encounter on the ground are always concrete phenomena. In empirical research, we start from certain observations in specific locations and bring them into conceptualisation, which means that we construct a representation or a concept. The point is to identify and analyse particular urbanisation processes as particular moments or as constituting instances of a universal — the general process of urbanisation. We thus conceptualise urbanisation processes as particulars or as differentiations of a general process of urbanisation and analyse how a specific territory is transformed by these particular urbanisation processes. In doing so we therefore understand the particular as a mediation between the universal and the individual: Particular urbanisation processes constitute general traits of socio-spatial development on the ground and thus on a specific terrain. As a consequence, we can analyse an urban territory as the result or outcome of the interaction and entanglement of a specific combination of different urbanisation processes.

Towards new vocabularies of urbanisation

How can we conceptualise multidimensional urbanisation processes that allow us to decipher the production of specific urban territories? Looking at contemporary approaches, we realise that they offer only a very rudimentary and limited set of urbanisation processes, such as urban regeneration, gentrification, suburbanisation, periurbanisation, or informal urban development. These concepts do not suffice to grasp and understand the differentiated and dynamic patterns and pathways of urbanisation emerging across the planet (see Schmid et al. 2015). A revitalised vocabulary of urbanisation is therefore required to decipher — both analytically and cartographically — the transformation of urban territories. In our project we were looking for concepts that address the multidimensionality of urbanisation and not just highlighting one isolated aspect. These concepts should not be derived from only one specific paradigmatic case, but have empirical starting points in different urban territories. Therefore, a comparative procedure is necessary for the development and conceptualisation of urbanisation processes. Lefebvre did not define urbanisation processes more specifically. He gave us a series of important concepts, such as the production of the urban fabric, the hypothesis of the complete urbanisation of society and the important consideration that

urbanisation affects both urban and non-urban areas. But, beyond these general reflections and conceptions, we have to be inventive and identify different processes of urbanisation. To make Lefebvre's concept fruitful for concrete analyses we need to go beyond his general theoretical considerations using a transductive research procedure (see Schmid 2022).

So how can we conceptualise specific urbanisation processes? This implies a moment of generalisation: to detect a bundle of characteristics, common underlying mechanisms, logics, regularities and common traits in the way urbanisation unfolds and proceeds, thus producing similar outcomes. Using an appropriate comparative procedure, it is possible to identify a common problematic across different cases or singularities and the various divides that separate them. These specific urban outcomes can be grouped in order to make systematic distinctions between different situations that share a common problematic. Thus, if we look at existent concepts, we see that they define in a more or less precise way a core problematic, such as the forced relocation of inhabitants (gentrification), geographical peripherality (suburbanisation) or precarious settlements (urban informality). We can understand these concepts as expressing and defining particular moments of the general process of urbanisation. In other words: urbanisation as a general and generic concept has to be specified by more narrowly defined concepts of urbanisation processes. In a separate step, we subsequently have to identify concrete urbanisation processes and bring them into conceptualisation: the main aspect here is to find appropriate definitions of these processes. This includes a theoretical moment, to examine extant concepts and terms and possibly also develop and define new concepts. This always includes a comparative moment: We compare a specific urban configuration with extant concepts and assign it to one of them. Or we come to the conclusion that this configuration does not fit the extant definitions and start to develop a new concept with a different definition. In the following step, these concepts have to be specified, tested using different examples and finally stabilised in order to propose using them for further discussions and various applications.

Our territorial approach allows us to analyse the surface of the earth and to discern certain consistencies emerging in the ongoing current of urbanisation and in the continuous mesh of the urban fabric. This analysis detects the interplay and entanglement of urbanisation processes that give a territory its distinctive features and characteristics. It identifies territories within which the same rules apply, the same regulations are in operation; in which certain overarching connections and modes of interaction dominate and may give rise to a more or less coherent understanding of the urban. However, it does not follow that we should consider only the specificities of urban territories and fall into the trap of singularity. Rather, urbanisation can be seen as a general but differentiated process with several dimensions. It is composed of a wide range of particular urbanisation processes unfolding in the confrontation of general processes and specific territorial conditions that can be identified through comparative analysis. From a more general perspective, this highlights and confirms the necessity of developing a differentiated view of urbanisation. The reduction of the concept of urbanisation to certain universal principles or mechanisms cannot suffice to address productively the diversity and richness of the contemporary urban universe. By identifying different processes of urbanisation as constitutive elements of an urbanising planet, we go beyond the apparent contradiction between universalising and particularising research strategies and provide a dynamic understanding of urbanisation processes across the divides that characterise our contemporary world. Urban territories are open to a vast range of urban

developments and hence also to realising the possibilities that are intrinsic to urbanisation.

Therefore, new concepts and terms are urgently required in order to help us to decipher the varied and restlessly mutating landscapes of urbanisation that are currently being produced across the planet. It is necessary to diversify the empirical references and theoretical sources in urban theory, and to enrich our language with a wider palette of terms that represent the manifold emerging urban situations and urban processes. The goal is not to develop a unifying language, but to propose an enriched vocabulary that leads to a differentiated view of the world and helps us to better understand the dynamics of urbanisation. The development of a more diversified vocabulary of urbanisation allows us to offer a more differentiated framework for analysis and practice, and to facilitate the exchange of ideas and debates in urban studies that is increasingly multilingual and global in character.

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Research Note

Rethinking Housing Alternatives in Aging Cities: Exclusion and Resilience among the Urban Elderly in Japan

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of ongoing urbanization and demographic aging, this paper critically examines the limitations of Japan's formal housing system in addressing the needs of an expanding population of impoverished seniors living alone. It investigates how informal arrangements, shaped within legally ambiguous contexts, have taken form as viable responses under the strain of diminishing public interventions and escalating market pressures. Although frequently delegitimized, subsistence-based and unregulated practices continue to provide essential shelter for marginalized groups excluded from formal housing domains. Drawing on international comparisons, the paper contends that such alternatives, when facilitated by adaptive policy frameworks, possess the potential to alleviate housing precarity. Ultimately, it calls for a reconsideration of the rigid formal-informal dichotomy in order to promote more integrative and resilient housing strategies in aging urban environments.

Keywords

urban aging; informal alternatives; housing practice; elderly poverty; Japan

1. Introduction

Recent years have seen a marked global acceleration in urbanization and aging. In Japan, where these dynamics are unfolding concurrently, there is a compelling imperative to align analyses of urbanization with demographic transitions. Even in the Tokyo metropolitan area, home to the largest proportion of working-age cohorts, those aged 65 and over are projected to comprise around 35% by 2045 (Cabinet Office 2019). Yet the built environment of the city has not been sufficiently restructured to manage this shift, notably in the housing sector. Beyond the rising demand, the primary challenge lies in ensuring the availability of accessible and affordable accommodation for the growing number of urban seniors.

Heightened economic deprivation has aggravated housing precarity among this demographic. While the national poverty rate declined slightly from 16.1% in 2012 to 15.4% in 2021 (MHLW 2022), the rate for older adults living alone reached 37%, far exceeding 14% observed among couples in the same age

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bracket (Abe 2024). With their numbers expected to swell from 7.38 million in 2020 to 10.49 million by 2050 (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research 2025), the elderly in single-person households are poised to constitute a substantial share of the urban poor. This trend points to a resurgent housing crisis amid societal and spatial transformation in progress.

Historically, housing policy was a central pillar of social welfare. This paradigm was generally realized through the construction of public housing, with the aim of formalizing substandard settlements via clearance or upgrading schemes. Nevertheless, the turn toward neoliberal modes of governance has curtailed public sector engagement, disproportionately impacting single-person older households, especially those lacking financial and social support. This marginalization underscores the necessity of reassessing existing policy frameworks and implementing measures that more effectively respond to the evolving needs of disadvantaged groups.

In the face of demographic aging, this paper advocates for reimagining alternative practices and embedding them as a deliberate component of urban housing policy. Through the lens of the elderly living alone in Tokyo, it evaluates the constraints of formalization initiatives and the viability of informal arrangements as resilient and pragmatic pathways. The discussion also considers the applicability of such modalities beyond Japan, showing how they can deliver valuable, albeit modest, forms of shelter in cities where formal housing systems dominate and selectively receive official recognition.

2. Limitations of public housing and the shift to market-based approaches

Since the post-war recovery period, public housing in Japan has served as a fundamental platform in granting housing access to those with limited income. The Japan Housing Corporation (JHC), founded in 1955, launched this effort by building thousands of units annually, with 43,586 established in 1972 alone (UR 2023). The compilation of relevant data exhibits that private rental housing costs in the 1970s surged at more than twice the rate of inflation, whereas public sector rents remained stable, amounting to one-third of market rates (Fuwa 2024). Public housing thus played a pivotal role in enhancing household well-being and labor productivity, thereby contributing to the country's broader economic advancement.

Over time, however, the extent and function of public housing have changed. Since the creation of the Urban Renaissance Agency (UR) in 2004, which succeeded JHC, provision has been modified to conform more closely to neoliberal ideals. UR initiated a commercially oriented approach, emphasizing urban redevelopment through the encouragement of private sector involvement. As Hirayama (2005) notes, public housing construction has nearly ceased amid the shift. In fact, only 39,703 units were completed between 2005 and 2022, with just 586 in 2022 (UR 2023). By contrast, more than 72,000 condominium units were sold by private developers in the same year (Real Estate Economic Institute Co., Ltd. 2024), reflecting a pronounced reliance on profit-driven housing regimes. In light of these tendencies, only around 5% of the population resides in public housing (Statistical Bureau 2019).

Alongside the government's retreat from direct interventions, UR-managed properties have gradually diverged from the housing expectations of seniors with reduced budgets. Dwellings developed under UR tend to target middle- and higher-income segments and fall outside the affordability range of older adults. For instance, a 50-square-meter unit in a UR complex on the outskirts of Tokyo rents for approximately 120,000 Japanese yen (JPY) per month, while 38.3% of elderly residents earned less than that monthly amount in 2019 (Tokyo Metropolitan Welfare Bureau 2019). Municipal programs operated by the Tokyo Metropolitan

Government offer lower-cost options, with average rents around JPY 23,000 (Office for Housing Policy 2018). Nonetheless, the high demand renders access to these opportunities highly competitive. Application ratios may escalate to twenty applicants per unit, and acceptance rates may drop to one in thirty-six for the properties designated for older adults, such as "Silver Peer" (JKK Tokyo 2023a, 2023b). Yamamoto (2023) recounts the case of an 87-year-old man who waited fifteen years for public housing, exemplifying the scale of unmet need.

Another issue is the age and design of the existing public housing stock. As of 2018, less than one-quarter of them originated after 1995; in comparison, 60% can be traced back to before the mid-1980s (MLIT Japan 2016). These outdated buildings frequently warrant major upgrades, particularly in seismic safety and plumbing. Many were completed during the 1970s, incorporating designs for the nuclear family configuration prevalent at the time. Commonly measuring about 50 square meters and subdivided into small rooms lacking barrier-free features, such layouts are ill-suited to the living needs of single-person elderly households. The absence of elevators in many multi-story buildings impedes accessibility for those with mobility difficulties.

Prevailing beliefs that older renters are undesirable have reinforced Japan's long-standing preference for homeownership, further narrowing their housing choices. In 2019, the homeownership rate was 61.2% overall and 88.2% among those aged 60 and over, remaining high at 79.4% even in expensive urban areas (Cabinet Office 2019). These figures demonstrate the peripheral status of seniors in the rental market, where eligibility criteria are rigorously applied. Roughly 80% of landlords are reluctant to lease properties to prospective elderly tenants (MLIT Japan 2018a). A 2023 survey found that 26.8% of older applicants were turned down, with the rate surpassing one-third in the Kanto region, encompassing Tokyo (R65 Inc. 2023). These rejections are principally attributed to applicants' inability to obtain a guarantor, concerns regarding their financial reliability, and perceived risks associated with solitary death. Poor older adults clearly encounter formidable obstacles when attempting to enter the formal rental housing sector.

3. Rise of informal alternatives and their drawbacks

This paper seeks to critically interrogate the pervasive binary that frames the formal as inherently legitimate and desirable, while casting the informal as deficient or temporary. Yet the formal and informal are not mutually exclusive. In the realm of urban housing, informal arrangements do not simply occupy residual spaces left by formal systems; rather, they frequently materialize as locally grounded responses to regulatory voids and the shortcomings of both public provision and market-driven development. In this regard, Yiftachel's (2009) concept of "gray space" presents an important perspective through which to interpret this complexity. Gray space refers to liminal zones positioned between legality and illegality. Although institutionally sidelined, these spaces are implicitly tolerated and continue to be integral to the maintenance of everyday urban survival. In this paper, the term "informal alternatives" denotes organically generated practices that operate within such gray spaces.

The inadequacies of Japan's formal housing provisions have stimulated the spread of informal alternatives that furnish feasible solutions for vulnerable people. Among these, *kashi rooms*, a form of rental accommodation, gained prominence during the economic downturn of the 2000s. Typically converted from offices, warehouses, or apartments, these two- to four-square-meter units rent for JPY 20,000 to 30,000 per month. Without formal registration as residence, they are also labeled

dappō hausu, or "law-evading houses." Notwithstanding minimal legal safeguards, such lodgings drew tenants unable to access formal rental housing, owing to their affordability, the absence of guarantor obligations, and the issuance of documentation necessary for jobs or service contracts like mobile phones.

The momentum to delegitimize this scheme became evident in 2013, when a *kashi room* property in Tokyo's Nakano Ward was cited for breaching the Fire Service Act, despite no reported injuries or damage. Public discourse centered on legality rather than tenant rights, leading to a series of closures and evictions. Authorities acted to tighten regulations and reclassify these rooms as "dormitories" under the Building Standards Act, thereby subjecting them to more stringent compliance requirements. Violations were identified in around 80% of the investigated properties, with 80% of those located in Tokyo (MLIT Japan 2017a, 2019a). These crackdowns suppressed the supply of low-cost options and intensified the instability experienced by housing refugees, especially among seniors. Between 2007 and 2016, the proportion of homeless persons aged 60 and over soared from 42.2% to 65.7% (MHLW 2007, 2017), evidencing the excessive burden borne by the elderly in poverty.

Stricter enforcement against *kashi rooms* triggered a subsequent phase of formalization, typified by the emergence of more regulated rental rooms known as share houses. By 2021, 5,057 registered share houses existed, up from 2,804 in 2014, with approximately 70% based in the Tokyo metropolitan area (Japan Share House Organization 2021). This growth has been fueled by policy rationales derived from neoliberal principles. Even the brochure published by the responsible ministry, *Share House Guide Book* (MLIT Japan 2017b), states that multi-tenant formats can yield considerable rental returns, attracting the interest of private operators. Administrative endorsement, coupled with profitability in high-demand urban centers, has facilitated the expansion of this housing model.

Even with their proliferation, share houses have not succeeded in alleviating housing insecurity among older adults. A 2017 survey by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT Japan 2018b) highlights several barriers. Nearly one-third of share houses imposed age restrictions that disqualified elderly applicants, resulting in those over 65 representing as little as 4.9% of all tenants. Most contracts were short-term, with 4.1% lasting more than three years. Just 15.4% of rooms were priced below JPY 40,000. Half of operators reported accepting renters eligible for special housing assistance by law, which includes those in lower income tiers, elderly people, persons with disabilities, disaster victims, single-parent households, and foreign nationals. Nonetheless, 76.6% of them were foreign nationals and only 15.6% were older adults. These patterns reveal that share houses are largely tailored to the preferences of younger cohorts with high mobility, leaving aging individuals underrepresented.

Government attempts to dismantle informal alternatives have primarily focused on the enforcement of standards, such as stricter fire safety regulations and licensing mandates for dormitory-type lodgings. These policies, in fact, have limited housing availability and accessibility without enacting appropriate compensatory measures. Japan's policy direction continues to dismiss the alternatives as illegitimate, prioritizing their eradication at the expense of integration into comprehensive housing policy. This stance overlooks the adaptive value of improvised living endeavors and remains inadequate in addressing the entrenched inequities shouldered by underserved elderly populations.

4. Applying informal alternatives in the Global North

Ongoing societal realignments in the Global North are beginning to parallel those of the Global South, where informal alternatives have evolved as a coping mechanism to mediate access to housing. The majority of studies have examined those practices in rapidly urbanizing regions of the Global South, with particular emphasis on slums. However, as housing prices climb and socioeconomic disparities deepen in cities, the presence and spread of unregistered and unauthorized accommodations are expanding globally (Shrestha et al. 2021). Even in countries with well-established formal structures, some governments have begun to engage with implementable methods by acknowledging the potential of informal alternatives instead of undermining them.

In the United Kingdom, mounting housing costs have led vulnerable individuals to seek shelter in unconventional spaces, such as garages and sheds, that are leased as living quarters (Lombard 2019). Equivalent approaches have been adopted in New South Wales, Australia, where outbuildings are permitted for residential use (Gurran et al. 2021). Ireland has likewise proposed similar practices, formerly restricted, to mitigate the city's acute housing shortage (Loughlin 2025). These repurposed buildings, equipped with minimal amenities, serve as indispensable, though imperfect and sometimes criticized, housing options for populations excluded from formal avenues. Across diverse settings, the growing embrace of informal alternatives is justified as inevitable when government efforts and market logics are insufficient in relieving housing pressures.

In this line of discussion, the Republic of Korea stands as a noteworthy case. To navigate the accumulating age-related urban strains, Korea has utilized accommodations not officially classified as residences. The most notable example is the *goshiwon*, akin to Japan's *kashi rooms*, which has long been employed as a low-cost unit. Despite consistent criticism of *goshiwon* for their unsatisfactory living and safety conditions, the Korean government has undertaken regulatory adjustments geared toward incremental improvement, rather than discarding informal alternatives as has occurred in Japan. Consequently, the number of older occupants in *goshiwon* increased from 104,766 in 2017 to 177,441 in 2022, accounting for 40% in the category of secondary housing (MLIT Korea 2017, 2022). With 72.6% of them residing alone (MLIT Korea 2022), *goshiwon* appears to offer a practical mode of shelter for the elderly in comparable situations.

The experiences of those countries suggest that informal alternatives can function as protective buffers against housing insecurity when attuned to policies informed by the local milieu and socio-demographic contexts. In Japan, incorporating such alternatives into mainstream policy would necessitate institutional restructuring to guarantee safety and accessibility, in tandem with preserving affordability. The strategic application of real-world insights may contribute to the stabilization of housing conditions and the reform of chronic inequities within formal housing systems.

5. Conclusion

The convergence of aging, urbanization, and economic hardship has intensified housing insecurity among impoverished seniors living alone. Public housing has become less attainable following its reduction in scope and scale, whereas private rentals are financially out of reach. This reflects trajectories observed in the Global South, where spontaneous settlements took shape due to the persistent inaction of authorities. As shown in the international cases outlined, formulating broader housing policy must involve the inclusion of informal alternatives as purposeful elements.

A key implication of this study is that the formal-informal divide fails to capture the realities of aging in contemporary cities. Robust housing policy entails the coordination of varied tenure types, spatial patterns, and assistance mechanisms. Informal alternatives should be understood not as a deficiency in planning, but as strategies that arise in response to enduring structural constraints. Accordingly, policy recommendations call for revising regulations to permit affordable rentals that comply with basic safety requirements, allocating subsidies to elderly tenants in need, and expanding eligibility for share houses that sustain diverse urban lifestyles.

As demographic transitions accelerate, countries such as Japan confront heightened challenges in addressing poverty and social divides. Although safety remains paramount, renewed attention is essential to harness the constructive potential of subsistence tactics. This is especially evident in today's contexts, characterized by the weakening of public commitment and the ascendancy of neoliberal influence, where older adults are increasingly at risk of displacement. Policymakers and planners are thus urged to re-evaluate informality and pursue concrete visions toward more just and workable urban futures.

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Research Note

Grappling with 'Good' Care: Narratives from Kyoto's Nighttime Nurseries

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Abstract

Care is instrumentally shaped by where and when it is situated. Through the close reading of a care worker's narrative, the paper explores the contextual care practices and the emergence of situated care ethics in nighttime nursery settings. Moral and emotional negotiations of what *good care* is are central to this process, and the commitment to continue caring amidst ambivalence arises here. Care workers attend to various interests and ideals for care in looking after children outside the home at night, rather than prescribing what spatio-temporal arrangements of care are better or worse.

Keywords

Feminist ethics of care; night; nursery; childcare

Introduction

Care is inextricably shaped by the place in which it is generated and experienced (Milligan and Wiles 2010). Extending this contribution that geographers have made in the interdisciplinary study of care, this paper demonstrates how the ethics of care and its enactment are also situated in particular spatial *and* temporal contexts. The emergence of ethics of care is contingent upon cultural environments and historical trajectories (Raghuram 2016, 2019). *When* care takes place is essential to how it is made sense of, especially in its moral understanding. By exploring nighttime nurseries in Japan and the cultural ambivalence surrounding the practice of caring for children outside the home at night, I delineate the negotiation of various moral and spatio-temporal ideals of what *good care* might be, that is central in this context and the ensuing emergence of situated care ethics. Nighttime nurseries in this paper refer to nurseries open beyond 8 pm that care for children whose parents work at night.

In what follows, I first briefly trace the feminist scholarship on the ethics of care and denote its place-specificity that geographers have called attention to. Then, the geohistories of nighttime childcare in Japan and the moralising discourse on this form of childcare are outlined. The following part turns to an analysis of a narrative by a care worker, to explore the situated emergence of care ethics specific to her practice and experience of caring for children at night. It is essential to note that this is not an exhaustive attempt at theorising *the* care ethics of nighttime childcare, but rather an

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exploration of the situated emergence of the ethics of care in this setting. I conclude the paper by suggesting the significance and implications of this exercise for care studies.

Situated ethics of care

Originating in Gilligan's (1982: 74) seminal psychological work *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, the ethic(s) of care 'evolves around a central insight, that self and other are interdependent'. Standing in contrast to the emphasis on independence and autonomy in liberal ethics permeating second-wave feminist arguments (Sevenhuijsen 1998: 37-38), the feminist ethics of care conceptualises individuals as 'dependent upon one another for their survival, development and social functioning' (Engster 2007: 7-8), contesting the expectations of self-sufficiency (Held 2005), to instead foreground human vulnerabilities and conceive of a relational social ontology. While the initial conception of the ethics of care explicitly drew on women's experiences, it has been developed and advocated for as a feminist practice rather than an exclusively feminine morality. The feminist ethics of care advocates for the centrality of care in public life, de-gendering care as women's work and morality (Sevenhuijsen 1998; Tronto 1993, 2013).

Parvati Raghuram asserts that such a dislocation of care ethics from women's bodies and experiences needs to be accompanied by a further dislocation from the Global North (2016) and 'the normative white body through which much care is theorised' (2019: 629). Geographers' interest in differences across place can contribute to the studies of care ethics by spelling out the locational specificities of care through a close attention to the geohistories of care (Raghuram 2016). Care is 'strongly based in practice' (Raghuram 2016: 512); hence care ethics is 'continuously being produced and enacted through its located practices' (525). Her arguments highlight the universalising qualities of the ethics of care and urge scholars to critically reflect on how care ethics may arise and take shape differently in different places. This is particularly pivotal considering how the theorisation of care ethics originates from the Global North, the West, and white bodies, but has been mobilised as universally applicable and relevant, when in fact care is racialised, and the world is racially unequal (Raghuram 2019: 630). Greenhough et al. (2023)'s call for a scholarship on 'cultures of care' further emphasises the variegation of care among different groups. What is considered *good care* is highly contingent, and they are also always negotiated and changing, as 'each culture of care is a complex network through which care is expressed, extended, audited and at times undone' (Greenhough et al. 2023: 6).

Geohistories of nighttime childcare in Japan

The question of what constitutes *good care* recurs in the narratives of care workers providing care at night. The sociopolitical histories of nighttime childcare in Japan underlie this constant negotiation of care ideals that characterises their work. From the 1950s to the 70s, Japan experienced a period of high economic growth, and the demand for infant care and nighttime childcare surged as many women started taking up paid work outside the home (Nakata 1982: 21). The heightened demand for nighttime childcare was largely met by unregulated private childcare providers, often called baby hotels. These baby hotels came under public scrutiny in the 80s, when a journalist covered the poor conditions in which children were cared for (Domoto 1982), and many injuries and accidents, some of which were fatal, were reported at these facilities (Asano 2019: 24-25). While this has prompted governmental provisioning and licensing of nighttime nurseries, much of nighttime childcare needs remain fulfilled by private providers (Ohe 2019).

Ohe (2019, 2023) further suggests that the ambivalence around leaving children away from their family and home at night, and the negative prejudices around parents who work until late, are essentially discouraging public provisioning of nighttime childcare. Furthermore, the unsubstantiated claim that nighttime childcare adversely impacts children's physical and cognitive development remains an influential discourse in portraying nighttime nurseries in a negative light. Developmental psychologists have refuted these claims by demonstrating that the length and the nocturnal setting of childcare are not the factors that determine children's developmental states, but rather the qualities of the home environment in which they are cared for and the parents' lack of childcare support and confidence that play a strong part (Anme and Oh 2000; Anme et al. 2010). Hence, care workers play a key role in providing daily support to families by encouraging children's exposure to positive social interaction and acting as counsellors that parents can consult (Watanabe et al. 2010).

The geohistories of nighttime childcare in Japan, particularly of its moralisation in popular, public and scientific discourse over the past five decades, signify the ambivalence and anxieties surrounding the practice of caring for children at nighttime nurseries. The negotiation of such ambivalence is not incidental but central to the experience and practice of care workers at the nighttime nurseries I visited. In the following section, I analyse a narrative from an interview with a care worker, Ajisai (pseudonym), to examine the tensions she encounters in detail, and how she navigates them and narrates this process of navigation. Through this focused analysis of Ajisai's accounts, I attempt to experimentally build care ethics back up rather than drawing them down to this context (Raghuram 2016: 524). My intent is not to theorise *the* ethics of care of nighttime nurseries in Japan, but rather to demonstrate how geographers might carefully engage with a specific care culture to explore the situated emergence of care ethics.

Analysing Ajisai's narrative

Ajisai is a lead care worker at Nursery E, a licensed nighttime nursery in Kyoto, Japan, open from 7 am to 10 pm, consisting of a daytime class (until 7 pm) and a nighttime class (until 10 pm). Children have dinner in the nighttime class, and those staying after 8:30 pm also sleep until 10 pm. Ajisai has worked at the nursery for over thirty-five years and became the lead care worker seven years ago. I met her in February 2024 and interviewed her during my fieldwork in Japan from September 2023 to March 2024, where I visited 11 nurseries and interviewed 41 parents and care workers. All participants were interviewed in Japanese, and the English translations of the interview transcripts presented here are mine. The interview with Ajisai took place in a small office across from the nighttime class. It was past 5:30 pm, just before dinner time for children.

In the interview, I mentioned the negative public opinion that I often hear regarding nighttime childcare to ask what she thought. In response, she described her experience of suggesting to some parents to consider signing up for the nighttime class, as she noticed they were often late for the pick-up time at 7 pm. Noting how parents often decidedly reject these suggestions, she explained that she senses the parents' hesitance in depending on nighttime childcare. While expressing her understanding of such sentiments, Ajisai cautiously narrates how nighttime childcare may be helpful:

> Ajisai: But, um, you know, well... I think that's also a way to support the parents, um... you know the children don't have to eat dinner at the nursery every day, but at times when it's hard for the mother, when their work overruns beyond 7 pm, they rush, they rush for us, but you know you can't be late because the daytime class does end at 7 pm
> Sieun: Right

> Ajisai: So then, if you were registered for the nighttime class, for times when the mother is busy, um, the children can eat at the nursery. Then, well, after they eat they can go home and have plenty of relaxed time to play together, that's a benefit of it, so then, um, for that, um the mums, um, for when the mums are busy or tired, it helps them, um, I think they should use it whenever it's hard for them, and there's lots of children in the nighttime class! Yeah, and um, it's not like they (the children) are lonely
> [...]
> Ajisai: There are people who feel like that, certainly
> Sieun: Hmm, yes
> Ajisai: You know they feel sorry for the kids? Because it's so late at night. But you know about that, um, hmm, I think maybe I feel that I want to cherish the mum's job as well, and um
> Sieun: Right, I see
> Ajisai: Yeah, yes, and, you know, um we, for meals, uh, um, we have the meals, and um the play times as well, we have that...yeah, we do these things in a way you wouldn't feel bad for the children just because they stay here till late.

In this narrative, Ajisai recognises and negotiates the reluctance expressed by the parents and in cultural discourse, around the fact that children stay at the nursery until late. While she demonstrates her sympathy and understanding for such feelings and ideals surrounding childcare and familyhood at night, she simultaneously troubles the negative assumptions of nighttime childcare, such as the imagination that children are lonely while waiting for their parents at night. She does so by accounting for the ways nighttime nurseries can support busy mothers and their relationship with their children, by alleviating the time pressure that permeates their family lives. She further denotes her reassurance that children are not lonely, or rather that she makes sure that they are not lonely at the nursery, as they are with their peers, and their dinners and play times are taken care of attentively. Her narrative works to delineate how the practice and experience of nighttime childcare contests normative ideals of *good care* that expect children to be home at night, without dismissing the parental hesitance fuelled by it.

While Ajisai's narrative outlines how care workers make the nursery a fun and caring space at night, its narration as a *defence* against the criticism of nighttime childcare delineates her ambivalence. In our dialogue, Ajisai does not dismiss the negative remarks made towards nighttime childcare that I raise, and instead further elicits the anxieties expressed by the mothers and legitimatise them. She then narrates a defence against the critique rather than a dismissal of it by attending to these emotions and describing alternative views on how nighttime childcare may be helpful and portraying the nighttime class as lively rather than lonely. Earlier in the interview, Ajisai explained that the care workers working during the day now leave without saying goodbye to their colleagues working at night. While they used to announce their departure, this change was made so that children do not feel left behind. She expressed her intention to avoid the case where some children become bothered that their parents have not arrived yet. The care that she pours into arranging the atmosphere of the nighttime class in such ways further demonstrates her worries around how the nighttime class might be affecting the children, and the power of normative ideals for children to be at home at night.

Such ambivalence around nighttime childcare is negotiated as Ajisai speaks. She holds onto her worries towards nighttime childcare and narrates her care for the mothers and their jobs, as well as her efforts to provide *good care* for the children at the nursery. Instead of determining *the* right way to care for children, and where children should be at night, she continuously negotiates how to protect different interests and understandings of *good care* together. As Mol et al. (2010) compellingly

assert, '[r]aising an argument about which good is best "in general", makes little sense. Instead, care implies a negotiation about how different goods might coexist in a given, specific, local practice' (13). Ajisai's care demonstrated in and practised through her narrative produces a corresponding situated ethics of care that is committed to continuously negotiate and care for varying interests, expectations and experiences of children and their parents without prescribing what *good care* might be. The normative diurnal ideals of childcare that portray nighttime childcare in a negative light are reworked through this attention to diverging moralities of care and responding to care needs with various physical, emotional, and discursive care practices.

Conclusions

By attending to the place-specific histories and scientific discourse surrounding nighttime childcare in Japan, this paper has brought the culturally specific moralisations of care to the fore. Through this I have demonstrated the importance of the temporalities of care in how nighttime childcare is morally made sense of and experienced. Care workers at nighttime nurseries grapple with normative ideals of *good care*, in response to popular anxiety surrounding nighttime childcare, fuelled by historical stigma associated with baby hotels and moralised reluctance of caring for children outside the home at night. Through the close reading of a care worker's narrative, I have explored the contextual emergence of care ethics. The navigation of ambivalence around nighttime childcare is central to the practice of care workers. The commitment to continue negotiating different ideas around what *good care* is, and the different interests of children and parents were characteristic in the practice and ethics of care at nighttime nurseries. Rather than determining the correct and righteous way to care, and prescribing such ideals to this context, care workers physically, emotionally, and discursively attend to the plurality of *good care* in their setting. Through the detailed analysis of one care workers' narrative, the paper responds to Raghuram's (2016, 2019) calls to account for the inductive conceptualisation of care ethics at an exploratory capacity. In doing so, the paper also exemplifies how geographers may attend to the spatial *and* temporal specificities in the production of care practice thus ethics, illuminating the moral and discursive work that often underlie practices and experiences of care.

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Research Note

Building Social Infrastructure for Migrant Workers: A Geographical Analysis of Community-Based Japanese Language Class in Koga City, Fukuoka Prefecture

Shintaro FUKAE *

Abstract

In Japan, local governments are developing systems for community-based Japanese language education as part of social integration policies. However, about 40% of municipalities in Japan have not yet established community-based Japanese classes. This paper presents action research conducted with the city of Koga, a municipality engaged in building a multicultural society. It examines the roles of community-based Japanese classes. Reinterpreting them as “hub” rather than “third place” expands their potential to offer care and services that support foreign residents in living true to themselves. As a result, such classes are seen to function as important social infrastructure.

Keywords

immigrants; community-based Japanese classes; social infrastructure; community hub; solidarity hub; assessment; Koga; Kyushu

1. Purpose

Since the late 1970s, local citizens in Japan have been supporting the lives of foreign residents through volunteer activities. One of the most important places for this support is the community-based Japanese language class. In Japanese, the term 地域 has two meanings: *local* and *community*. In this paper, 地域日本語教室 refers to Japanese language classes organized and run by residents living in the community; therefore, the term *community* is used. Led mainly by local Japanese residents, these classes provide a space where refugees and migrants can learn Japanese, receive help with daily life, and interact with others. This paper discusses the theoretical foundation for understanding the social role and function of these community-based classes.

2. Background: Japan’s social integration policy

Japan’s policy for accepting foreign residents changed in 2018 with the release of the “Comprehensive Measures for the Acceptance and Coexistence of Foreign Nationals”

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(hereafter, the "Comprehensive Measures 2018")[1]. This marked two important changes.

First, the national government started providing financial support to local governments to help them build systems for community-based Japanese language education. In 2019, the national government launched the "Project for the Promotion of Regional Japanese Language Education Systems for the Acceptance and Coexistence of Foreign Nationals" (hereafter, the "Promotion Project")[2]. The Promotion Project supports local governments by providing funding, encouraging the appointment of coordinators with expertise in Japanese language education, and recommending classes taught by trained teachers. Because of this, community-based Japanese language classes led by volunteers are now being asked to reconsider their role and meaning.

Second, the policy clearly stated that social inclusion was one of its goals. Before the Comprehensive Measures 2018, the focus was on creating communities where foreign residents could live more easily[3]. But the Promotion Project makes it clear that foreign residents are full members of Japanese society, and that policies should be based on this idea of inclusion[4]. As a result, Japan is now working to build local Japanese language education systems that focus on social inclusion, especially by the effort of local governments.

3. Problem: Low motivation among local governments

The systems for regional Japanese language education involve many actors, including the national government, local governments, and volunteers. If we consider the national government as the macro level, local governments as the meso level, and volunteers as the micro level, we see different motivations. The national government is motivated by economic development. Volunteers are motivated by an interest in international exchange and a desire to contribute to society. But many local governments are less motivated. This is often because of the small number of foreign residents in their area and the lack of mayors who actively support multicultural coexistence. For example, as of 2023, 38.9% of local governments have not yet established community-based Japanese classes[5], although this number is going down. Increasing the motivation of local governments to support these classes is an important issue, but it has not yet been studied enough.

4. Discussion: Action research in Koga City, Fukuoka Prefecture

4.1. Overview of Koga City and its initiatives

Koga City is located in northern Kyushu, between Kitakyushu and Fukuoka City. As of March 2025, the city has about 59,000 people,

1 Please refer to the website of the Immigration Services Agency of Japan: https://www.moj.go.jp/isa/support/coexistence/nyuukokukanri01_00140.html

2 Please refer to the website of the Agency for Cultural Affairs: https://www.bunka.go.jp/seisaku/kokugo_nihongo/kyoiku/chiikinihongokyoiku/

3 Please refer to page 2 of the 2006 Comprehensive Measures for Foreign Residents as Members of Society. https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/gaikokujin/honbun2.pdf

4 Please refer to the "Purpose of the Project" section on the website provided in footnote 2.

5 Please refer to page 26 of the "Survey Results on the Actual Situation of Japanese Language Education (2023)". https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20241101-mxt_chousa01-000038170_02.pdf

including 1,300 foreign residents (about 2% of the total). About 31% of the foreign residents have "Technical Intern Training" visas, and about 20% have "Specified Skilled Worker (i)" visas. The city is known for its food processing industry.

Koga city has already had a class under the Board of Education since 2005, but that class was like a regular school and did not involve local residents.

In 2018, a new mayor took office and made a strong commitment to multicultural coexistence. In April 2020, the city government established a new Multicultural Affairs Section as a government unit within the municipal administration. Since then, I have worked with this section to start a new community-based Japanese class. I mainly served as a community-based Japanese language education coordinator in Fukuoka Prefecture, providing advice on the operation of the new community-based Japanese language class in Koga City. According to our design, the new class was to be led by local residents. In April 2022, the old class merged into the new program.

4.2. Theoretical foundations of the community-based Japanese class

When designing the class, at first, I used the concept of the "third place" (Oldenburg, 1989) to understand the Japanese class. Third place is a comfortable place in the community that is not home, work, or school, and where people can make social connections. Oldenburg (1989) listed eight features: (1) neutral ground, (2) a place where everyone is equal, (3) focus on conversation, (4) easy to access, (5) has regular visitors, (6) low-key, (7) playful, and (8) a second home. I thought that community-based Japanese classes could have these features and become places to build and rebuild social relationships. I shared this idea with the Multicultural Affairs Section, and it was accepted.

But as the class continued, some problems became clear, especially the low and decreasing number of foreign participants. Third place theory alone could not explain or solve this problem. Therefore, I looked for another theory and focused on the "hub" concept from geography. I used two ideas from Kornatowski: the "community hub" (2022) and the "solidarity hub" (2024). Community hub is a place that connects people to local resources and does "assessment," meaning it acts like a consultation center. Solidarity hub is a place where people who want to help others go to show and build solidarity.

Based on these ideas, the Japanese class can be seen as a place where local people who care about foreigners gather (solidarity hub), and also as a place where they talk, share concerns, and connect foreigners with community support (community hub). I focused on the idea of "assessment" in the community hub model. In the practice of community-based Japanese language classes, "assessment" can be considered in two stages. The first stage is to understand the background of each foreign participant: for example, their reasons for coming to Japan, future aspirations, current living conditions, previous experiences of learning Japanese, and the difficulties they face in daily life in Japan. The second stage is to identify their specific needs: for instance, the reasons they joined the class, what they hope to gain from it, and what they wish to achieve in their everyday lives. Based on such assessments, it becomes possible to provide each participant with the necessary information and to set individual goals tailored to their needs. Community-based Japanese language classes, while serving as comfortable spaces for interaction, also have the potential to function as places where foreign participants can pursue self-realization in their daily lives, grounded in such assessments.

5. Conclusion

In Koga City, local and foreign residents are now interacting through one-on-one or small-group activities that reflect the needs of the foreign participants. As the coordinator of Koga City's Multicultural Coexistence Environment Development Project, I provide advice and suggestions for these practices. My research is action research that engages with the field to improve practices and contribute to the realization of a better society. Therefore, together with city officials, I will continue to conduct action research through a cycle of "goal and issue setting," "implementation," and "evaluation." Based on this action research cycle, I plan to develop a practical hub model centered on "assessment."

Finally, this paper connects these ideas to the concept of "social infrastructure." Since Klinenberg (2018), social infrastructure has become a popular way to think about places and organizations that support social relationships. Enneking et al. (2025) list seven types: (1) public institutions, (2) commercial spaces, (3) recreational facilities, (4) religious facilities, (5) transportation, (6) digital infrastructure, and (7) groups of people. One unique point is that they include groups of people as part of social infrastructure. Enneking et al. (2025) also argue that social infrastructure does not only help build social connections but also provide care, services, and platforms for cooperation. These functions match the activities of Japanese classes. The ideas of community hub and solidarity hub can help us study these functions more deeply.

Latham and Layton (2019) suggest that thinking in terms of infrastructure helps us see the value of underappreciated public spaces and systems. To "think infrastructurally" means looking at how these spaces are made and used. They also argue that successful social infrastructure is not guaranteed. We must carefully record and explain why and how it works so that we can protect it. Since the Promotion Project does not have stable funding, it is important to share and study good examples of Japanese classes as social infrastructure. This will help continue and improve these important programs.

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Research Note

Is East Asia Global North or Global South? Rethinking from a More-than-Human Border

Ling-I CHU *

Abstract

While the Global North/South framework has replaced the West/East divide, ideological struggles over competing utopias appear to have yielded to a shared orientation toward development. Yet, as the South reinterprets its own conditions and questions the Northern path, the East — marked by an alternative desire — has subtly resurfaced. Rather than asking whether East Asia belongs to the Global South or North, this paper addresses the issue differently by exploring how alternative development might be possible in East Asia. Drawing on more-than-human border thinking, I argue that the pursue of darkness opens space for inter-Asian referencing and for reimagining development itself.

Keywords

more-than-human; divisions of the globe; border; Blue Tears; East Asia

Replacing the East–West with North–South?

In 1980, the Brandt Line was first proposed as a way to reframe the world into the Global North and Global South (Brandt 1980). That year, however, the world remained firmly divided between East and West at the height of the Cold War, a moment when few could have imagined that such a geopolitical order would shift so dramatically within the following decade. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, globalization replaced the Cold War as the dominant global framework in the 1990s, and the North–South categories effectively supplanted the earlier East–West divide. If the East–West divide represented an ideological confrontation between rival blocs envisioning competing utopias, the new globalized framework reflects a singular consensus around the pursuit of development. Development is upheld as both a universal value and a fundamental human right in globalized discourse (Chant and McIlwaine 2009; Dados and Connell 2012; Gray and Gills 2016). The categorization of North and South, as it purports, simply reflects different moments within a developmental continuum, indicating transitory standings within a global scale of advancement.

Once situated within opposing Cold War blocs, East Asia is now increasingly interconnected through integration into a globalized world. Since East Asia is no longer divided along East–West blocs, the question now becomes: in the current context of globalization, should it be considered part of the

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Global North or the Global South? This question may involve issues ranging from international power dynamics and regional security (Buzan and Segal 1994; Goh 2007) to the global division of labor and prospects for democratization (Friedman 2019; Glassman 2018; Yeung 2010).

However, if we seriously adhere to conventional North–South definitions, this question becomes may turn out to be less significant than it initially seems. Under this framework, North and South are merely categories along a single developmental continuum, with each country positioned somewhere along the spectrum. Moreover, such classifications are provisional, what is considered "South" today may be reclassified as "North" tomorrow. The one-dimensional North–South classification in this sense might serve practical purposes, such as comparing development levels, but it provides limited insight into what East Asia is, what development entails, and how development takes shape within the region.

But can we really say that the divide between the West and the East has truly vanished in the tides of history? When the South begins to realize that the path taken by the North, often upheld as a set of universal norms, may not be suitable for its own development, and thus seeks to break away from dominant knowledge frameworks, reassess its own conditions, and explore alternative trajectories, this shift points to the persistence of a hidden East–West distinction (Dados and Connell 2012; Grovogu 2011). The seemingly unified consensus on development may, in fact, obscure the power relations embedded within it. In other words, within the Global North–South framework there lies the East–West divide. If this is the case, then the question of whether one belongs to the Global North or South becomes all the more crucial, as it may reveal a deeper and enduring colonial relationship between the West and the rest.

Then, is East Asia, after all, part of the Global North or the Global South? This paper approaches the question from a different perspective by tracing the East–West power relations underlie the North–South framework. We suggest that the more critical question to ask is how those constructed as the "Other" by the North or the West, whether designated as the South or the East, might embody alternative possibilities. Accordingly, the question may be reframed as: *How is an alternative beyond the established framework possible in East Asia?*

Wouldn't East Asia, known for its developmentalism, constitute an alternative path to development distinct from that of the Global North? Indeed, it may be an alternative to the laissez-faire market economy represented by the Washington Consensus — if such a thing truly exists in reality (Amsden 2001; Wade 2010). Even so, when East Asian developmentalism seeks to leapfrog and catch up through state-led concentration of efforts, it reveals their continued pursuit of Western recognition and submission to global rankings, implying that their path may be less "alternative" than it seems (Woo-Cumings 1999).

Even more embarrassing is that we East Asians are always at odds with one another. There are lingering tensions between Koreans and Japanese, constantly tries to outcompete Korea, and China has strained relations with many of its neighbors (Chu 2004; Er 2017; Hwang 2003). Perhaps the underlying reason for this discord is that we view each other primarily as competitors in global rankings (Cumings 1999). In doing so, we have undermined the very basis for inter-Asian referencing (Chen 2002).

Blue Tears at the border

Yet in certain contexts, glimmers of the alternative do emerge. When the waves crash against the shore, the sea's abundant bioluminescent plankton emit a faint, glowing light. To romantic poets, these are the tears of

the ocean. Blue Tears is a phenomenon that occurs at the border.

With the arrival of the rainy season each April, silicate sediments from exposed terrestrial surfaces, which suggest patterns of large-scale urbanization, are washed into rivers and transported offshore. The influx of nutrients triggers diatom blooms and leads to the rapid proliferation of *Noctiluca scintillans*, a bioluminescent plankton species that feeds on the diatoms (Chiang and Tsai 2017).

While bioluminescence of this kind is not uncommon, in highly urbanized areas severe light pollution often renders it invisible. The Matsu Islands are one of the few exceptions. Although they belonging to Taiwan, the Matsu Islands are situated just off the coast of Fuzhou, a major metropolitan area in China. The islands' long-standing role as a Cold War frontline has kept them dark enough to witness the ephemeral glow. With the rise of Blue Tears tourism, Matsu has transformed from a militarized borderland into a breathtaking wonderland.

In search of darkness

However, Blue Tears is not entirely a natural phenomenon. It is, in fact, a byproduct of development, reflecting human impact on the environment. Furthermore, the Blue Tears phenomenon has also sparked tourism-driven competition between the islands, some governed by Taiwan and others by China, subtly reshaping cross-strait relations. One point of consensus among these competitors is that light pollution poses a serious threat to the visibility of Blue Tears.

This is the broader context behind the dark sky movement in Matsu. Creating a darker sky requires rethinking and redesigning lighting systems so that they operate more efficiently, conserve energy, and minimize light pollution. The pursuit of darkness is not only about making the Blue Tears visible; along the way, it also brings back starlight and contributes to the creation of a more ecologically friendly environment. More importantly, the movement can be understood as part of a wider transformation in everyday life, as it resonates with emerging lifestyles such as slow food, mindful consumption, and an appreciation for quiet soundscapes (Lin 2020).

Cross-border connections provide crucial support for this reorientation of local development agendas. Among them, the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) plays a key role by offering guidelines for improving lighting environments and certifying exemplary cases as International Dark Sky Places (Hunter, 2013). Advocates in Taiwan actively engage with counterpart organizations in South Korea and Japan through the network of dark-sky communities. South Korea's Yeongyang Firefly Eco Park and Japan's Iriomote-Ishigaki National Park, the first two certified Dark Sky Places in Asia, serve as important models for learning and reference (Lin 2019; Lin and Liu 2020a, 2020b, 2020c).

This movement opened up new possibilities for inter-Asian referencing, as it resonates with certain forms of knowledge, affect, and memory across East Asia. Whether placed on the frontlines of the Cold War or incorporated into the global division of labor through developmentalism, the people of East Asia have endured the logic of sacrificing the self for the nation, of giving up the small parts for the greater whole, in these contexts. The search for dark skies evokes a renewed attentiveness to one's place and to the interdependence we share with others in the world. It resists the logic of sacrificing the homeland — soil, sea, and sky — for the sake of national development. This alternative form of bottom-up, cross-border interaction can thus be seen as reclaiming a basis for inter-Asian referencing, moving beyond the colonial histories, national identities, and economic comparisons that are deeply intertwined in the region.

Conclusion

Through the Blue Tears at the border and the cross-border search for darkness, I explore how alternative possibilities might take shape in East Asia from three aspects:

First, this case underscores the possibility of darkness as a form of development. It is neither the territorial confrontation that marked the Cold War nor a race among developmental states to climb global rankings. Instead, the pursuit of darkness, aligned with eco-friendly and mindful ways of living, addresses the wounds borne by East Asian peoples and opens up possibilities for healing. In this sense, darkness not only provides an alternative to development but also enriches its meaning.

Second, reflection rarely arises without cause; it is usually triggered in specific sites or circumstances. Here, the encounter and entanglement of silicates, rain, seawater, waves, and plankton, together with urbanization, Cold War legacies, and developmental aspirations, coalesce into the phenomenon of Blue Tears, which sparks such reflective moments. In turn, Blue Tears also participate in the cross-border exchange and learning inherent in the search for darkness. I suggest that they not only lay a more-than-human foundation for inter-Asian referencing but also broaden our very imagination of what referencing itself can be.

Finally, this case foregrounds the geographical stakes of alternative development. It does not suggest that East Asia has transitioned into a post-development stage, nor that the entire region shares identical conditions for pursuing alternative pathways. Following Mignolo's (2000, 2011, 2012) notion of border thinking, I stress the disjunction between knowledge and geography. When prevailing epistemic frameworks cannot adequately capture local experiences, the ensuing in-betweenness, although unsettling, can open up points of departure for actions that exceed existing paradigms. Rather than slotting East Asia into North–South or East–West schemas, we should attend more closely to the knowledge, affects, and memories circulating at the margins, to those unruly geographies that remain unconfined by such frameworks.

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Research Note

Translation as an Academic Practice: The Appropriation of Geographical Knowledge in Taiwan

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Abstract

This paper examines the translation of geographical knowledge in Taiwan to show how academic translation mediates local social changes. It highlights how translation has always been undervalued despite its importance in laying research and teaching foundation. Focusing on three key academic institutions, the study details their translation efforts on spatial theory and how these were integrated with broader activities such as social activism and community engagement. Finally, the author reflects on how knowledge-peripheral countries, while emulating advanced nations through translation, may still anchor knowledge production in local contexts, thereby transforming the hegemony of English into shared English commons.

Keywords

translation politics; knowledge politics; translated modernity

Introduction

Modernity, as a specific historical condition and process of social development, is not only characterized by the global expansion of Western political and economic power, but also reflected in translation practices shaped by asymmetrical power relations. In East Asia, both Japan and China experienced what Liu (1995) terms “translated modernity,” which indicates forced modernization and nation-building under Western influence. Translation in this context was a vital tool for introducing foreign knowledge, given the intellectuals’ anxiety in national salvation and thought reform.

However, how translated foreign academic literature truly works in fostering theoretical and empirical innovation within local scholarly communities is seldom examined. This oversight highlights the marginalization of academic translation in broader processes of knowledge dissemination and innovation. Although the importance of translated texts for learning, teaching, and research is widely recognized, translation continues to be regarded as secondary to “original” scholarship—although such originality itself is often rooted in borrowed foreign theories and perspectives.

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This paper examines the translation of geographical knowledge in Taiwan to make a case on how academic translation mediates comprehension, critique, and action. It first highlights how translation has not only served as a crucial channel for introducing Western thought but also fostered intellectual innovation. Despite this contribution, academic translation is still regarded as secondary to original scholarship, revealing an implicit hierarchy between imitation and innovation.

The study then focuses on three key institutions—the Department of Geography at National Taiwan University (DG at NTU), the Department of Geography at National Taiwan Normal University (DG at NTNU), and the Graduate Institute of Building and Planning at National Taiwan University (GIBP at NTU)—analyzing how they engage with translated geographical and spatial theory to enrich teaching, research, and social involvement. Finally, this paper reflects on how academic communities in knowledge-peripheral contexts can move beyond imitation and dependency by localizing and adapting Western knowledge, thereby fostering more autonomous and contextually grounded forms of knowledge production and practice.

Important but marginalized academic translations

Academic translation in postwar Taiwan can generally be divided into two main categories: government-sponsored and privately published translations.

In terms of government support, Taiwan's National Institute for Compilation and Translation (NICT) played a key role in academic translation, producing major works of global scholarship. For example, with the support of the NICT, Professor Yi-Chung Hsueh from the Department of Geography at Chinese Culture University translated and published Richard L. Morrill's *The Spatial Organization of Society* in 1985 (the original second edition was published in 1974). And Professor Kuei-Cheng Pan of the Department of Geography at National Taiwan Normal University translated Yi-Fu Tuan's *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (originally published in 1977) in 1998.

In 1997, the National Science Council (NSC)—the primary funding body for research for universities in Taiwan—launched the *Translation and Annotation Program for Classics in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, a dedicated initiative to support academic translation. Under this program, Professor Cheng-Chung Wu of the DG at NTNU received funding to translate and publish Jane Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* in 2007 and Ebenezer Howard's *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* in 2020.

Meanwhile, since the late 1980s, in response to Taiwan's increasing social openness and the academic shift toward critical perspectives, private publishers have invested heavily in translating Western texts on humanities and social science. These translations spanned disciplines such as philosophy, history, sociology, political science, and more (Wang 2005), though geography—especially human geography—was notably absent, reflecting its marginal academic status in Taiwan at the time.

In the early stages, many translations were adapted from simplified Chinese editions produced in China, which were then converted and refined for local publication. As Taiwanese scholars and graduate students gained expertise, the amount of locally produced translations witnessed a significant growth. The expansion of higher education in the mid-1990s further stimulated the academic translation market. However, steady decrease in university students coming along with demographic decline and the rise of digital reading have also posed as a counter-force that reduced the demand for printed translations. This leads to the cutback in the translation of large-scale series, even though the number of translated academic works continue to expand.

Despite this growth, concerns persist. Taiwan's small domestic market has been limiting publishers' ability to sustain serious academic translations. The massive influx of low-priced translations from China moreover aggravates competitive and cultural challenges, while, on the contrary, Taiwanese publications entering the Chinese market often face censorship (Lai et al. 2015). The society's lack of recognition on translation poses yet an even more fundamental problem. Academic faculties, who are supposedly capable of the job, are discouraged by the time-consuming nature of translation and its low academic value in a system prioritizing research output. For this, calls have emerged for increased government support to sustain quality translation works, whether through funding, higher translation fees, or formal academic recognition (Lai et al. 2015).

Furthermore, senior academics sometimes advise junior scholars to avoid excessive involvement in translation, warning that it may overshadow their original research. Some scholars may even dismiss translations as inferior to source texts, reinforcing the perception that translation is intellectually less valuable. Ultimately, academic translation occupies a paradoxical position: widely acknowledged as important, yet consistently marginalized. This is reflected in both its low academic prestige and the rarity of translations being treated as the subject of serious scholarly study.

Translation for comprehension

In Taiwan, physical geography aligns closely with natural sciences, whereas human geography has remained marginal within the humanities and social sciences (Wu et al., 2006). Both were initially shaped by positivism. By the 1990s, amid Taiwan's localization, democratization, and academic critical turn, perspectives like critical political economy, cultural studies, and feminism began to influence human geography. New methods such as phenomenology and textual analysis emerged, moving away from positivism. However, a distinctly critical orientation only fully developed after 2000 (Wu et al., 2006).

The translation of contemporary geographical thoughts was essential in facilitating this critical turn. Due to positivism's legacy and Taiwanese geography institutes' limited training in epistemology, critical theories like radical geography, feminism, poststructuralism, and Foucauldian thoughts often seemed inaccessible because of their abstract language and unfamiliar styles. Given this, faculty and students from the geography departments of NTNU and NTU's, as well as NTU's Graduate Institute of Building and Planning (GIBP) embarked on the translation of key works.

At NTU, Professor Lan-Hung Nora Chiang led a project culminating in the 1996 publication *Contemporary Issues in Geographical Thought: Selected Translations* (thereafter *Contemporary Issues*) (Chiang et al. 1996). The 1996 first edition offered a traditional overview of geographical thought, covering key paradigms, debates, and geographic development in Europe and North America. It included Holt-Jensen's (1988) introduction of Kuhn's scientific paradigms and the three major schools of traditional, quantitative, and critical geography, with an emphasis on humanistic and radical perspectives. Self-published by NTU's Geography Department, it adopted a historical approach while acknowledging post-quantitative developments.

The 2000 second edition of *Contemporary Issues* added articles on social and feminist geography, reflecting both the editors' interests and Taiwanese scholarship's critical turn, plus a piece by Laurence J. C. Ma on humanistic geography, postmodernism, and new regional geography (Chiang et al. 2000). Published by Tonsan, a respected social sciences publisher in Taiwan, it marked a shift toward market-oriented translation. The third edition (Chiang et al. 2014) continued this trend, adding

translations focused on East Asia—including feminist geography in Taiwan and Hong Kong, migrant women's experiences in Hawaii, skilled migration to Australia, and thematic cartography. It also featured two original articles by local scholars on migration studies and tourism geography, bringing Asia-Pacific studies and Taiwanese geographers to the front.

Given that NTNU was originally established for the training of secondary teachers, education remained its Geography Department's focus. In 1992, notes on the history of geographical thoughts from a lecture by Paul Claval, NTNU's visiting scholar at that time, were translated and revised into a book: *A History of Geographical Thoughts* (2003). The book traces geography from ancient Greece to postmodern developments, offering a cohesive narrative unified by Claval's perspective, unlike the multi-author reader by NTU. The 2005 second edition added chapters on globalization, GIS, the cultural turn, and human geography's future. Later editions even appeared in China (2007, 2015) with minimal changes.

Also in 2005, Chih-hung Wang and colleagues translated Richard Peet's *Modern Geographical Thought* (originally 1998), focusing on post-quantitative human geography, including existentialism, phenomenology, radical Marxist geography, postmodernism, and feminist geography. Peet's leftist stance is demonstrated by the book's significant attention on Marxist and critical political economy perspectives.

Compared to earlier NTU and NTNU texts, Peet's work is more current and introduces critical perspectives less familiar with the contemporaneous Taiwanese society. Even with the translation, readers still rely on instructors for explanation, suggesting that language access alone is insufficient; critical thinking requires supportive teaching and research to integrate critique with social practices. Such orientation also aligns with the lead translator Wang's background at NTU's GIBP, an interdisciplinary center blending Western critical theory, social critique, and practice. The next section discusses GIBP's translation efforts.

Translation for critique and social action

Unlike other geography institutions in Taiwan, the Graduate Institute of Building and Planning (GIBP) at NTU was founded with practical goals tied to national development. It later evolved into a research and teaching institute deeply engaged in local social practices, civic struggles, as well as spatial planning and design.

Concerning itself with Taiwan's democratization and localization progress, GIBP emphasized not only planning expertise but also critical social analysis, aiming to address real-world issues and even facilitate social changes. Unlike its fellow institutions on spatial design and planning, which are more technically oriented, GIBP focused on critical theories in architecture, urban studies, and spatial-societal relations. Professor Chu-Joe Hsia, a UC Berkeley Ph.D., played a vital role in shaping this approach, and for this he also encouraged students to translate key theoretical works. Their efforts were compiled into a reader: *Readings in Social Theories and the Cultural Form of Space*.

The first edition of *Readings in Social Theories and the Cultural Form of Space* (Hsia, 1988) features 15 translated essays from environmental psychology, architectural criticism, urban studies, geography, intellectual history, and semiotics by Allen Scott, Manuel Castells, Michel Foucault, and others. In the preface, Hsia (1988) explains that the book's purpose is to challenge the profession's narrow focus on technical skills and regulation norms by introducing theoretical frameworks that analyze space through historical and social realities. He argues that Taiwan's spatial structure mirrors its position in global capitalism and must be understood through its economic, political, and cultural contexts.

Without such critical insight, professionals cannot effectively address spatial issues, not to mention transform them.

Many of the essays in the 1988 reader stemmed from Chu-Joe Hsia's teaching and his Berkeley training, exemplified by his 1987 dissertation titled as *An Epistemological Critique of Contemporary Aesthetic Theories on Architecture: Towards a Social Theory on the Cultural Form of Space*. Hsia later translated his dissertation into Chinese (Hsia 1992), and along with the 1988 reader, it became a foundational text for GIBP students and their access to the then avant-garde theoretical discourses.

For instance, Hsia (1992) critically examined theorists like Kevin Lynch, Christopher Alexander, Manfredo Tafuri, Roland Barthes, and the Althusserian School, analyzing how they related spatial form to cultural and social context. His critiques exposed the ideological limits of humanist and poststructuralist approaches—arguing that the former ignored political-economic realities, while the latter failed to confront state power or account for collective agency.

Another example is Hsia's introduction of Manuel Castells. Castells was Hsia's advisor at Berkley, so his theories somewhat guided GIBP faculty and students throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Castells' concepts—such as urban social movements, project identity, the space of flows, and the local state as a critical arena for civic action—had a profound influence on GIBP's involvement in participatory community planning, civic protests, preservation movements, and the pursuit of a citizen-oriented urban vision.

Castells' influence did not end with his translated essays in the 1988 reader though. At the turn of the 2000s, Hsia spearheaded the translation of *The Information Age* trilogy (Castells, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2002). GIBP students also contributed to the translation of Castells' writings afterwards, introducing further discussion on the space of flows, planning and social change, and urban sociology. These translations were published in the academic journal *Cities and Design*, edited by Hsia, as well as in the *Bulletin of the Graduate Institute of Building and Planning*.

In 1994, *Readings in Social Theories and the Cultural Form of Space* was released in a substantially revised edition (Hsia and Wang, 1994). This edition added key texts by Castells and Foucault, as well as works on spatial theory by Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Pierre Bourdieu, and Roland Barthes. It also included three feminist-oriented essays on geography, housing design, and urban studies, broadening the range of critical perspectives.

Overall, GIBP's academic translations at NTU stand out in Taiwan for their scope and depth. They encompass a wide array of interdisciplinary fields, including architecture, environmental planning and design, environmental psychology, geography, cultural studies, and sociology. And, during this process, they stick to the focus on critical theory and its application on empirical research and social practice.

Discussion and conclusion

Translation, including the translation of geographical knowledge, is not merely a conversion of words and meanings but fundamentally a worlding process that demands different worlds of life to understand, empathize with, compete against, negotiate with, and cooperate with one another. It is essentially about how differences might coexist. The implication of this paper should therefore not be limited to academic translation alone; we should remember that the social worlds the academia depends on, investigates, and helps construct are themselves translated through scholarly practices.

However, given that the global academic community remains entrenched in the hegemony of the English language and Western-dominated systems of knowledge production, academic translation in knowledge-peripheral

countries such as Taiwan operates within asymmetrical relationships shaped by postcolonial contexts. In response to this situation, we propose two possible directions for reflection and action.

First, to move beyond imitation and dependency, local knowledge production must ground the translation and appropriation of Western knowledge in local experiences and issues. This approach enables the development of contextually rooted yet broadly relevant concepts and theories. Translation, in this sense, embodies a creative tension between mobility and rootedness—the former is embodied by the transgression of cultural boundaries while the latter seeks anchorage in the local context.

Second, the role of English should be reimagined. Ideally, it should function not as a hegemonic language but a shared commons accessible to all. This shift requires a serious re-examination of power imbalances between English and other languages, such as Chinese, that reflect lingering imperial hierarchies. In this context, sustained translation efforts are pivotal. As translation concerns the profound exploration of language selection, it is indispensable for opening up a more equitable space for knowledge exchange. In this way, intellectual contributions may be preserved in both local languages and English, while the expanding body of English works from diverse cultures serves as a shared resource—no less, and no more.

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Research Note

How have Japanese Geographers Read the Works of Nineteenth-Century German Geographers?

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Abstract

This paper addresses how Japanese geographers have read the works of 19th German geographers: Carl Ritter and Ernst Kapp. While the main problem of modern geography was understood as the environmentalism, especially the opposition between 'environmental determinism' and 'possibilism', some Japanese geographers proposed an alternative interpretation of the paradigm of 'modern geography' that addressed the spatial system and hierarchy and its temporal processes.

Keywords

geographical thought; paradigm; translation; modern German geography

1. Introduction

Most geographers would think that 'quantitative and theoretical revolution' changed the paradigm of 'classic modern geography' and that 'New Geography' was established as 'spatial science' during the 1950s (Cresswell 2024). We would understand that this 'New Geography' was criticized by Marxian or critical and humanist geographers since the second half of the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s, and fierce disputes among them have led to the multiple paradigms in 'contemporary geography'.

However, what is the paradigm of classic modern geography begun in the 19th century? The conceptions of Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859), Carl Ritter (1779-1859), Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904), and Paul Vidal de la Blache (1845-1918) have sometimes been understood only in the context of 'environmentalism', that is to say, the opposition between 'determinism' and 'possibilism', and the research of 'Landschaft morphologie' (landscape morphology).

These understandings are not wrong. However, these have been criticized and revised by many geographers who belong to different historical and geographical, or various cultural, political, and social contexts. In Japan, there were a lot of translations and investigations on the plural histories of European geographical thoughts since the Meiji Restoration. Japanese modern academic geographies have been established under the strong influence of European geographies, in particular German geography. Japanese geographers have made these investigations crossing their own cultural, social, and academic context. I think these include the distinct and original interpretations

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on European geographies, but most of these articles were written by Japanese. Language barrier still prevents us from making the circulation and crossing of different knowledges and ideas.

In this paper, I present some interpretations on the works of Carl Ritter and Ernst Kapp by three Japanese geographers belonging to different generations.

Firstly, Saburo Noma (1912-1991) was the representative of the first generation of researchers on the history of European geographical thought. Noma (1963, 1979) described the formation of modern German geography from the beginning of the movement of 'Reine geographie' (pure geography).

Secondly, Keiichi Takeuchi (1932-2005) was engaged in social geography in Italian and Mediterranean World, and he also wrote many articles on the histories of geographical thoughts from the perspective of the articulation between academic and popular geographies. He was a former chairperson of the IGU commission of the history of geographical thought.

Finally, Tetsuya Hisatake (1947-2007) was one of leading cultural geographers, who researched the geographical and cartographical knowledges of North American indigenous people as well as the history of cultural geography, in particular Carl O. Sauer and his Berkeley School which was influenced by the ideas of German thinkers: Johann Gottfried Herder and Friedrich Ratzel.

2. Geographical science as spatial and temporal relationships and processes: The idea and method of 'Modern geography' by C. Ritter

Noma (1963, 1979) and Takeuchi (1981) reconsidered the concept of 'Allgemeine vergleichende Geographie (general and comparative geography)' by Ritter. Noma pointed out that Ritter deliberately used the term of 'Geographischen Wissenschaft' to distinguish his new concept of geography from the old type of 'Geographie' that was presented as random lists and miscellaneous descriptions of geographical phenomena in places and areas.

According to Noma, the movement of 'Reine Geographie' in the second half of the 18th century had played an important role in making this new Geographischen Wissenschaft. Before this movement, the only raison d'être of geographical knowledge was useful for monarch, politician, merchant, and so on. Geography was a part of 'Staatenkunde' (the state or the political discipline). In Staatenkunde, a monarch assigned two elementary roles to geographers: one was setting and resetting the boundary among states; the other was collecting basic information in his territory. The state boundary had changed constantly due to war and political marriages. But with Reine Geographie, a new idea of boundary based on natural or physical conditions was introduced into geography to fix state boundary. Although the concept of natural boundary was very simple, it transformed the old 'feudal geography' into a 'scientific discipline'. Farinelli (1983, 1989) has a more radical way of thinking that Reine Geographie was the emergency of 'civil (bourgeois) geography' which tried to liberate geographers from the dominance of cartographic reasoning.

What is the basic idea of Ritter's 'Geograhischen Wissenschaft'? Noma and Takeuchi mentioned that Ritter did not consider new geography as environmentalism and teleological or mythical cosmology. Ritter sought to study 'geographical individuals' and their positions on the surface of the earth by uncovering not only the general laws governing natural forces, but also those governing historical and cultural forces. Ritter designed scientific research of the system or 'Anordnung' (ordering) of spatial relations at various scales on the earth by the comparative and relational approach: the reciprocal relationships from 'das Einzelne' (Part) to 'das Ganze' (Whole) and from Whole to Parts. Ritter considered that these complex interrelationships had

hierarchical ones between part and whole in the nesting spatial scales.

However, Ritter divided a continent into its basic parts and structure by not economic, cultural (ethnic) and political unit, but the natural one. Can it be said that he did not hold an environmental determinist perspective? According to Takeuchi, although we may be able to recognize the limitation of this concept of regional division by natural elements, we should remember that Ritter had always criticized the subordination of geography to 'Staatenkunde'. Takeuchi estimates that his concept of regional unit was the basic method that could exclude the influence of Staatenkunde from his Geographischen Wissenschaft.

In fact, Ritter was also interested in the change of traffic routes and means, and the impacts of its historical development on the relationships among the continents or places on the Earth. Ritter thought that these relationships never fixed permanently and always changed. For example, he mentioned if the isthmus of Suez or Panama was dug in the future, this project could change the spatial relations in the world and the position of Europa could become more prominent, because Europa occupied favorable position to connect with all other regions in the world easily. Takeuchi thought that the transformations of time-space relations or the relativity of space-time were the main topic in Ritter's geography.

Ritter's basic conception has been misunderstood or disregarded due to his difficult ideas and mistranslations. Takeuchi pointed out Élisée Reclus, the French translator of Ritter's work, might not understand the perspective of the complex interrelations between Whole and Parts. Therefore, Takeuchi evaluated that Reclus had trivialized the conception of 'räumliche Anordnung' by Ritter to simple environmentalism.

3. The conception of cultural geography by Ernst Kapp

Ernst Kapp may have been forgotten as a geographer. In Japanese academic world in the 1950s, the work of Kapp was recognized as the philosophy of modern technology, but any Japanese philosophers did not take any notice of the aspect of Kapp as a geographer. However, Noma (1963) pointed out that the position of Kapp was peripheral among Ritter's successors, but his work (1845) was very famous and popular in his time, because it could connect the ideas of Hegel and those of Ritter. Hisatake (2000) also pointed out that it was in this book that Kapp coined the term of 'Culturgeographie'.

His book was constructed by three parts: Die physische geographie, Die politische geographie, and Die culturgeographie. While the part of political geography made up more than half of this work, the number of pages of cultural geography was relatively small. Kapp's political geography was very known by European intellectual. For example, he had influenced the ideas of land power and sea power by Carl Schmitt (1954). Claude Raffestin (1995) regarded the work of Kapp as 'missing link' between Ritter's Erdkunde and Raztel's Politische geographie.

When the German revolution begun in 1848, Kapp went into exile to the America continent. This experience as an exile brought new ideas to Kapp. He wrote second edition of his book (1868) whose contents were rather different from first one. According to Hisatake, while the part of political geography of Kapp's book was strongly influenced by the world view of Hegel or his philosophy of world history, the part of cultural geography showed his position as Hegel's leftist group, including Karl Marx. Hisatake (2000) thought that the ideological position of Kapp was closer to Marx than Hegel. His cultural geography was largely divided into two parts: 'Die Geographie der Raumcultur' (geography of space-culture) and 'Die

geographie der Zeitcultur' (geography of time-culture).

In the part of space-culture Kapp (1845: 365, translated by author) introduced the key concept of 'Arbeit' (Labor) into cultural geography:

> Die Arbeit ist die Seele der Cultur. Die Cultur füllt die Kluft zwischen Natur und Geist, sie ist die ewige Brüke zwischen der Materie und den Gedanken. In der Cultur kommt durch den Menschen die Natur zu sich, und erhält mittels seiner Thätigkeit und Arbeit ihre Vollendung. Die Arbeit macht den Menschen wahrhaft zum Herren der Wirklichkeit.
>
> (Labor is the mind of culture. Culture fills the gap between nature and mind, it is eternal bridge between the material and the thought. Nature becomes culture through human being and is granted completeness by his activity and labor. Labor makes men the true master of reality.)

Hisatake considered that Kapp could overcome a kind of idealism including Ritter's thought and re-interpret the traditional concept of landscape by the concept of labor and property, and his cultural geography tried to explore new approach between human activity and natural environment beyond idealism. However, Kapp remained optimistic about the industrialization of the world (Schultz 1996), and did not address problems such as the alienation of labor that was a unique issue to the modern world which Marx discussed in the *Capital*.

In the part of time-culture, Kapp's one of the main concepts was 'Die Verklärung der Natur durch den Geist in der größtmöglichen Tilgung der Raum= und Zeitspatien' (the transfiguration of nature by mind in the full annihilation of space and time) (Kapp 1845: 31). While this annihilation was achieved by various means including machine (internal combustion engine, telegraph, telephone), language and mind, Kapp regarded mind as the most important means. Hisatake thought that this problematic was connected to 'faux frais' in distribution costs by Marx and 'time-space compression' by David Harvey (1989). It seems that Kapp developed Ritter's ideas of the relative space-time to discuss the particular impulse of modern capitalist world. However, this problematic was not necessarily taken over the works of Friedrich Raztel who was interested in the movements of ethnic and animal groups.

4. Concluding Remarks

Noma, Takeuchi and Hisatake tried to provide an alternative way of reading about Ritter and Kapp by reconsidering some central concepts of modern geography which were ignored by many geographers. They can bring Ritter and Kapp to life as the predecessors of contemporary geography. How can they do their alternative reading of these classic works? In addition to their deep knowledges and understandings about European culture, history, and society, the peripheral position and context of Japanese geographers may enable them to read these works in a way that is different from the European tradition.

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Research Note

Bridging Geographical Concepts Between Contexts: Reflections on Language Translation and Knowledge

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Abstract

This article calls for critical attention to the role of language in knowledge production for the advancement of geographical scholarship in East Asia. This article reviews recent debates on the epistemology of geographical knowledge and reflects on some issues that arise from the practice of translation in this discipline. Geographical concepts are often translated and interpreted differently in different linguistic and socio-spatial contexts, and how these concepts can be translated between various contexts may be key to open up the possibilities of theorizing from East Asia. In response to these debates, this article suggests alternative ways of doing translation which underscore dialogues and mutual understanding.

Keywords

language translation; knowledge; concepts; epistemology

Introduction

In this article, my goal is to reflect on the relevance of translation between languages to knowledge production in geography[1]. I argue that, instead of considering translation as a unidirectional practice, it is important to recognize translation as a multi-directional and relational practice, which has the potential to expand the possibilities for knowledge mobility and for dialogues between different places. Drawing on the experience of East Asian geography, I examine and reflect on some issues that arise from translation in this discipline. Then, in response to recent scholarly discussions, I also suggest alternative ways of doing translation which underscore dialogues and mutual understanding. Translation as a bridging means can help to connect concepts from various contexts.

I became interested in this topic during a research stay in Japan in 2023, where I explored the multiple meanings embedded in geographical concepts as well as the history of Japanese geographical scholarship. I discovered that Japanese geographers translated various works from other languages to shape their own

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[1] Here, I refer specifically to translation between languages, distinct from how the term is used in Science and Technology Studies (STS) or Actor-Network Theory (ANT), though such approaches may inform the study of language translation.

geographical writings from the late nineteenth century onward. This period also witnessed a broader movement of scientific knowledge in all academic disciplines from the so-called Western world, influencing not only intellectual activities but also wider social transformations in East Asia. Within this context, I focused on the institutionalization of geography as an academic discipline in East Asia and discovered many intriguing aspects of how geographical knowledge was translated. These findings led me to reflect more deeply on questions of translation, knowledge, and the identity of geographers, recognizing translation as an integral part of the process of producing geographical knowledge.

Language in the epistemology of geographical knowledge

Language translation has played a key role in the history of modern geographical scholarship in East Asia. The translation of geography textbooks from foreign languages, beyond merely English, facilitated the establishment and growth of the discipline at modern universities in the early twentieth century in Taiwan (Chiang and Jou 2006), Korea (Baik 2006), and Japan (Yamada 2007). In Japan, for example, different phases of geographical scholarship were closely tied to the topics and types of translated materials, as well as to the motivations of the translators, many of whom were geographers themselves [2]. While this historical trajectory may suffer from postcolonial critiques of academic imperialism, East Asian geographers' critical reflections on so-called "imported scholarship" have alternatively pointed to an understanding of their self-representation and intertextuality (Mori 2009; Shimazu et al. 2012). It can also be suggested that translation remains a continuous academic practice to present day. In Japan, translation activities remain central to a particular type of university course, that is the reading classes devoted to the close reading of significant or classical works, mainly in foreign languages.

It is important to place an emphasis on the critical role of language in mediating geographical knowledge within specific socio-spatial contexts. Critical debates in Anglophone geography have problematized language. For Blomley (2008), language serves as both a medium of communication and a means of thinking, and the issue of linguistic hegemony in Anglophone geography is significant for critical geography which aspires to intellectualism, solidarity, reflexivity, and the analysis of power. As Robinson (2023) discusses, the norms of which language to use and where to publish research have long defined what constitutes "international" knowledge, limiting the scope for theoretical conversations. The current knowledge production activities prioritize the use of English. While reflections on language and knowledge emerged earlier in Latin America with the development of decolonial approaches, as well as in the Anglophone world, East Asian geography has only recently begun to engage seriously with these issues.

We must be beware of the problem of linguistic privilege created by the global dominance of English as the hegemonic language of knowledge-related activities (Müller 2021; Ren 2022). English is not only about grammar; it is also about language as a social practice and a way of thinking that

[2] An unpublished manuscript of journal-article length entitled "Translating human geography into and from Japan: Language, knowledge, and territory," elaborating on the role of translation in the five phases of the trajectory of Japanese geography, is available upon request from the author.

constitutes a body politics of knowledge. Recent works problematize language as both a navigator of possibilities and interactions (Ren 2022; Zhao 2020) and a manifestation of hegemony and privilege (Müller 2021). They represent two interrelated approaches: the first looks for ways to develop dialogues that are concerned with comparative geographies; the other is concerned with the location of the discipline of geography as centered on so-called the West, the Global North, the former colonial powers, the English-speaking regions, etc. Language shapes academic conventions in a given place. Original research or intellectual development in each place may be less known outside that territory due to language barriers.

Knowledge is created as it circulates through texts and ideas, which are modified and reinterpreted through translation (Fall 2012). Fall wrote about the works of Claude Raffestin, a French-speaking geographer in Switzerland. Fall discussed how and where Raffestin's works were written, thought about, used, ignored or translated into many different languages, including Japanese, but rarely English. Fall emphasized the importance of paying attention to the spaces and contexts of geographical works, especially when drawing ideas from foreign thinkers.

Translation of geographical concepts

Concepts in geographical knowledge are being translated. Conventionally, translation is understood as a process of merely seeking equivalent meanings of words between source and target languages (Figure 1). However, there is a need to go beyond this conventional understanding. Müller (2007) highlights that geographers frequently need to handle sources and materials in foreign languages, urging us to consider the politics of translation and the agency of the translating geographers. This critical awareness is also important when examining the translation of geographical concepts.

Geographical concepts are often translated and interpreted differently in various socio-spatial contexts. The concepts of territoriality and territory, for example, have already been defined and understood differently by Anglophone and Francophone geographers (Delaney 2005; Klauser 2012; Raffestin 1977, 1986; Sack 1986), not to mention how it is decolonized in Latin America (Halvorsen 2019). When East Asian geographers translated these works into their respective languages (Raffestin 1996a [1977], 1996b [1986]; Delaney 2017 [2005]; Yamazaki 2022), they synthesized these foreign works with their own regional experiences and languages, which further led to different conceptualizations in their academic praxis.

Clarifying the meanings and contexts of the concepts we use in academic discourse is important for advancing geographical explanations. Geographers in Asia have already alerted us of the danger of overlooking the differences in the meanings and contexts of the concepts being translated (Gao and Cartier 2024; Raju 2004; Shin et al. 2016; Tang 2014, 2021; Zhao 2020). For instance, Tang (2014, 2021) criticizes the random appropriation and indigenization of different concepts. Raju (2004) also discussed the uncritical adoption of Western categories in the context of India.

The concept in the source language is influenced by the intellectual and socio-spatial contexts from which it emerged. When translating this concept into the target language, many factors come into play (Figure 2). For example, the translators' identities, funding, and the institutional setting of the translation project are all influential factors. Translators may have their own motivations and are sometimes influenced by local politics because they often seek knowledge relevant to their societies (for example, Hsu 2020). The outcome of the translation process affects research and teaching, which may subsequently impact policy and practice within the target society. For East Asian geographers, this process has often been

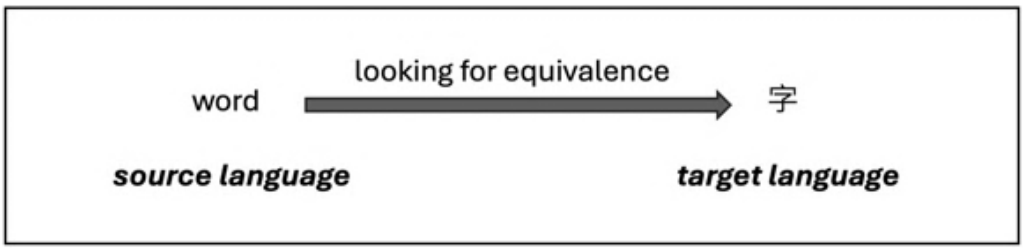

Figure 1: Conventional understanding of translation

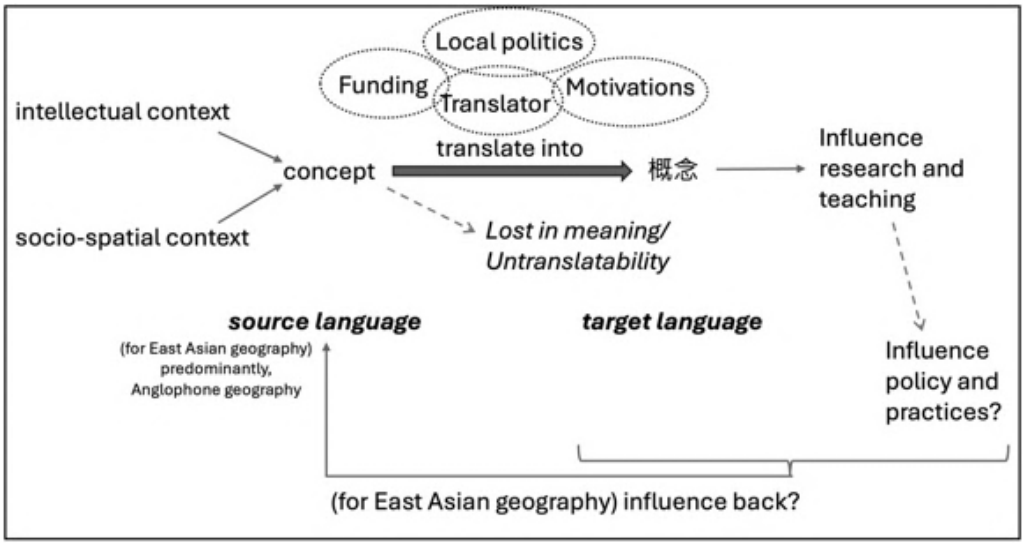

Figure 2: Translation of concepts in geography

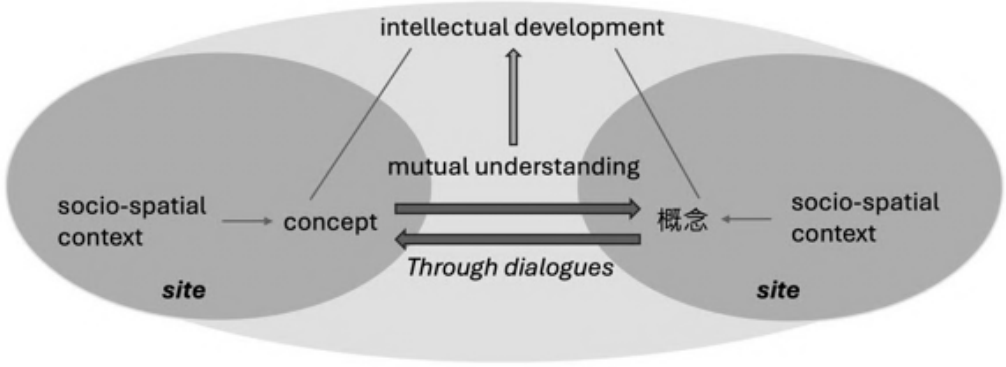

Figure 3: Alternative translation and knowledge production

unidirectional, from the source language to the target language. This raises the question of whether we can influence back the source society.

Geographers have identified several issues with translating geographical concepts. Drawing on examples from political geography, Sidaway et al. (2004) discussed two such problems: mistranslation and misrecognition. Mistranslation is simply using the wrong words. Misrecognition occurs due to a lack of awareness of historical specificity and assumptions; concepts often carry specific assumptions about the social order (Sidaway et al. 2004). These two types of problems can also be identified in other geography subdisciplines, such as economic geography. Mizuoka (2019: 309) documents that critical concepts of space were mistranslated and misrecognized in the Japanese translation of an economic geography textbook published in the late 1990s. Relating to spatiality, the word "heterogeneity" was mistranslated as "homogeneity." However, the more serious mistake is misrecognition. Marx's concept of "mode of production" was "dropped entirely" because the translators, who were not interested in critical geography, were unable to recognize the concept.

Untranslatability can be considered the third problem in translating geographical concepts from the perspective of decolonial geography. Although translation is conventionally understood as finding equivalents, some concepts and ideas simply do not have equivalents in other languages, and their meanings cannot easily be captured in existing knowledge typologies or categories (Jazeel 2016). Untranslatability also complicates the circulation of concepts between English-, French-, and German-speaking geographies (Stock 2024). An academic concept may carry complex, multi-faceted, and contextual meanings (Shin et al. 2016). The scientific literature has already discussed some examples in Asian languages:

- "Development" in Southeast Asia (Rigg 2003): There is no universally accepted language that conveys this concept. The words and their meanings vary greatly depending on the country's history.
- "State," "territory," and "border" in Asia (Sidaway et al. 2004): These terms were not only contextual within the country's history but also relational, as they were connected to other countries in the region, due to the geopolitics and historical geography.
- "Race" in Japan (Takezawa 2015): This study of Japanese geography textbooks from the early Meiji period reveals how the concept of "race" was introduced to Japan. This influenced not only knowledge activities, but also, in the more consequential way, led to the problem of racial discrimination in contemporary Japan.
- "Nature" in Asia (Droz et al. 2022): There is a diversity of conceptualizations of "nature" in East and Southeast Asia. Each language's conceptualization is linked to its particular understanding of the relationship between humans and the environment. However, environmental reports and policies at the global level ignore this knowledge and assume a universal understanding of nature.
- "*Shequ*" (社区) in China (Gao and Cartier 2024): Rather than "community" or "neighborhood," "*shequ*" should be used to describe local areas in China since these English words ignore the spatial and administrative meanings of "*shequ*," which is part of China's state administrative hierarchy.

Alternative translation in geography

Inspired by recent calls to decolonize and decenter knowledge production (Shin 2021), this final section proposes an alternative

translation approach that emphasizes dialogues and highlights the differences in concepts and meanings between languages. This approach echoes Zhao's (2020) "translation turn," which proposes that, rather than seeking equivalence, we should engage in dialogues that recognizes and values the differences between languages.

Scholars influenced by the postcolonial thought have advocated studying and theorizing from the Global East and Asia, small cities, and other research sites. As Ren (2022) suggests, the most important thing is not to provide case studies but to overcome the privilege of thinking and speaking the language of theory. Comparative research should demand more translation, exchange, and collaboration. It is important to understand how a concept originating in a particular context is socially and spatially situated. Through dialogues, mutual understanding can be fostered, which advances the innovative intellectual development about categories or phenomena (Figure 3). For example, Tang et al. (2024) innovatively applied the philosophy of *tongbian*, a philosophy that goes beyond dialectics to underscore non-dualistic ceaseless interaction and continuity, to show the limitations of Western literature in addressing issues related to land, property, and territory. As Tang et al. (2024: 8) suggest, their theorization approach

> upholds difference without alienation and contests framings of conjunctural approach as informed by the dialectic between the general, assumed to be the North, to then pose the particular-empirical cases in the South.

They aim to influence the dominant ways of understanding these critical issues.

If geography recognizes the diversity of landscapes and places around the world, then we must also recognize the different words in different languages and contexts that we use to describe and explain these spatial phenomena. The way we translate geographical knowledge influences not only scientific communication but also how we understand our societies and intervene in various geographical issues.

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Research Note

Zainichi Culture as Inclusive Driver of Multinational Enclaves in Osaka: The Case of "IKUNO Multicultural Flat"

Ayano YAMADA *

Abstract

This paper examines community-based multicultural initiatives in Ikuno Ward, Osaka—Japan's most ethnically diverse urban area. Focusing on the activities of IKUNO Multicultural Flat, it highlights locally funded programs supporting children, youth, and adults with foreign backgrounds through education, consultation, and community engagement. Despite the absence of government funding, these initiatives foster inclusivity and cultural exchange while addressing demographic and social challenges. The study suggests that such grassroots efforts offer a viable model for multicultural coexistence in historically complex urban communities.

Keywords

ethnicity; inclusivity; multinational enclaves; Osaka, Ikuno

Ikuno Ward, located in Osaka City, has the highest proportion of foreign residents among all urban municipalities in Japan, with 22.5% of its population holding foreign citizenship as of March 2024. This equates to approximately one in five residents. The ward is home to long-established "oldcomer" communities—primarily ethnic Koreans who migrated before World War II—as well as an increasing number of "newcomer" residents in recent years. In total, individuals with roots in 79 different countries reside in the area (Table 1).

Ikuno Ward also grapples with a range of complex social issues, including rapid population aging, a sharply declining birthrate, a school assistance rate more than double the national average (indicating relative poverty), and school reorganization resulting from the diminishing student population. These challenges position Ikuno as a community at the forefront of issues related to multiculturalism, multiethnicity, socioeconomic vulnerability, and demographic decline.

Table 1: Comparison of the first three major nationalities of foreign residents in Ikuno Ward between 2025.3 and 2012 (Source: Residents' registration record)

Rank	2025	Population	2012	Population
1st	Korea	18,050	Korea	26,532
2nd	Vietnam	3,833	China	1,612
3rd	China	3,661	Vietnam	211
4th	Nepal	1,586	Taiwan	130
5th	Myanmar	645	Philippines	90

In response to these conditions, community-driven initiatives have emerged to reimagine

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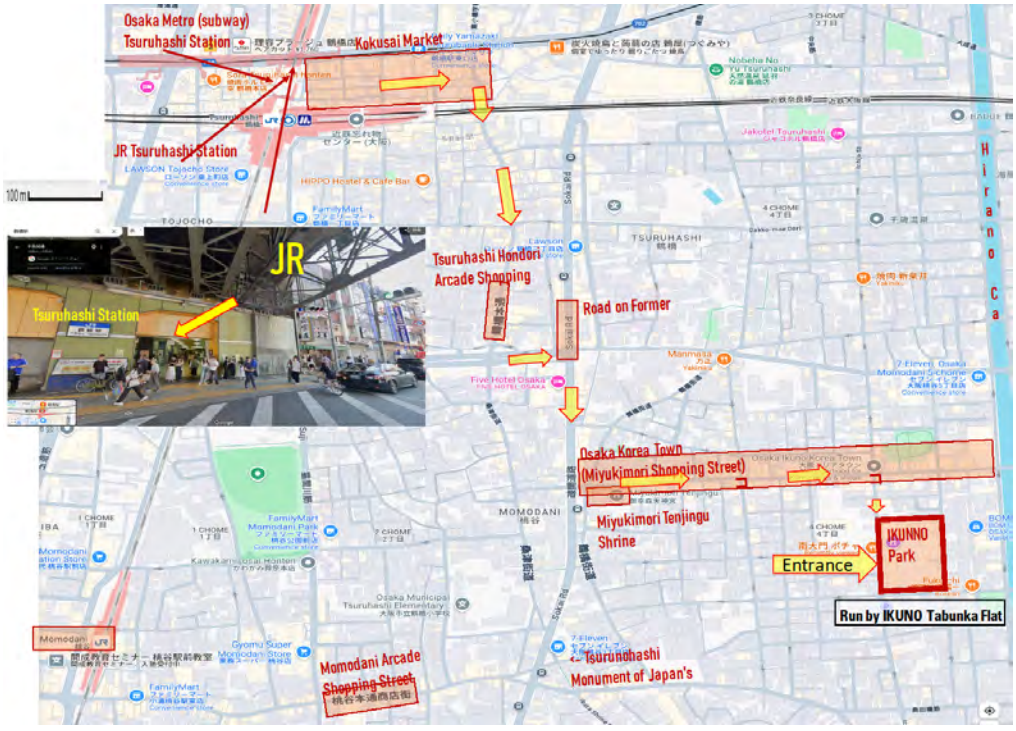
local community-building while preserving the ward's historical and cultural legacy. One notable example is the work of the nonprofit organization *IKUNO Multicultural Flat*. The term *tabunka* in its name refers to "multiculturalism," reflecting its mission to promote inclusive coexistence.

The selection of the site itself reflects the symbolic and historical significance of the area (Figure 1). According to Mr. Song Oh, the director of *IKUNO Multicultural Flat*, the decision to begin activities in this area was deeply tied to its unique historical background. The former Miyukimori Elementary School is located in a district where many Zainichi Koreans have long resided, including the well-known Korea Town, making it a highly symbolic location. From the perspective of the South Korean government as well, this neighborhood holds special meaning, and for Zainichi Koreans it can be regarded as a kind of "Mecca." Considering the recent diversification of Ikuno Ward, this area is a particularly appropriate place to serve as a hub for multicultural coexistence. In this sense, the historical presence and collective energy of the Zainichi community became a driving force behind the creation of *IKUNO Multicultural Flat*. Its practices are therefore grounded in the long-standing historical and cultural context of this community.

As school closures and consolidations progressed under the city's reorganization plans, *IKUNO Multicultural Flat* partnered with Retown Co., Ltd., to repurpose the former Miyukimori Elementary School site as a base



Maps Data: Google, ©2025

Figure 1: The location of Ikuno Tabunka Flat and its surroundings (This map was delivered at the EARCAG Osaka Session on 15 February 2025)

for multicultural engagement. Following a successful public proposal, the organization began managing the site in April 2022. In May 2023, the facility reopened as *IKUNO Park* (Figure 2).

Figure 2: IKUNO Park

It is important to note that this initiative receives no direct financial support—not only from Osaka City, but also from other public entities such as Ikuno Ward, Osaka Prefecture, or the national government. Instead, the organization operates entirely on self-generated funds. In addition to paying over 400,000 yen in monthly rent for the use of the former school building, the organization must also bear the cost of utilities such as electricity and water. Furthermore, a wide range of independently operated programs require additional funding, including personnel expenses necessary for the planning and implementation of various community-oriented initiatives. To sustain operations under these financial constraints, the classrooms of the former school have been rented out to diverse tenants, thereby creating a self-supporting model of revenue generation.

Currently, *IKUNO Park* hosts a diverse range of tenants and organizations, including a café, a cooking school, an Italian restaurant, a taekwondo dojo, and a K-pop dance studio. Each tenant contributes to the facility's vibrant and pluralistic atmosphere while pursuing their own goals.

Beyond property management, *IKUNO Multicultural Flat* engages directly with local residents through inclusive, needs-based programs. As of January 2025, approximately 140 children and youth with muiticultural backgrounds—many of whom face various challenges—are registered in the organization's programs. Support is provided through academic tutoring, consultations, and informal interactions, with the aim of offering both learning opportunities and a sense of belonging.

These young participants also engage in experiential learning, encountering diverse people and perspectives through a variety of activities. For students living farther away, online Japanese language instruction is available. During weekends and school holidays, the organization offers unique enrichment experiences such as rice planting, camping, and participation in university open-campus events.

Among its many programs, the "Children's Cafeteria" stands out. Operating twice weekly on Fridays and Saturdays, these community kitchens offer children not only nourishment but also social connection. Children attend for various reasons, including the opportunity to share meals with peers.

For youth with foreign backgrounds, the "*empathy-seed*" program promotes ethnic identity development and peer connection. Distinct from established Korean communities, many of these young individuals are geographically dispersed and have limited opportunities to engage with peers who share similar cultural backgrounds. The program provides a platform where participants—ranging from high school students to young adults in their 30s—can engage in open dialogue about their experiences of being minorities in Japanese society. Through these exchanges, they reflect on their own identities, deepen their understanding of self, and foster a sense of belonging. Notably, the program is driven by the youth themselves, who independently plan and organize events based on their interests and concerns. Adult staff

provide accompanying support through a non-directive, empathetic approach, enabling participants to take ownership of the process while ensuring a supportive environment. In this way, "*empathy-seed*" serves as both a site of empowerment and a mechanism for nurturing identity formation among young people with multicultural roots.

For adults, *IKUNO Multicultural Flat* offers training programs for those wishing to support children's education and Japanese language acquisition. Participants include school teachers, experienced volunteers, and newcomers to the field. These programs foster mutual understanding and knowledge-sharing among participants.

In addition, the organization convenes roundtable discussions and seminars to share insights and practical strategies for cultivating a multicultural community. It also operates a multilingual consultation desk staffed by interpreters in Vietnamese, Chinese, and English, as well as specialists such as school social workers, certified social workers, and legal advisors.

A range of community development projects further extend the organization's reach. For example, vegetables grown in the on-site community garden are used in the children's cafeteria and sold to the on-site Italian restaurant, fostering a local food circulation model. The former elementary school library has been transformed into a community library where conversation is encouraged—a deliberate departure from conventional "silent" library norms, emphasizing human connection.

Collaborative efforts with diverse sectors continue to expand. These include multilingual storytelling sessions, child-friendly recreational spaces, and annual events such as *Crossing Fes*, where residents from different cultural backgrounds perform music and dance. Another signature event, the *World Night Market*, offers cuisine from around the globe and serves as a platform for aspiring food entrepreneurs. This initiative is linked to a broader project supporting food startups, with the goal of revitalizing vacant housing in Ikuno through the establishment of permanent restaurants.

In these ways, *IKUNO Multicultural Flat* is collaboratively building what might be described as a "fortress of coexistence"—a community infrastructure that empowers individuals to discover, express, and take pride in their potential while fostering a peaceful and inclusive urban environment.

To summarize, *IKUNO Multicultural Flat* engages in a wide array of support activities: creating safe spaces for children, offering educational and language support, operating multilingual consultation services, organizing online Japanese classes, running community kitchens, and empowering youth with foreign roots.

These initiatives are not government-funded but are sustained through independent financial means. More than simply offering direct "support" to children, youth, and adults with foreign backgrounds, these programs contribute to the cultivation of a community ethos that values diversity and inclusivity. While questions remain about their long-term sustainability due to their non-governmental nature, such initiatives have thus far proven to be effective responses to the complex and contemporary challenges faced by historically layered urban communities.

Indeed, the historical coexistence of ethnic Koreans and Japanese residents in Ikuno has fostered a local culture characterized by deep interpersonal connections and mutual support. This unique regional ethos has not only enabled these grassroots efforts to flourish, but also expanded the possibilities for achieving multicultural coexistence. If such locally rooted practices can serve as a model, the experience of Ikuno may offer valuable insights for realizing a multicultural society across Japan. As evolving practices toward the realization of a multicultural and inclusive society, their potential continues to unfold.

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Research Note

The Establishment of a Religious Facility by New Overseas Chinese in Osaka and Its Socio-Cultural Impact

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Abstract

In 2023, a Guandi Temple was established in Osaka, Japan, by new overseas Chinese worshippers. The facility served as a site for religious practice for the Chinese community, while also remaining accessible to the host society. This study examined the relationship between the local communities and the temple based on visitor trends. The survey indicated that, while the Chinese community primarily visits the temple for worship, Japanese visitors utilize the temple in more diverse ways. This suggests a non-Western understanding of "religion" one that challenges the dichotomy of the religious-secular.

Keywords

worship place; religion; overseas Chinese; Nishinari Osaka; Guandi temple

1. Introduction

Economic and sociocultural activities of the new overseas Chinese community have become increasingly prevalent in Nishinari Ward, Osaka City, Japan. As a part of their cultural expression, they have established a facility for transnational religious practices. This facility functions as an open space, welcoming members of the host community, without imposing restrictions on its use. Consequently, it is being utilized in various ways by both immigrants and members of the host society. This study explores the potential of this facility to foster new relationships between the local community and recently arrived overseas Chinese immigrants.

The decline in shopping arcades in this area was pronounced from the 1990s to the 2000s. Since 2013, new overseas Chinese immigrants have started various businesses in this area, including food and beverage businesses, followed by lodging and real estate. This growth has been driven by a network of individuals from Fuqing City, Fujian Province, and consequently, Chinese enterprises have gradually begun to gain prominence. In 2017, the Osaka China Chamber of Commerce (大阪華商会), hereinafter referred to as OCCC, was founded by the Chinese immigrants engaged in business in Nishinari Ward. In 2023, Chinese immigrants constructed the Osaka Guandi Temple (大阪關帝廟)[1], religious facility which

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[1] There is a Guandi Temple in Osaka City that shares the similar name, but it is not directly related to this facility.

is associated with Daoism, Buddhism. Lu (2018, 2019) and Wang (2019) have discussed the trends of new overseas Chinese people in the area. This study explored the relationship between the local community and the facility by examining visitor trends at Guandi Temple.

We analyzed visitor trends at Osaka Guandi Temple based on the data recorded by Ms. A, a Japanese staff member stationed at the temple during the daytime. Her records include the number of visitors and their characteristics, organized by date. The data were aggregated with the consent of Ms. A. Uncertainties or missing details were confirmed through interviews with Ms. A. The records used in this survey were collected between February 2024 and January 2025. Records from January 2024 (when the temple opened) and from April to May 2024 were unavailable and were therefore excluded from the analysis. Based on these records, visitors were classified according to their country of origin, place of residence, sex, and reasons for visiting. Any unclear characteristics were marked as "unknown." Among visitors who came to the temple multiple times, those whose faces Ms. A were classified as "regulars" while those she did not recognize were classified as "irregulars." It is important to note that Ms. A collected these records informally, and as previously mentioned, some were incomplete. Therefore, the data used in this study were not sufficiently rigorous. However, we assessed that the records are adequate for identifying visitor trends, making them a potentially valuable resource for understanding the cultural and social functions of the Guandi Temple.

2. Constructing the Guandi Temple in Nishinari Ward

In 2019, the OCCC planned to transform the shopping arcade in Nishinari Ward into Chinatown. However, the project faced opposition from local residents and was further hindered by the pandemic, ultimately causing it to stall. Subsequently, the OCCC decided to propose the construction of the Guandi Temple a cultural facility that will still lacking in the area. The project gained momentum due to significant support. This support came in the form of donations from OCCC members, overseas Chinese people from various countries, and members of the local Chinese community in Nishinari, Japan. One member of the OCCC donated a plot of land to the association, which included a former shop's warehouse in the shopping arcade alley, with its structural framework kept intact. The construction of Guandi Temple began in 2023 on this land and was completed in January 2024 (Figure 1). The OCCC is responsible for managing temple operations. Unlike the Chinatown Project, the construction of the Guandi Temple was not publicly promoted. Furthermore, the temple is located in the back alley of the shopping arcade. Without information boards, it is difficult to see the temple while passing through the shopping street (Figure 2). There were no significantly opposing voices.

To clarify, the Guandi Temple is a place of worship dedicated to "*Guandi*" (關帝), also known as "*Guan Sheng Di Jun*" (關聖帝君), a deified form of "*Guan Yu*" (關羽), a general from third-century China. Since Guan Yu is worshiped in folk beliefs, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, the temple is associated with these beliefs and religions (Nikaido 2024). Guandi temples are found not only in mainland China, but also in Chinese communities around the world. These temples serve several functions for the Chinese people. First, Guandi Temple is primarily known as a place to pray for business prosperity and harmonious relationships. Second, they symbolize the connection between Guandi temples worldwide and mainland China. For example, through mutual visits, the OCCC has strengthened its relationship with the Xiezhou Guandi Temple, an ancestral temple located in Xiezhou Town, Yuncheng City, Shanxi Province, China, and

Persatuan Kebudayaan Guan Gong Malaysia, which means the Malaysia Guandi cultural promotion center through mutual visits (Figure 3). As a result, Osaka Guandi Temple was recognized as a hub for cultural exchange by the ancestral temple. Additionally, the members of the OCCC hoped to contribute to the community through the temple in Nishinari Ward.

Mr. L, who played a central role as a real estate agent in the region and contributed significantly to the establishment of the Guandi Temple, first reflected on his activities in the shopping district during a guest lecture (July 2023) at the authors' university. He expressed his intention to establish a mutually beneficial relationship with Japanese store owners. He believed that the revitalization the arcades by attracting more customers would be a way of giving back to the local community. Therefore, he did not think that the shopping district necessarily had to be called "Chinatown." He articulated his desire for shopping streets to feature a diverse variety of dishes from various countries. Ultimately, he expressed his aspirations to attract tourists through Chinese cuisine and to establish a venue where people could experience different cultural practices, such as Fujian tea. The method of serving Fujian tea differs from that used for Japanese tea.

The Guandi Temple in Nishinari Ward has unique features. In addition to *Guan Sheng Di Jun*, *Mazu* (媽祖) and *Manjusri* (文殊菩薩) are also worshiped in the temple. *Mazu* is a deity that originated in Fujian, China. In Daoism, *Mazu* is the goddess of the sea and honored to ensure a safe voyage. In the framework of Mahayana Buddhism, *Manjusri* is regarded as the bodhisattva of wisdom. It is uncommon for these deities to be enshrined together in one place. Many members of the OCCC originate from Fujian Province, which explains their worship of *Guan Sheng Di Jun* and *Mazu*, who are deeply revered there. The birthday of *Mazu* was also grandly celebrated at the Guandi Temple (Figure 4). The inclusion of *Manjusri* in their worship may also reflect the members' desire for their children to succeed academically.

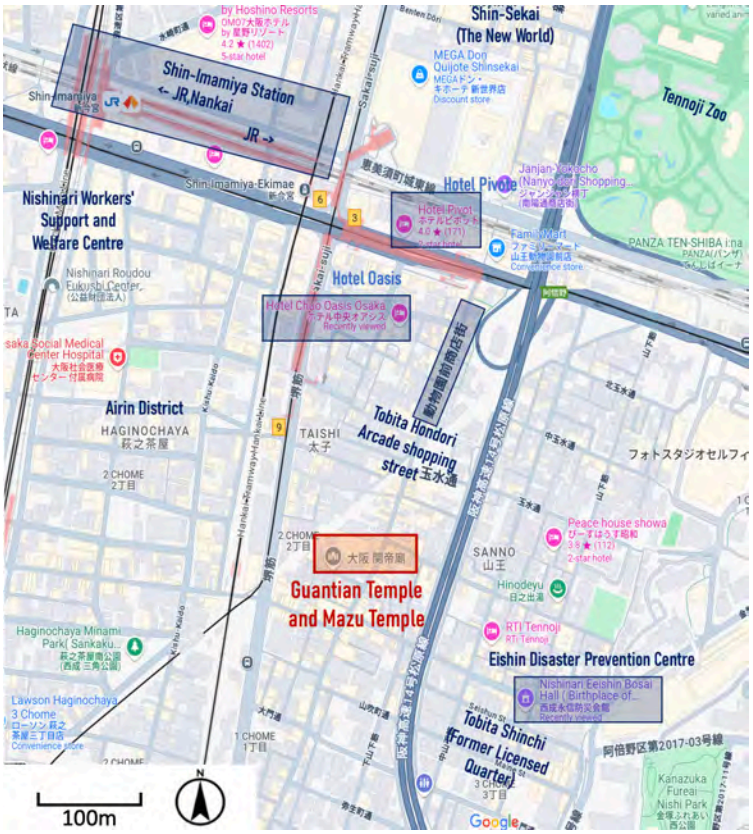
In Japan, Guandi Temples are not widely acknowledged. At least seven Guandi Temples have been identified in Japan[2]; however, these figures are negligible when considering the approximately 76,000 Buddhist temples and 84,000 shrines present across the nation (Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan 2024). This suggests that the recognition of Guandi Temples was not widespread. *Mazu* was widely accepted in early modern Japan, with *Mazu* worship spreading to various regions (Fujita 2021). However, its contemporary influence is limited. Although the proverb "三人よれば文殊の知恵" (The wisdom of *Manjusri* is found in the gathering of three. = Two heads are better than one) is well-known in Japan, it cannot be said that *Manjusri* is deeply ingrained as an object of worship. Although these objects of worship have historically been transmitted to Japan, the facility, including its architectural style, has not yet taken root.

3. Visitor trends at the Guandi Temple

This discussion analyzes the survey results of visitors of the Osaka Guandi Temple. It is important to note that all numerical values presented in this section are cumulative totals. Initially, 1,800 visits were recorded over a nine-month aggregation period. Of them, 575 (31.9%) were repeat visitors. In terms of actual numbers, there was an upward trend in the number of visitors when observed on a monthly basis during the specified reporting period (Figure 5). An examination of visitor data

[2] Collaborative Reference Database. 17 November 2023. https://crd.ndl.go.jp/reference/entry/index.php?page=ref_view&id=1000340314 (last accessed 5 May 2025).

Figure 1: Exterior of Guandi Temple in Nishinari Ward (Credit: Qian Yinshan)



Maps Data: Google, ©2025

Figure 2: Location of the Guandi Temple and its surroundings (Revised version of the map delivered at EARCAG Osaka Session on 15 February 2025, based on Google Maps)

Figure 3: Visit of *Persatuan Kebudayaan Guan Gong Malaysia* to the Guandi Temple (Credit: Ms. A)

Note: The dance depicted in this figure is the "*Yangge dance*", a folk dance originating from Northeast China. This performance took place at the rear of the Mazu palanquin procession (a type of deity sedan-chair procession).

Figure 4: Parade celebrating Mazu's Birthday in the shopping arcade (Credit: Qian Yinshan, July 4, 2024)

disaggregated by country or region revealed that the number of visitors from Japan consistently exceeded from other regions or countries. Throughout the survey period, the total number of visitors from Japan was 1,095, making it the largest demographic group. The total number of visitors in China was 568. Together, these two countries accounted for more than 90% of the total number of visits. In terms of gender composition, a small majority of visits were male (59.6%), whereas females represented 40.4%.

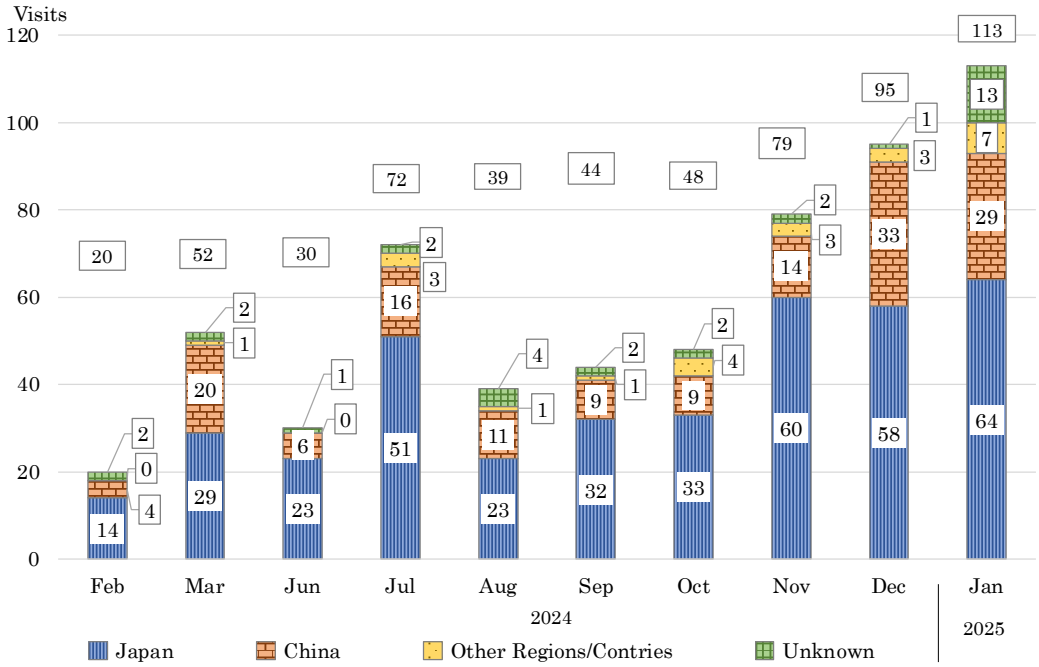
The category of "regulars" predominantly consists of A's acquaintances and friends (199 cases), karaoke izakaya mamas (145 cases), and members of OCCC (99 cases). First, we ascertain the precise nature of A's acquaintances and friends. Ms. A is a Japanese woman in her seventies who communicates solely in Japanese. She had previously worked as a manager (mama) at karaoke izakayas located within the shopping arcade. Several of her interpersonal and personal relationships were also brought to the Guandi Temple. Mr. B's case was the most notable. Mr. B, an acquaintance of Ms. A, visited the temple more frequently than any other individual. Among the regular visitors, Mr. B, an acquaintance of Ms. A, was the most frequent visitor. Of the 309 visits by Japanese regulars, Mr. B accounted for 125. Mr. B, an elderly individual residing close to the temple, had prior acquaintances with Ms. A. Mr. B was a regular patron of a karaoke izakaya located on the arcade street. However, in June 2023, the usual establishment was destroyed by a fire. Subsequently, Mr. B began to visit the Guandi Temple, where Ms. A was located. Other patterns of visits by acquaintances and friends of Ms. A, who are also regular, include coming solely to see Ms. A and trying to spend time with him before their favorite izakaya opens. It was assumed that these visits were primarily aimed at conversations with her.

Next, the term "izakaya mama" refers to the managers of the karaoke izakayas run by the Chinese immigrants, which are concentrated in the arcade street near the Temple. Most of these individuals were Chinese women who had migrated to Japan from Fujian Province. Some Chinese women working as "mamas" frequently visited the temples. They did not visit with the intention of talking to Ms. A, as the Japanese did. A considerable proportion of the constituents affiliated with the OCCC hail from Fuqing City, situated within the province of Fujian. They sometimes visited Guandi Temple for business, but primarily engaged in worship activities.

With regard to "irregulars," the predominant rationale was "tourism, sightseeing, or worship" (228 cases). However, there were also visits from teachers, media personnel, and tourists. Teachers went on field trips with high school and university students to explore the neighborhood. Media personnel conducted the interviews, including those with free local papers and major news organizations. The former publication featured the temple on its cover (see Figure 6) and included a four-page feature article about the temple (Wakamatsu 2025), while the major news organization introduced the temple as a religious facility increasingly visited by foreigners in recent years[3]. The facility was included in tourist tours for Japanese visitors, and tour guides were increasingly leading tourists.

The facility was incorporated into the itinerary for Japanese tourists, with tour guides accompanying the visitors. On another occasion, a secular nonprofit organization based in the region held a "*Bon Dance*" (*Bon-Odori*) at the Guandi Temple, which is a unique religious

[3] "Increased Inflow of Residents Revitalizes Osaka: Exchange Hubs and Religious Facilities Continue to Emerge." The Mainichi Shimbun, 25 March 2025. https://mainichi.jp/articles/20250325/ddm/003/040/121000c (last accessed 9 June 2025).



Note: Data from April to May 2024 are excluded. The number of visits from the "regulars" was excluded.
Prepared by the authors, based on Ms. A's records.

Figure 5: Trends in the actual number of visitors by country/region

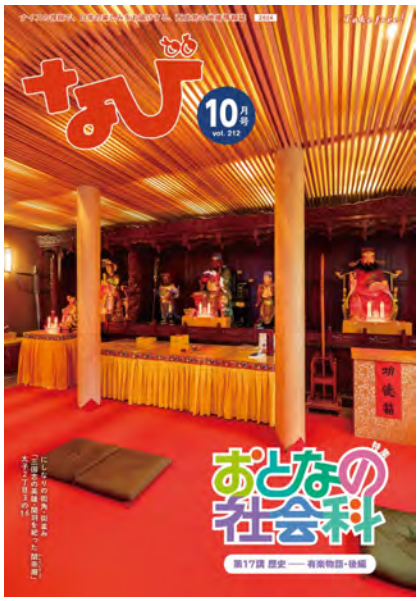


Figure 6: Free local monthly magazine featuring Guandi Temple on the cover (*Navi* 212, courtesy of Nice Inc.)

Figure 7: Scene of the Bon Dance at Guandi Temple (Credit: Ms. A, August 2, 2025)

event in Japan (Figure 7). The group, which engages in activities including the dissemination of artistic pursuits and human resource development, performed their newly created Bon Dance at the site as an "offering" to the deities.

4. Discussion and conclusion

A discernible trend of increasing visitor numbers has been documented; however, the persistence of this phenomenon remains unclear. To ascertain whether this increase will persist, it is necessary to review the data that extend beyond the current aggregation period. It is evident that Guandi Temple is progressively garnering recognition as it has been integrated into tourist itineraries and emerged as a local area study visits. Moreover, the aggregated data indicate that the number of Japanese visitors exceeded that of Chinese visitors. The OCCC had the option of exclusively restricting access to the temple to Chinese individuals; nevertheless, it opted to implement such measures.

The motivations for visiting the temple varied considerably between the Chinese and Japanese regulars. For the Chinese regulars, the primary motivation for visiting temples was worship. Additionally, the temple functions as a symbol of the maintenance and formation of identity among new overseas Chinese people, as well as a representation of the local community. Conversely, Japanese regulars are predominantly thought to visit for conversations and interactions with Ms. A, in notable contrast to other religious facilities frequented by international migrants in Japan. The facility demonstrated tolerance of other religious practices, as evidenced by the example of Bon Dance. Moreover, the presence of Japanese staff members at the facility is considered significant as it serves to reduce barriers for Japanese visitors. In a manner consistent with the perspective that many izakayas in this area are regarded as third places (Molasky 2014), the temple can also be regarded as a third place for Japanese regulars. The demographic composition of the area was originally characterized by a significant proportion of elderly single males. Whether or not this was anticipated as a form of diverse and open utilization aside, it can be evaluated positively that the Guandi Temple is fulfilling its purpose of 'contributing to the community.' Guandi Temple, which is open to these diverse uses, should not be understood from the perspective

of the Western dichotomy of religious-secular. Rather, it can be considered as a place that flexibly alters the way it operates between immigrants and the host society. This study underscores the non-Western dimensions of transnational religion in China as seen in Japan. However, what this study shows is merely a trend observed within just one year of the temple establishment. To elucidate the religious and cultural positioning of the Guandi Temple, it is imperative to conduct interviews with visitors, gather data on the number of visitors following the conclusion of this study, and undertake more detailed investigations.

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Translation

Envisioning a Safety Net from the Community Level: Insights from Homelessness Research

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(Translated by Maurice YIP [ii])

Editors' note

This manuscript was originally published in Japanese as a book chapter:
水内俊雄 2024. 地域からセーフティネットを構想する－ホームレス調査研究の経験から－. 宮町良広･田原裕子･小林知･井口梓･小長谷有紀編『地域学―地域を可視化し，地域を創る』60-70. 古今書院.

This translation was prepared by Maurice Yip and reviewed by Toshio Mizuuchi.

1. Safety net research is extremely policy-driven

I became aware of this issue in the 2000s. Since then, my research themes have consistently been related to the construction of a safety net, and I would like to present a view on this issue based on my own research trajectory on this theme. The safety net is extremely close to policy, and findings from a purely high-level observer research stance are not welcome in society if they diverge from what is being sought. It requires a very close relationship with the field, and because of this, it also has a social implementation aspect that is popular today. As a geographer, when I first started to carry out the homeless survey in 1998, which made me aware of the issue of safety net, I felt that it had to be done in a very interdisciplinary way to address it as a regional issue.

To summarize briefly, regarding the social implementation of safety nets for the homeless, the emergence of the new category of "needy persons" (生活困窮者) has replaced the homeless as the main focus of policy. The KAKEN research reflecting this change is now clearly conducted by an interdisciplinary team. The team consists of researchers from social welfare, sociology, urban planning, and architecture. These projects are indeed concerned with the region, and I often use the terms such as "city" and "region", but in terms of the safety net, what kind of practical application of urban and regional studies has the KAKEN research team come up with? In this paper, I would like to present the trajectory that led to it, which can be seen as a collection of good practices.

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2. The safety net-oriented research began with a survey of the homeless

Let us go back 25 years in time. It all started when Mayor ISOMURA Takafumi, who was a professor in the Faculty of Business Administration at Osaka City University before becoming the mayor of Osaka. He instructed Osaka City University to take the lead in conducting a survey of the homeless. At that time, the sociology and geography departments of Osaka City University and the labor economics and social welfare departments of Osaka Prefecture University were the main participants. There were very few studies in sociology that dealt with the homeless, and clarifying who the homeless people were was the essential starting point for understanding how to provide services to individuals. From the perspective of labor economics, the problem of homelessness was a problem of unemployment, and the urgent task was to figure out how to construct an unprecedented system for adjusting the demand for labor in response to the ups and downs of the economy. In addition, in the field of social welfare studies, homelessness was partly caused by the dysfunction of social welfare, and the question was how to make it work. From this perspective, these three academic fields were able to get to the heart of the problem because they were primarily concerned with people. There was a lack of prior research, and there were too many unknowns, so there was a great need for good practices that would lead to practical solutions.

However, the problem that geography faced in relation to the homeless problem was to provide knowledge on how to coordinate the use of space and to provide basic data for consensus building on the use of space (this is how I understand it now). Many homeless people spontaneously use and live in public spaces and other people's private spaces, and the issue was more about "eviction" than about coordinating the use of space. Many concerns were expressed, especially by the graduate students who attended. While the other three academic fields were concerned with the structure of the system, geography, by its very nature, is good at observation, and we recognized that the problem was to clarify where the homeless were. Although people who could no longer live in the region became homeless, and the problem of homelessness is a problem of spaces related to urban parks, underpasses, station buildings, and riverbeds, there was no attempt to look at this problem as a regional issue.

Research in an area where there are many unknowns is required to find solutions and to contribute to the smooth implementation of policies based on the findings. This survey of homeless people faced such a very practical problem. At the time of the survey, around 2000, I was not really aware of it, but the survey leader, sociologist MORITA Yohji, was a researcher with a strong awareness of this point, and there was much to learn from his attitude. After that, young researchers in sociology, labor economics, social welfare studies, and geography produced results and were able to pursue careers as researchers, and it can be said that this was the result of providing clues and answers to the unknown things that were being sought. Looking back on those days, I think that the process and the results, including the various heated discussions that sometimes turned into arguments between the young graduate students and the faculty members at that time, are worthy of being called good practice.

3. Unknown research subjects are worth dealing with

At the heart of this search for the unknown was the need to clarify the role of work in helping the homeless find employment. While it was true that the majority of people lost their homes and ended up on the streets after losing their jobs, 70% of those living on the streets earned an average of 30,000 yen. They were found to be working in informal jobs, mainly collecting scrap and recyclable materials, living

in huts or tents they had built while working, and leading a lifestyle that was equivalent to an income of about 80,000 yen, as they had no rent or utility bills to pay and spent about 50,000 yen.

In line with the findings of these surveys, the central government (the then Ministry of Health and Welfare) introduced its first homeless policy in 1999, and local governments followed suit in 2000. The surveys revealed a picture of homeless people who worked, which was quite different from the situation in Europe and America, and the way to achieve the goal of eliminating homelessness as society demanded was to re-integrate them into the formal labor market, rather than the informal one. With the goal of moving into an apartment with a rental contract that is tied to formal employment, this was called "self-reliance through employment", and the new facility called the "Homeless Self-reliance Support Center" was to be responsible for helping people in their early 50s, who were still in their prime, to return to the formal market. With employment support provided by the Hello Work employment agency, shared accommodation with meals was provided. As a result, around 40% of the people started out with the goal of "self-reliance through employment", and around 40% of them achieved that goal in the short term. For those who found it difficult to return to the formal market with a focus on employment, the route to "welfare independence", or becoming independent in an apartment by receiving public assistance, was explored while using the temporary shelters set up in parks, or shelters that could be used for one night or short-term stays. This route was improved in the direction of elderly people without an address receiving public assistance, and in the early 2000s, so-called "home protection" using public assistance housing assistance in the community rapidly progressed. Of course, the outreach work of private NPOs also played a strong role. In Osaka City, housing called "supportive houses" (so-called because they were modeled on similar projects in the US) were set up in converted simple lodgings, while in the Tokyo metropolitan area and other areas, NPOs operated free or low-cost lodgings (multi-person lodgings based on the Social Welfare Law) that functioned as housing by guaranteeing temporary accommodation until people could move into their own apartments. We call this intermediate housing "transit housing". The path to "self-reliance through work" and "self-reliance through welfare" - the path to ending homelessness - has been opened up through this intermediate housing.

The field of study has also shifted from homeless people living in public spaces and other outdoor living spaces to areas that offer apartment living, and to the broader category of precarious living as a resident. These apartments are typically small, low-rent dwellings in inner-city neighborhoods, and research has shifted to the study of housing, living arrangements, support systems, and work styles in areas where the real estate market is dominated by the use of underutilized resources such as employee dormitories, in other words, the safety nets of cities and regions. Of course, even with the introduction of such safety nets, there were various gradations of circumstances, such as those who could not cope well with them, those who moved back and forth between sleeping outdoors and informal employment, etc.

4. We focus on homeless self-reliance support centers and free low-cost accommodation

Research from the perspective of "transit housing" in the context of supporting the homeless was something new. Previously, shelters were the main form of housing for the homeless, but from the 1980s, temporary shelters were set up in large cities for people to spend the winter or the year-end and New Year period. These included rehabilitation facilities for unemployed people with injuries or illnesses that could be used within public assistance facilities, which could also be positioned as

transit housing. However, in addition to these, in the early 2000s, a series of homeless self-reliance centers were established under the jurisdiction of the government of designated cities in large cities as a new measure dealing with people living on the streets/homelessness. The operation of most of these hastily-built centers was taken on by a long-established social welfare corporation in the industry that operates the above-mentioned transit housing. In addition, as an outreach to people living on the streets, a system of mobile consultation was also established. This combination of the center and the mobile consultation room formed the core of official homeless measures.

What was unique was the background of the staff involved. As the operation of the interim housing was developed on short notice, some staff were seconded from the main corporation, but the majority were recruited through job postings at Hello Work and word of mouth. They did not necessarily have welfare-related qualifications. Therefore, the team was made up of a diverse group of people with a variety of career backgrounds who had entered the "industry" through changing jobs, and who were relatively strongly motivated to work on improving the homeless problem.

The reason I continued to be involved with self-reliance support centers was the aftercare project started by Director YAMAMOTO of "Oyodo", a self-reliance support center. The project was made possible through private funding via an NPO with which the director was involved. The project entailed helping the former residents to find jobs and apartments to live independently after leaving the center. The apartments were conveniently located, had low rent, and were close to places of employment, and were scattered all over Osaka City and beyond. When it comes to whether or not the local community can support single men living in apartments, the fact that they have lived there for a short time means that their ties to the area are weak, and in the absence of ties to their families, the center becomes their lifeline. As the center staff members take on the role of family, and through repeated home visits and safety checks, it becomes clear that the unintentional monitoring of local real estate agents and the presidents of small and medium-sized companies also plays a significant role.

In addition, free or low-cost shelters developed in metropolitan areas that were institutionally underutilized have been discovered by NPOs as a way to house such individuals. This is done by using public housing subsidies as rent to help people get out of homelessness. Rather than approaching it as a "poverty business", we obtained cooperation from several NPOs to investigate how the transit housing functions as a safety net. This involved using idle former employee dormitories in local regions to provide private rooms and meals in a dining hall, with the goal of achieving "employment self-reliance" and "welfare self-reliance". It became part of the support for overcoming homelessness using public assistance, serving as either a final residence or temporary transit housing. The passionate commitment of the young staff, most of whom had changed jobs, was truly impressive.

The significance of post-use local residence, place, and regional built environment - such as centers and accommodations - has grown stronger as social infrastructure. From this perspective, the work has become meaningful in terms of social implementation in these regions. In this way, since the late 2000s, homelessness research has shifted from focusing on homeless individuals living on the streets to studying those who have lost their connection with a home while residing in housing. This has led to nationwide research on transit housing and apartments.

5. What is the state of the safety net for the homeless in East Asia?

In 2001, overseas research was started in East Asia, in South Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan, with a survey of the homeless, and the reason

why the research was continuously adopted was due to the synergistic effect of the research in Japan and East Asia, where the situation of the homeless in Japan and the development of a safety net for them were progressing in parallel. I have written elsewhere about how I started to work on the issue of homelessness in East Asia, which was completely unrelated to the flow of research in Japan (Mizuuchi 2017). I consciously planned a survey that focused on location, built environment, and regional relations. This involved focusing on intermediate housing in urban areas, such as shelters, homeless self-reliance support centers, hostels, lodgings, and simple lodging facilities. As this is a project relatively new in terms of policy, it has also been largely ignored by academia, and there is almost no prior research, so we carried out a series of joint surveys with translation.

Geerhardt KORNATOWSKI, who was a research student who participated in the East Asia survey from the beginning and ended up writing his doctoral thesis on this theme, reflects on the expansion of the survey to include the region in a retrospective essay on his master's thesis, which dealt with homeless support in Hong Kong:

> From a geographical perspective, it is inevitable that the commonalities of support centers and services in inner cities stand out, and it was clear that the relationship with the unique housing and labor markets was decisive, not just the geographical convenience of the support services. For the time being, in my master's thesis, I focused on the fact that support groups have a high level of pride in the areas where they operate. These groups can make use of the unique characteristics of these areas in their support activities. In conclusion, I stated that the high motivation for providing support services and the social identity that is based on the location have formed another social movement. (Kornatowski 2022: 117)

In his master's thesis, he focused on the bases of activities of homeless support groups from this perspective and proposed the concept of "place-based". Furthermore, in his doctoral thesis, he examined the popular urban theories of the time, such as revanchist city and gentrification, which were gaining popularity in the radical geography community, and examined whether they were applicable to Hong Kong:

> Although the poor housing and homelessness issues and incidents of removing the homeless from public spaces certainly fitted well, the movement to strengthen support for the homeless, including the injection of public funds, the persistent support activities of NPOs in inner city areas, and the construction of new transit housing, called for a different theory. (Kornatowski 2022: 118)

At the time, we were running a Global COE program, and our goal was to pursue the establishment of the "East Asian Inclusive City Theory". This was in line with the "Another Approach to Inner City Regeneration through Homeless Support in East Asia" project, which was approved as a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (A) from 2010 to 2012. Here is the outline of this project:

> The recent ten years of new homeless support initiatives in East Asia (Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong) have given us an insight on its achievements. Homeless support has produced an alternative rehabilitation-based regeneration model, in which energetic NGOs have filled the gaps of residual welfare and housing policy shortcomings. We have analyzed projects on local safety-net rebuilding and unique transitory housing initiatives. These projects have added an extra dimension of housing and job support to the existing welfare schemes. By means of organizing international workshops every year, we have also formulated suggestions for enhanced social policies.

It was truly a rebirth as a study of the concept of a regional safety net.

6. The nationalization of survey that leads to a comprehensive safety net concept has been conducted

In the East Asia survey, the focus shifted from inner-city regeneration to urban theory in the 2010s. As an overseas research project, the primary objective was not to implement social measures to create safety nets in each region. However, the Japanese survey was more about tackling the unknown aspects of the homeless problem than about pure research, and this led to the clarification of policy issues and the creation of a mechanism that mobilized and motivated actors to tackle these issues.

Clarifying the importance of aftercare became the most important issue for the unknown. This is because it was related to how successfully people who had left homelessness could live in the region. In the 2000s, the number of welfare recipients in Nishinari Ward, Osaka City, who were the target of such aftercare, increased dramatically. In 2005, we conducted a survey of 1,249 people at the request of the ward office. In 2006, we conducted a nationwide survey of people who had moved into apartment living through homeless support groups across the country, with the cooperation of 63 groups from as far north as Asahikawa to as far south as Naha. This "Another Homeless Survey", which was conducted as an alternative to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare's nationwide survey, was a groundbreaking survey in terms of building a nationwide network for supporting the homeless. It was commissioned directly by a Democratic Party of Japan member of the House of Councillors at the time. Firstly, during the survey, we were able to work together with well-known social activists from Nishinari, Kamagasaki, San'ya, Shinjuku and Kitakyushu, and through our visits to NPOs providing support across the country, we were able to create opportunities to bring together organizations that had previously been working more or less independently. This meeting between social activists and NPOs led to the establishment of the "National Homeless Support Network" in 2007, with OKUDA Tomoshi of Kitakyushu at the center, and directly led to the official establishment of the NPO in 2008.

Coinciding with the time, the bankruptcy of the Lehman Brothers and the subsequent organization of the "Tent Village for Jobless over the New Years Period" (年越し派遣村), a tent village for newly unemployed homeless individuals, marked the beginning of a rapid development in research and safety net policy formulation. In the midst of Prime Minister KOIZUMI's "trinity reforms", the safety net component, aside from the heavy public assistance sector, began to be formalized in the mid-2000s as being entrusted to private NPOs. Following the "Tent Village", it became a natural course for private NPOs to take on policies related to the last line of safety nets.

The "Cabinet Office Special Mission Team for a Society that Includes Each and Every Person", which was established in January 2011 under the leadership of YUASA Makoto, who was the leader of the "Tent Village", combined with the recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake that followed, decisively set the trend towards social inclusion, with private sector NPOs playing a leading role. In order to do this, it is necessary for the private NPOs themselves to clarify the actual situation and initiatives on the front line, and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare has begun to support surveys through a subsidy system called the Social Welfare Promotion Project. The aforementioned NPO National Homeless Support Network was also commissioned a survey project through a selection process and has been conducting it continuously since 2010, while I served as the head of its survey committee.

The immediate goals were to formulate emergency support for the precariously housed, to promote residential welfare, and to establish

personal support and accompaniment support to provide concrete aftercare. As a result, the support for the homeless, which had been called "residual welfare", was formally included in the welfare system with the enactment of the Act for Supporting the Self-Reliance of Persons in Need in 2015. One of the free low-cost accommodation facilities for the homeless, which had been criticized for being a poverty business, was rebranded as a social welfare housing facility, and the personnel costs for providing support were finally institutionalized as daily life support housing facilities. In addition, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism has also promoted housing welfare policies based on the establishment of housing welfare corporations, with the aim of evolving the Housing Safety Net Act in the form of housing security for people with special needs.

7. A safety net concept that is inclusive and built from the region

As the author, I have referred to the last safety net as the "basal safety net" that functions in any region, and our research team has continued to be involved in the establishment of this formal welfare system. While repeating nationwide surveys, I was able to gain the rare experience of being involved in the process of enacting this law. Thanks to this experience, a series of Challenging Exploratory Research Projects were adopted to contribute to the safety net concept by tracking down the diverse groups of people living in precarious conditions in the region.

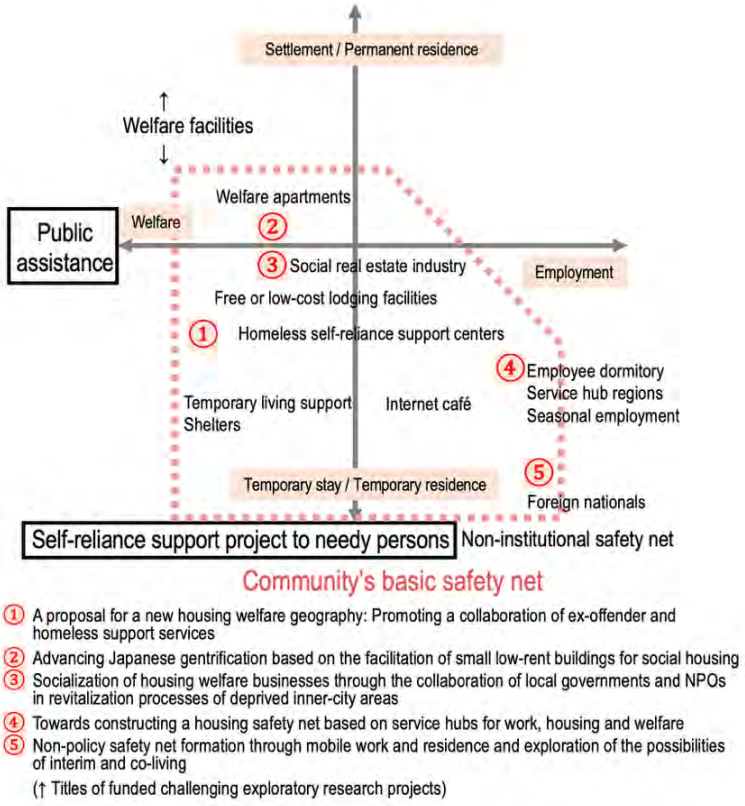

Figure 1: Schematic diagram of the community's basic safety net

Finally, using Figure 1, I would like to explain how the topics of the Challenging Exploratory Research Projects have been involved in the safety net that is being constructed from the region.

Items ① to ⑤ in Figure 1 are research topics for Challenging Exploratory Research, which have been adopted every three years since 2010. In contrast to the traditional safety net, which has been covered by institutional welfare, the basic safety net of the public assistance for the self-reliance of the need persons has started to function, particularly at the homeless self-reliance support center, temporary living support, and shelters. And from there, or directly through the use of public assistance, many needy persons have begun to live in the regions, with free or low-cost accommodation and welfare apartments being mediated by the social real estate industry. The three themes of the challenging exploratory research ①, ②, and ③ are precisely those that deal with such themes, and in terms of the relationship with the community, the small, low-rent housing became "social housing" (which refers to housing that utilizes public housing assistance in the form of public assistance, as opposed to public housing). The mechanism of revitalizing urban areas in need from the viewpoint of residential welfare began to work as a result of the accumulation of these housing units. This was supported by NPOs whose main purpose was to provide residential welfare.

Recent research (④ and ⑤) has focused on the way in which these dormitories function as a non-policy, yet substantive safety net that does not rely on private-sector systems, providing a set of housing and work. The scope of research is expanding to include dormitories for temporary and contract employees, seasonal workers, and even foreign nationals. In particular, in terms of regional relations, the survey makes visible what is difficult to see in terms of regional concentration of dormitories for employees and seasonal workers, and it is also easy to see the areas where foreign nationals live in concentrated numbers. Amidst the declining population and the mismatch between labor supply and demand, the need for foreign nationals is increasing greatly. The residential welfare safety net is essential as an infrastructure that enables everyday coexistence in the regions.

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Exploring the Perceptions of Newcomer Immigrants in the Japanese Inner City

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Abstract

This paper examines how newcomer immigrants perceive and experience life in Nishinari, a stigmatized inner-city neighborhood of Osaka, Japan. Based on two-and-a-half years of fieldwork and interviews with 31 immigrant residents, it proposes a typology of "perceptions of Nishinari" to capture the diverse and complex ways in which immigrants understand their environment. Through these grounded accounts, this paper reveals the dynamic and evolving interpretations among immigrants in Japan's marginalized urban spaces.

Keywords

territorial stigmatization; neighborhood perceptions; immigrant; lifeworld; Nishinari; Osaka

Introduction

This paper is an adaptation of the fourth chapter from the author's master's thesis completed at Osaka City University (now, Osaka Metropolitan University). Based on two-and-a-half years of fieldwork and participant observation in the impoverished inner-city neighborhood of Nishinari in Osaka, Japan between 2014 and 2017, this research seeks to understand the significant increase of newcomer immigrants (hereafter referred to as "immigrants" or "migrants") [1] living in the target area [2] by delineating their migration processes, networks, and varied relationships with Japanese society. The findings presented

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1 The term "newcomer immigrants" refers to migrants, mostly from the Asia mainland and Southeast Asia, who moved to Japan from the late 1980s onward. This term is used to distinguish between so-called *Zainichi* Koreans and other non-Japanese who either moved or were forcibly relocated to Japan during its occupation of Asia prior to and during the Second World War.

2 The field for this paper is defined as the northwest portion of Nishinari Ward, known in Japanese as 西成北西部 (*Nishinari hokuseibu*). This area is sociologically significant because it represents the largest *hisabetsu buraku* (discriminated community) in Japan and played a large role in galvanizing the postwar *Dowa* Movement. While Nishinari Ward writ large is also historically significant as a symbol of inner-city poverty in Japan, this research focuses on the Nishinari area to better understand the transition away from a uniquely Japanese form of discrimination to the more generalizable phenomenon of immigration, inner-city poverty, and stigmatization. "Nishinari" and "the Nishinari area" are used interchangeably to refer to the field of research, while "Nishinari Ward" is only used when referring to the larger surrounding area.

here—namely, descriptions of the lived experiences of 31 immigrants in the Nishinari area gleaned from semi-structured interviews[3]—represent an attempt to answer the following research question: What are the perceptions of immigrants living in a highly-stigmatized part of the Japanese inner city, and how does this inform our broader understanding of the ways in which immigrants understand and interface with the communities in which they reside?

The lived experiences of immigrants in Nishinari are inherently complex, diverse, and dynamic. This dynamism is manifested in the varied ways in which immigrants perceive and describe their place of residence. As residents, the immigrants' diverse perceptions of the Nishinari area (hereafter referred to as "perceptions of Nishinari"[4]) provide valuable insight for interpreting recent changes and social trends in the area. While research on the migration process and social capital seeks to illuminate how immigrants come to make Nishinari their home and the kinds of relationships they form there, questions concerning how these people perceive their living environment and their experiences within Japanese society are invariably more subjective. The goal of this paper is to provide a framework for the common "perceptions of Nishinari" by interpreting the narratives of immigrant residents.

This paper will begin with an overview of the prior research devoted to uncovering immigrants' perceptions of their environment. Following that, I will introduce the concept of the lifeworld and elucidate the "perceptions of Nishinari," the central theme of this research. After identifying the factors contributing to the framework, I will analyze the typology of the "perceptions of Nishinari" through case studies. Finally, this paper will conclude with a discussion of cognitive variability, focusing on how one's "perception of Nishinari" can change over time.

1. The perceptions of immigrants

Among the qualitative literature on immigrants, the views and perspectives they hold of their host societies is a central theme. Indeed, this topic's impact is far reaching, stretching beyond the domain of sociology to a wealth of other disciplines, from psychology and anthropology to economics and political science. For the purposes of this paper, I review previous studies in the field of urban sociology to better understand the influx of immigrants into marginalized and impoverished neighborhoods.

In Japanese urban sociology, Hideo Aoki (1993) views international migration as a re-stratification of the urban underclass of the host society. This argument focuses on the processes of sending and receiving and offers a typology of the position of foreign workers in the Japanese labor market. In his delineation of the stratification of workers, Aoki emphasizes both the fluidity and the diversity of the lower urban strata in Japanese society. However, as this argument rests strongly on the historical backdrop of the early 1990s, it reduces

[3] Interviews were conducted in Japanese or English, depending on which language the participant was more comfortable using. In only one circumstance was interpretation necessary (participant K3), in which the participant used Korean, and a mutual acquaintance translated into Japanese. Further, each interview participant is assigned a code consisting of a letter representing their nationality and a number corresponding to the sequence of their interview. For example, P2 designates the second Filipino participant interviewed for this study.

[4] "Perceptions of Nishinari" is used here to reflect the Japanese term 「西成地区観」, which indicates immigrants' subjective interpretations of their neighborhood, rather than objective assessments.

foreigners residing in the areas studied to merely manual laborers. As a result, the scope of Aoki's analysis is overly narrow when one considers the current situation in which the social status and occupations of foreign residents have become highly differentiated.

Kahoruko Yamamoto (2000; 2010) conducted similar work in Kotobukicho, a *yoseba*, or district within a Japanese city where day laborers congregate to find work, of Yokohama city. Through her exploration of the perspectives of manual laborers from Korea and the Philippines residing in Kotobukicho, Yamamoto found that these immigrants differ from the Japanese residents in the area. That is, contrary to the Japanese, who are subject to a degree of exclusion from larger society and bear an inferiority complex, the immigrants in Kotobukicho see it as a place where they can earn high wages and interact with their fellow residents. Although an interesting and important point, Yamamoto's representation of immigrants assumed that they have maintained the same, homegeneous perspectives since their arrival in Japan.

In this respect, western urban sociology is instructive. The study of urban migration has its roots in the Chicago school of sociology (Park and Burgess 1925; Zorbaugh 1929), and this paper focuses on a theoretical shift that occurred during the mid-1980s. It was at this time that the traditional theoretical frameworks proposed by the Chicago school (namely, assimilation, multiculturalism, and ethnic enclave theory) started receiving criticism for not reflecting reality and being too ethnocentric (Zhou 1997). Consequently, focus was placed on reexamining the immigrants' journey within their host societies, and a richer understanding of the immigrant experience in the United States—namely, that variation exists within the immigrant community and they cannot be expected to simply assimilate into the middle class—took hold. The segmented assimilation theory was the first to posit that immigrants, especially second-generation and onward, integrate into different segments of the host society, leading to diverse social and economic outcomes (Portes and Borocz 1989; Portes and Zhou 1993), while also taking differences within immigrants' perspectives into account. As Yamamoto (2000, 2010) analyzed in Kotobukicho, newly arriving immigrants tend to perceive and experience their place of residence differently from general society. A similar trend can be observed in large American and European cities as well. From their research in Miami and San Diego, Portes and Rumbaut (2014: 178) point out that, contrary to their predictions, and even though most immigrants live in relatively poor areas, many of them think positively of these areas[5]. These perceptions are seen as the result of a combination of factors, namely the living conditions and experiences in their home countries and host societies.

More recent studies, however, have begun exploring immigrants' perceptions from the approach of social psychology, focusing on the link between place of residence and life chances, experiences of discrimination, and stigma (Broto et al. 2010). This has revealed more varied interpretations of immigrants' perceptions of their place of residence and host society, adding nuance to what was once characterized as generally positive. Indeed, when immigrants are unable to move to their desired location due to economic exigencies, many cases reveal that they go on to criticize and discriminate against other residents (Smith and Ley 2008; Wacquant et al. 2014). In sum, while immigrants' perceptions and experiences of their place of residence necessarily and

[5] Jensen and Christensen (2012) and Biswas-Diener and Diener (2001) also report similar findings from different fields, the former in East Arlburg, Denmark, and the latter in Kolkata, India.

naturally differ from what is common in the larger host society, we must also acknowledge the internal gradations that exist among immigrants themselves.

French sociologist Serge Paugam (2005) argues that taking diversity into account is a theoretical and analytical advancement. Indeed, he posits that in order to understand the process of poverty, it is necessary to simultaneously consider the social representation of poverty and the experiences of those identified as poor. In doing so, it becomes clear that poverty has different meanings depending on the level of economic and industrial development of a country or region, making it possible to analyze the subjective aspects of poverty as well. This study shares Paugam's awareness of the subjective nature and experience of poverty: to fully understand the case of Nishinari and avoid simplistic generalizations, it is necessary to employ an analytical framework capable of addressing the area's extensive diversity.

2. From the "lifeworld" to "perceptions of Nishinari"

The concept of the "lifeworld" has been frequently used by social scientists in an attempt to comprehensively understand the lives of their subjects. Tomoko Fukuda (2012: 14), who studied transnational networks of Pakistani residents in Japan, summarizes the usage of this analytical framework as follows:

> The concept of the lifeworld has often been used in Japanese migration research. It involves a reconstruction of the subject's reality through participant observation, interviews, surveys of living conditions, and especially life histories and ethnography. (translated by the author)

It is important to note that the lifeworld does not aim to represent reality itself, but the reality of the parties concerned. Although the methodological superiority of empiricism and subjectivism has long been debated, the goal of the lifeworld is not objectivity. Rather, it is incumbent upon the researcher to be as aware as possible of his or her own positionality, and to describe and reconstruct in concrete terms how the participant's habits and behaviors are subjectively conceived and expressed (Frick 2011).

By focusing on the participant's daily practices and the diversity within them, the lifeworld is informative when examining the relationship between social structure and the individual. As Ijichi (2000) explains from her fieldwork on Jeju Island, the study of the lifeworld cannot be constructed from the traditional dichotomy of structuralism and individual agency, but must recognize the give-and-take between the two. No matter how much an individual is constrained within a given social structure, there is always room for improvisation and negotiation to emerge.

It is in this vein that the concept of the lifeworld informs our understanding of Nishinari. As mentioned above, the "perceptions of Nishinari" that this paper aims to uncover necessarily reflect the participants' lifeworlds. As will be detailed in the next section, the "perception of Nishinari" is the subjective interpretation by each participant of the place in which he/she lives, and I will analyze the specific factors and process of its formation. Given such conceptual complexity, a comprehensive description of the lifeworld—made up of everyday practices, such as customs, values, backgrounds, cultural practices considered traditional, improvisation, social structures, and more (Ijichi 2000)—falls beyond the scope of this paper. As such, the "perception of Nishinari" is a thread that runs through the lifeworld of immigrants, but is not equal to it.

Nevertheless, the sociological significance of elucidating the "perceptions of Nishinari" can be summarized in the following two points. Firstly, even if the level of analysis does not reach that of the lifeworld, it is still possible to reconstruct the "perceptions of Nishinari" from the participants' narratives. These perspectives, inherently subjective, are rooted in deep and

meaningful personal experiences. Above mere observations of whether Nishinari is good place to live or not, objections to Japanese society, complex attitudes toward experiences of discrimination, and contradictory statements emerge through this form of expression, providing valuable data for interpreting the relationship between social structures and the individual.

The second point of sociological significance is its contribution as a case study. The immigrants living in the Nishinari area represent a growing population of subalterns in Japan's "stigmatized inner-city," and their understanding of social status and perceptions of their situation provide a unique case study that informs urban sociology, immigration studies, and Buraku studies. As outlined in the previous section, the accumulation of research focusing on the perceptions held by immigrants in recent years has forced researchers to acknowledge the diversity that exists within those views, making it difficult to advance theory beyond descriptive observation. In this paper, I posit four types of "perceptions of Nishinari," keeping in mind the improvisational and variable nature of the participants emphasized in the lifeworld framework. Of the four types presented here, some have been observed in other fields, while others have yet to be outlined in detail. Moreover, by examining the process by which immigrants' perceptions are formed, it is possible to draw connections between the Nishinari area and other marginalized inner-city neighborhoods studied around the world.

3. The formation process

Portes and Rumbaut (2014) point out that not only do the attitudes and perceptions immigrants hold differ according to their place of residence and host society, but that significant variation can be also observed within the same immigrant communities. Based on findings from previous studies which posit that immigrants' subjective perceptions are mainly shaped by various social and economic factors in their home and host societies, in this section, I will examine the factors at play in forming participants' "perceptions of Nishinari."

The conditions in migrants' home countries provide a useful starting point. The culture and social norms, level of economic development, standard of living, and native language of immigrants living in Nishinari are all determined by their country or region of origin, and it is important to note that this directly impacts their subjective perceptions. As such, it can be said that the cultural and socioeconomic conditions of the home country shape immigrants' habitus and form the basis of their worldview prior to migration (Bourdieu 1972; Broto et al. 2010). After leaving their home country and moving abroad, immigrants compare and judge their destination against standards and expectations formed in their home country, at least initially. Merton (1957) investigated the same phenomenon through the concept of relative deprivation. That is, whether one is satisfied or dissatisfied with their circumstances is determined not by absolute conditions, but by the relative standards each individual adopts (Merton 1957; Pettigrew et al. 2008). This explains why immigrants tend to have different perceptions from those of the general society in their host country; a phenomenon which can also be observed in Nishinari.

The level of economic development in an immigrant's country of origin and their social status within it are important factors informing their "perception of Nishinari." More specifically, whether the participant came from a developed society or a developing country, and whether their background was middle-class or working-class, are all meaningful factors influencing their interpretation of Nishinari. In some cases, circumstances in the home country are directly connected to the migrant's purpose for migrating to Japan. For example, participants N1 and N2, both of whom were

born in northern Nigeria, fled to Japan to escape persecution by Boko Haram. The Koreans interviewed for this study came to Japan through a network of compatriots that directly tied their place of birth to the Nishinari area. In all cases, however, the criteria immigrants adopt for evaluating their place of residence vary depending on their motivations for migration and expectations when moving to Japan, and these differences are ultimately reflected in the "perceptions of Nishinari."

Another determining factor in the foundation of the "perceptions of Nishinari" is the migration pattern, specifically, whether they moved to Japan by choice or not. Of the participants who had no say in the decision, many began living in Nishinari immediately upon arriving in Japan. For them, their new neighborhood came to represent all of Osaka city and, by extension, Japanese society as a whole.

> P2: "(Before coming to Japan,) I knew almost nothing about this country and had no expectations in particular. I only came here because my mother told me to… When I first came to Nishinari, of course I was very happy because it is totally different from the Philippines. You know, the city is clean, there are no cockroaches or rats. I liked it because I could go anywhere by bicycle. And I liked the Japanese baths (ofuro) right from the start."

This account can be considered representative of the experience of those who moved to the area with no other recourse. This group of immigrants, who moved into the Nishinari area without any awareness of its relative social status, invariably evaluate their new life based on standards inculcated in their home countries. For those like participant I1, an Indonesian immigrant who has only lived in the Nishinari area and explains that he "fell in love with Japan because of its food and the warmth of the people," Nishinari serves as the benchmark for Japanese society. However, as their stay in Japan grows longer and they gain a deeper understanding of the area in which they live within larger Japanese society, their criteria change, and with it, their "perception of Nishinari" changes as well.

Conversely, most immigrants who chose to move to Japan lived in other regions of the country or parts of Osaka for some time—and therefore developed, to varying degrees, an understanding of Japanese society and the stigma associated with Nishinari—prior to moving in. Indeed, exposure to negative comments about their choice of residence, such as "Nishinari is scary" or "overrun by homeless people," or through the process of visiting the area themselves, they begin to form the basis of their "perception of Nishinari" in advance. Given that they decided to live in Nishinari despite the existence of these negative biases and other available options, we can assume that the area met their standards in one way or another, even if it was not ideal. In other words, the immigrants who make a rational decision to move into Nishinari do so with prior knowledge and set of expectations that make them less likely to be surprised by their area of residence than members of the previously discussed group. Moreover, if these immigrants find life in Nishinari to not match with the discriminatory rhetoric they faced prior to moving in, they feel further justified in their choice of residence.

In addition to factors relating to the home country, the immigrants' lived experiences in Japanese society also influence the "perceptions of Nishinari." Broadly speaking, immigrants' relationship with Japanese society and means of accumulating social capital are largely determined by their Japanese language skills and access to compatriot networks. In general, the more an immigrant personally associates with Japanese people, the more likely he or she is to become aware of public perception of the Nishinari area, which in turn impacts their "perception of Nishinari." When immigrants who previously held a favorable impression of their neighborhood are told of the "dirty and dangerous Nishinari," a cognitive dissonance

occurs, causing some people to change their views, others to become conflicted.

That being said, there are situations in which immigrants are made aware of the status of Nishinari even without forging strong bonds with Japanese society. For example, K1, a Korean woman, first learned of Nishinari discrimination by interacting with a cab driver who was reluctant to let her ride when she shared her destination. Of the participants interviewed for this study, K1 thinks more positively of the Nishinari area than most, yet even she admits that this experience—a symptom of territorial stigma—made her reconsider her place of residence. While there are cases of long-term residents who never come to realize how Nishinari is thought of by larger society, generally, participants' ability to understand and speak Japanese improves the longer they live in Japan, thus increasing their exposure to dismissive or outright discriminatory views.

In sum, it can be said that immigrants' "perceptions of Nishinari" are shaped by both experiences in their home country as well as those within Japanese society. However, it is also necessary to account for the role of individual attitudes in this analysis. Data from this survey reveals that two immigrants who share similar backgrounds and experiences—and even members of the same family—can form completely different "perceptions of Nishinari." As such, despite my best efforts in analyzing the factors discussed here, I must also recognize that there is a limit to their predictive power. In the next section, I will construct a typology of the "perceptions of Nishinari" and examine it through illustrative case studies.

4. Uncovering the "perceptions of Nishinari"

In explaining the typology of "perceptions on Nishinari" (Table 1), the following two points should be noted in advance. First, the "perceptions of Nishinari" discussed below are ideal types inductively derived from the data of this survey, and do not claim to be an exhaustive summary of all of the possible subjective views of immigrants. As ideal types, each is intended to analyze general trends rather than to wholistically describe the narratives of the participants in their entirety. Secondly, the "perceptions of Nishinari" are not mutually exclusive, but contain partially overlapping aspects. While this will be discussed in detail in the following section, it is because individual perceptions often change organically over time and rarely fit neatly into one type in perpetuity. Therefore, the classification of each participant represents only what his or her perception was at the time of the interview, and it should not be assumed that their type is fixed or incapable of changing in the future. As I covered at the

Table 1: The Typology of "Perceptions of Nishinari"

#	Type	Main Characteristics	Applicable Participants
1	Ignorance is Bliss	• Unaware of the existence of discrimination • Hold generally positive views of their place of residence	13 of 31
2	Positive Defiance	• Aware of the existence of discrimination and actively oppose it • Hold positive views of their place of residence and seek understanding from general society	12 of 31
3	Internalized Discrimination	• Hold biases toward the area and its residents • Support social stigma against Nishinari while simultaneously being a victim of it	4 of 31
4	Inferiority Complex	• Vacillate between positive and negative views toward the area • Sensitive to discrimination and conditioned to believe it	2 of 31

beginning of this paper, traditional assimilation theory was pilloried by the following generation for being too simplistic to properly ascertain the immigrant experience (Zhou 1997). As such, the similarities between the following types are a feature, not a bug, of this framework, in that it allows us to capture the breadth, depth, and complexity of the views expressed.

4.1. "Ignorance is Bliss"

The first "perception of Nishinari" may initially seem surprising given the prevalence of negative discourse surrounding the area, but it proves to be quite natural upon examination. The main characteristic is that participants of this type live in Nishinari without any knowledge of its social status and perceive the area in a positive or neutral way, thus leading me to name this type "Ignorance is Bliss"[6]. These participants are unable to pick up on the region's characteristics and the stigma it faces from general society, evaluating their place of residence solely through comparison with their environment in their home country. At the time of this study, 13 of 31 participants interviewed fit the "Ignorance is Bliss" type. Their backgrounds are diverse—two Nigerians, one Indonesian, four Filipinos, one Italian, one American, two Chinese, one Vietnamese, and one Nepali—spanning four continents and a broad range of economic development.

How does this perception emerge and persist? While varying in nationality, age, occupation, and gender, most participants in this type are relatively young, the majority of whom are international students and short-term visitors. There is considerable variation in migration processes as well: while reliance on organizational networks is the most common pattern, there are also those who deliberately chose to live in the Nishinari area. While this type is diverse in terms of attributes, they all share a low level of Japanese language proficiency and weak connections with Japanese society.

While foreign students naturally come to Japan with the goal of learning the language, in dorms and at their part-time jobs, and even after graduation, they are surrounded by classmates and other non-Japanese, making it difficult for them to establish personal relationships with Japanese people. Despite the fact that they are in contact with Japanese society in an educational setting daily, they live unaware of the history, social status, and existence of discrimination in their place of residence. The same trend can be observed with short-term missionaries, such as Filipino participants P3, P4, P7, and American participant A1, who focus their time and attention on their work, and Nigerian asylum seekers, like N1 and N2, who necessarily prioritize establishing a stable foundation for their lives. In all of these cases, participants have only limited engagement with Japanese society and thus have few opportunities to learn about the Nishinari area or encounter discrimination.

Blissfully ignorant of public prejudice, these participants form a "perception of Nishinari" that is unencumbered by negativity and stigma from the outside. As prior research indicates, immigrants in such a position tend to judge the host society and their place of residence within it based on the conditions in their home country, and in the case of these 13 participants, developing countries (Nigeria, the Philippines, China, Nepal, Vietnam, and Indonesia) make up the overwhelming majority. When compared to where they grew up, the Nishinari area is relatively clean, well-maintained, safe, and far from inferior in their eyes.

[6] In the original Japanese, this type is referred to as 「井の中の蛙」, which is the first half of an idiom that can be directly translated as "a frog in a well does not know the great ocean." Metaphorically, this idiom represents a person unaware of the world beyond one's small bubble, so for the English translation, I have adopted "Ignorance is bliss" to capture the same sentiment.

Let us examine the narratives of three immigrants who fit this type.

> IN1 (Indonesian male student): "(Where I grew up in) Bali is dirty and the streets are quite dangerous."
> Author: "Oh, crime, you mean?"
> IN1: "There was a lot of crime near my parents' house, yeah… But in Japan, in Nishinari it is clean and free, and I don't have that kind of fear at all.

> P3 (Filipina missionary): "I really don't know anything about Nishinari. Well, I know that it is very different from Manila. But I think Nishinari is very peaceful. The people are quiet and kind, busy, in general. I feel like Nishinari is a place to raise a family."

> V1 (Vietnamese male student): "Osaka is a bustling city, but it is very easy to live here (in Nishinari). It is close to Namba[7], and there are many trains, convenience stores, and supermarkets. And everyone is very kind and helpful. It is safe and convenient, and there are many beautiful stores…I liked living in Vietnam, but the roads are not good, there are many traffic accidents. It's just a lot less convenient. In Nghe An Province, where I lived, there are only three supermarkets."

These three participants share a significant amount in common: they all came from Southeast Asia, migrated to Japan in their early twenties, and have only lived in the Nishinari area within Japan. Like other participants in this type, they tend to describe their place of residence largely through comparisons with their home countries, revealing interpretations of Nishinari that directly oppose the commonly held images of fear and prejudice shared by Japanese society.

While the area's proximity to downtown Osaka is geographical fact, the perception that Nishinari is a relatively clean and safe area indicates a lack of knowledge about Japanese society. Without historical context, it is no surprise that these immigrants are unaware that the Nishinari area is a *hisabetsu buraku*, but they also fail to recognize that they are living in the middle of the largest concentration of poverty in all of Japan. IN1 reveals through the statement "in Japan, in Nishinari it is clean and free" that his lens for interpreting Japanese society is indeed Nishinari itself. P3, who goes so far as to emphasize the area's promise for raising children, is oblivious to the fact that Nishinari has the highest number of single-parent households in Osaka, in addition to the highest aging rate and the shortest average life expectancy in Japan.

There are others in this type who do not give as much credit to their place of residence[8]. Most of these participants are living there for economic necessity, although some are residing with their families. Unlike those quoted above, these participants do not speak of Nishinari in such lofty terms ("comfortable" was the most colorful expression used by these five), but they seem to be satisfied overall with the low cost of living and rent. These participants do not necessarily seek to establish a life in Nishinari; they just happen to live there now, and would probably move to another area given the chance. However, they demonstrate no awareness of the area's social status—nor do they harbor any distaste toward it or its residents—which fits the mold for the "Ignorance is Bliss" type.

It is worth clarifying that to acknowledge the existence of this type is not to deny the narratives of these participants as inconsistent or untrue. Given that subjective perception is constrained by one's mental models, a participant who has not been socialized in Japan cannot be expected to understand its complex social structures and history of discrimination and ostracization. Until these participants

[7] Namba is one of the main commercial and entertainment districts of Osaka, located in the south-central part of the city.

[8] There are five subjects in particular who fit this pattern: N1 and N2, a Nigerian male and female, P6, a Filipino, and C1 and C3, a Chinese male and female.

accumulate the time and experience required to understand their place of residence in the context of larger Japanese society, their "perception of Nishinari" is of an area with a higher standard of living than their home countries. This type is, therefore, transitory: while 13 participants shared this "perception" at the time of the interview, the same trend can be observed in all participants who had no say in moving to the Nishinari area immediately after migration. The "perception of Nishinari" that an immigrant transitions into, however, depends on his or her experiences, evolved understanding, and reactions to one's changing conditions.

4.2. "Positive Defiance"

Participants who fall into the second type also appreciate the Nishinari area, but speak based on an entirely different perception than those of the previous type. These immigrants form an identity of "Positive Defiance" against Nishinari discrimination and broader social inequality in Japan. Interestingly, the backgrounds of those who hold this "perception of Nishinari" are even more diverse than the "Ignorance is Bliss" type, and it is difficult to find similarities in their home environments or the circumstances surrounding their migration. The 12 participants in this type come from seven countries: the Philippines, Germany, South Korea, Nepal, China, India, and the United Kingdom. There is considerable variation in their age, gender, occupation and relationship to Japanese society as well. That being said, there are three throughlines that unify this type: these participants have generally lived in Japan for an extended period of time (the one exception being HI, an Indian male who has only lived in Japan for two years), they have an accurate understanding of the social status and stigma associated with the Nishinari area, and they actively defy discrimination and prejudice from the general public.

"Positive Defiance" is characterized by a high level of Japanese language ability and extensive contact with Japanese people. Of these 12 participants, nine are Long-term Residents or Permanent Residents, and five have intimate relationships with Japanese people. It is also worth noting that only three of these participants have lived in Nishinari from the beginning of their stay in Japan. Excluding P1 (a Filipina) and K1 and K6 (South Korean women), who moved into the area directly from overseas, the others made the conscious decision to reside in Nishinari after living in Japan for a certain period of time. While differences of degree exist between these participants, the fact that they deliberately chose to move into Nishinari even after learning of the area's social status is revealing. Despite the diverse criteria that informed their decisions (while K4 and UK2 (South Korean and British, respectively) emphasized economics, H1 (Indian male) prioritized proximity to work, P5 (Filipina) and Chinese participants C2 and C5 valued potential job opportunities, and G1 (German male) declared eloping with his Japanese partner as the main reason), it is clear that they moved into the area with a specific set of expectations. Choosing Nishinari, in the face of certain discrimination and social stigma, is their first act of defiance.

How do participants articulate this mindset? NE1, a Nepalese male who graduated from a Japanese language school and vocational school and has lived in Nishinari for three years, describes his experience as follows:

> Author: "What did you know about the area before you moved in?"
> NE1: "Well, I knew that Nishinari is considered the most dangerous area in Osaka, yeah. My teachers and friends constantly told me that it was dangerous to live here… I was a little disappointed that my friend believed that, so one day I invited him (to come to my apartment). 'Nothing's gonna happen, man, just come over,' like that. But he refused, he didn't come. I've lived here for three years now, and never once felt in danger, but I still get comments (from friends and others). I've just learned to stop paying attention."

Uncomfortable with the stigma and generalizations he faced on a regular basis, NE1 took concrete steps, like inviting his friend to visit the area, to dismantle them. Cognizant of the strong negative perceptions handicapping the area, he seeks to share his experiences and raise awareness amongst those around him. The efficacy of his actions, however, are tenuous at best, evinced by expression like "he refused, he didn't come" and "but I still get comments." Despite this, he continues to demonstrate an unwavering spirit of positive defiance with his concluding statement: "I've just learned to stop paying attention."

C4, a 71-year-old Chinese woman who began living in the Nishinari area in 2001, reflected on her first impressions of the community and the 15 years since.

> C4: "(My first impression was that) I didn't think badly of the area at all. When I first came here, people told me that it was not a nice area, but once I arrived, I had trouble finding things I thought were bad. The image of Nishinari is bad—that's for sure—but the area itself is not so… When I was studying Japanese at Y Junior High School[9], people used to say that Nishinari was not a nice place to live, but I always argued with them that that was not true…There are many schools, shopping is convenient, and everything is inexpensive. And as for transportation, there is the subway, Nankai Line, JR Line, and buses as well. For me, Nishinari is a very nice place to live. I say this with pride."
> Author: (with a laugh) "I know what you mean. People are often surprised when I tell them I live in Nishinari."
> C4: "Well, people who don't know about the area say that it is not a good place, or they just talk about the reputation of Nishinari in general. I guess it takes actually living here to see the good."

C4 makes a clear distinction between outsiders "who don't know," who merely accept the widespread discrimination of the area wholesale, and residents who "actually" understand what it is like to live there. In proudly asserting the benefits of living in Nishinari, C4 is fighting a similar battle to NE1. She seeks empathy from those around her, to varying degrees of success. Ultimately, however, she rationalizes the position of those who think poorly of the area by stating that actually living in Nishinari seems to be a prerequisite for appreciating its upside.

K4, a South Korean male, first came to Japan as an international student. He later moved into the Nishinari area after discovering its inexpensive housing. Following graduation, he found a job, married a fellow South Korean migrant, and started preparing to settle down. He recalls that after becoming financially viable, he was torn for a considerable period of time as to whether he should raise his family in the Nishinari area or not. However, he admits that as time passed, and he became more comfortable with the area, his mindset changed. He described this process as follows:

> K4: "In the beginning, you know, the rent was cheap, the cost of living was cheap, and I that was just the kind of place I was looking for. But when it came to my family, well, I was pretty worried. For a little while, I was unsure. But I got to know a lot of people at my kids' school, got involved with PTA, and when I talked to people, they were all very warm-hearted. Actually living here with my family, I found that it was a very nice place. Now, I have no worries and plan on staying here at least until my youngest (the youngest of five) graduates from school."

Despite changes in priorities due to becoming a father, K4 opted to remain in Nishinari after careful consideration, and he now feels at ease. Further, like C4, he uses the word "actually" to emphasize the difference between the reality of living in the area versus the public image of it. He had the following to say regarding the area's social status:

[9] Y Junior High School is not located in the Nishinari area.

> K4: "There are many rumors, not so good rumors. Even 15 years ago (when I first moved to the area), there were rumors, you know, and people saying all kinds of exaggerated things. But these rumors, well, they make me very sad, because that's not what actually living here is like. For me, this is a wonderful place to live. I could call it my second home. There isn't one part of me that wants to move elsewhere."

K4, who has forged a connection with the Nishinari community over the course of his time living there, is distressed by the area's reputation. Despite this, K4 remains loyal to Nishinari, not only by participating in the PTA and contributing to various community causes, but by positively defying the discrimination that plagues the area.

In addition to the three immigrants introduced above, P1, K1, and K6, who could not choose where they would live in Japan, also fit the "Positive Defiance" type. This is worth noting because unlike those who moved into the Nishinari area with prior knowledge of its public perception, these three participants went through a phase of "Ignorance is Bliss" shortly after migrating. Over time, however, each of them became aware of their situation for one reason or another. This is a pivotal juncture in the arc of immigrants living in Nishinari, and various reactions are possible. Nevertheless, if the participant's lived experience does not align with the negative portrayals being propagated, leading them to believe that discrimination is unreasonable, the "perception" of "Positive Defiance" beings to emerge.

Participant P1's case sheds light on this point. P1 is a 20-year-old Filipina who migrated to Japan in April 2014 to live with her mother (P5), who has lived in the Nishinari area for 11 years. In her first year in Japan, with only beginner-level Japanese skills, she struggled working part-time at a *bento* shop. Following that, she joined a Japanese language school in Uehonmachi, some five kilometers from her home in Nishinari, where she spent the next year intensively learning the language. During this time, P1, who had the characteristics of the "Ignorance is Bliss" type until then, expanded her sphere of everyday life—both geographically and socially—and as a result, learned about discrimination in Nishinari for the first time.

> P1: "At first, a teacher at school told me. Somehow that teacher found out that I live in Nishinari and approached me, with this *really* worried look on her face. She told me to be careful, that was about it. And then shortly after that, I got the same thing from my classmate. First, he laughed when he heard about Nishinari and said something like, 'You live in the ghetto.' This really made me think. I don't know if Nishinari is the ghetto, like I don't even know what a ghetto is in the first place. Why can't I see what these people seem to know (about Nishinari)?"

The experience of being repeatedly insulted created an internal conflict, which would ultimately lead to an evolution of her awareness from "Ignorance is Bliss" to "Positive Defiance." Six months later, during our second interview, the change in P1 was evident.

> P1: "I'm used to it now. You know, people making fun of where I live, hearing lies told about me."
> Author: "You're *used* to it?"
> P1: "Yeah, it happens all the time. But I think my perspective on Nishinari has changed a lot. At first, I couldn't stop thinking about it 'cause people were saying all kinds of things. I was like, 'Is my neighborhood really dangerous?' you know? But I've lived here for two years now, and have never felt "in danger" as they say. To be honest, I'm quite comfortable here. I go out alone at night, and I always ride my bicycle to my part-time job. Now I just ignore the people who have something to say (laughs)."

It goes without saying that this narrative is based on a different "perception of Nishinari" than the first interview. What is most important, however, is that of the several possible reactions P1 could have had to learning about how her place of residence is perceived by society at large (and

the same goes for K1 and K6, who had similar experiences), she chose to reject the biases she was told were common sense and trust her lived experience. Although the following section reveals a different reaction to similar circumstances, the "perception" of "Positive Defiance" is unaffected and unwavering when confronted with staunch territorial stigma. Regularly using expressions like "I don't care," "actually live here," and "it's a nice place," these participants highlight the gap between real conditions on the ground and negative popular opinion, taking pride in the lives they are building in Nishinari.

4.3. "Internalized Discrimination"

The third type, named "Internalized Discrimination," refers to immigrant residents of the Nishinari area who have adopted the same viewpoint as general society toward their place of residence. Four participants share these characteristics: two are long-term residents of Nishinari, Korean females K2 and K3; the remaining two, a Filipina (P2) and a British male (UK1), both moved elsewhere after only residing for a short period of time. The first two are fluent in Japanese and have received permanent residency. The latter remain unable to speak Japanese, and P2 has already returned to her home country.

These participants also share a common origin story. With the exception of UK1, the other three relied on connections with compatriots when moving to Japan, meaning that they could not choose their place of residence. K3 briefly summarizes this experience by saying that upon leaving her home country and coming to Japan, "I just ended up here and that was it." UK1 differs from this in that he was already living in Japan prior to moving into Nishinari. He recalls that there was a two-month gap when changing jobs before he could start at his new company, and economic necessity led him to choose a guesthouse in the area. As he never intended to live there long-term, UK1 did not integrate into the community and moved out as soon as his financial situation allowed him to do so, just three months after moving in.

Further, the three women who fit this type each carry the scars of discrimination. When K2 was a student, for example, she was discriminated against by her Japanese classmates for being foreign and came up against prejudice toward Nishinari for the first time when she started working at a company just outside of Osaka city. P2 laments a different aspect of her plight, saying that foreign residents like her are at an extreme disadvantage because they can listen but not speak. "I can't defend myself outside of my home. It's sad when you can't express what you really feel."

But why do these participants, who have experienced the injustice and cruelty of discrimination firsthand, ultimately end up viewing their place of residence in a similarly prejudicial light? Examining the narratives of "Internalized Discrimination" provided a useful starting point.

> P2: "In the beginning I quite liked Nishinari."
> Author: "In the beginning?"
> P2: "Yes, in the beginning. But now, I think Nishinari is just full of strange people."
> Author: "Really?"
> P2: "There are a lot of crazy people, you know. Well, I don't know if they're actually crazy or just mentally ill, but there are a lot of them. And there are a lot of homeless people, too. You know that place near Shin-Imamiya station[10]?"
> Author: "Yes."
> P2: "It's like it's not even Japan. It's like, it's hell over there."

It is clear from this recollection that as P2 grew more familiar with the area, her "perception"

[10] P2 is referring to Kamagasaki, an area located in the northeast part of Nishinari ward where day-laborers, elderly men, and other socially-marginalized people congregate. Strictly speaking, Kamagasaki does not fall within the Nishinari area as defined in this paper.

shifted to one largely critical of her surroundings. Yet, while her reaction is similar to the others in this type, P2 is unique in that her inability to speak Japanese left her unaware of the larger, socially imposed discrimination against Nishinari. Put another way, P2's distaste for the Nishinari area developed independently from public perception, which sets her apart from the "Internalized Discrimination" type.

UK1 condemns many of the same aspects of the area as P2, but does so from a slightly different perspective.

> UK1: "I think Nishinari is a place for outcasts. Alcoholics, poor people, old people, people without jobs. It doesn't seem stable, you know, like people just come and go. I don't know if Nishinari is related to the *Burakumin* people, but anyway, there are a lot of poor people there…It's been two years since I left (Nishinari) and of course I don't wanna move back. People reject Nishinari, they say, "It's not Japan," as if the area does not exist. I don't go that far. I don't think people should reject it, or ignore it, either. I lived there, too, you know? But the place you live has an effect on you, so as long as I'm in Japan, I'm fine living somewhere else."

UK1 justifies his decision to move out by asserting the influence of one's living environment. However, it is interesting to note that UK1's "perception of Nishinari" diverges from those who completely look down on it. Although he clearly states that he no longer wishes to be associated with the area, he nevertheless expresses empathy and a degree of understanding for its residents, resisting the impulse to reject it entirely.

Having spent more than half of their lives in Nishinari, participants K2 and K3 have endured repeated experiences of social stigma. K3, who says that she would have no place to go even if she returned to South Korea, frames her harsh critique of Nishinari within the backstory of her migration to Japan and changes to the area.

> Author: "You said earlier that you didn't know anything about the Nishinari area before you moved here."
> K3: "That's right. Perhaps that's why I managed to live here: because I didn't know about other places… But you come to understand an area once you live there, right? Its color, shall we say. If I had children, I would have probably moved. For the children's sake, for their education. But I couldn't have kids, so here I am."
> Author: "Is that so? What is your opinion of Nishinari now?"
> K3: "I don't think it's a good place. No, even living here now, I don't think so. Just look at how many people there are on welfare. I hate to say it, but Nishinari is like the trash can of Japan. And maybe 10 years ago or so, more people started coming from other places and things got worse. (Residents have) no manners. They spit on the ground, in front of people's houses. That's Nishinari."

K3 was shocked when she came to understand the state of affairs in Nishinari and says that she argued with her husband several times about moving out. Her sharpest criticism is based in a comparison of Nishinari today to the Nishinari of the past, focusing on changes in the area due to an inflow of new residents—specifically, the socially marginalized, like welfare recipients—and the deterioration of moral standards in the community.

K2 also began living in the Nishinari area at a young age, but unlike K3, she concentrates more on outside influences in relating her story.

> K2: "I'm not discriminating, but there are a lot of old men and women on the street, and it's just a bit depressing. I don't like that part. I want to live in a livelier place."
> Author: "Really? So you'd like to leave Nishinari?"
> K2: "Well, it's not that I want to leave. It's not that I want to live here, either, it's just that I came here when I was little and didn't have a choice…But as an adult, I'm just tired of having to explain to people why I live here and be told that the area is dangerous. When people talk about Nishinari, they're referring to the people who are from here. But I'm not from here, I was

> born in Busan, and I don't appreciate being talked about like that. If I had had a choice (when moving to Japan), I wouldn't have chosen this place."

K2 dislikes being confused with other residents and distances herself from Nishinari and the gaze of discrimination by emphasizing that she was not born there. This is a strategy for coping with discrimination and has been identified in poverty studies literature and case studies of various other urban neighborhoods (Auyero 1999; Wacquant 2000). While K2 does acknowledge Nishinari's convenience, her ultimate stance is one of self-preservation, redirecting any negative bias she receives toward the area and its native residents.

As demonstrated above, the "Internalized Discrimination" of these four participants is not perfectly uniform, as each individual articulates his or her "perception" based on their own awareness and diverse experiences. While the targets of their criticism may vary, each is similar in their final analysis of the Nishinari area being an unworthy place for them to live (Popay et al. 2003).

Another commonality is that all four of these participants experienced some sort of difficulty or hardship either during their residence or prior to moving in. For example, K3 stated several times during the interview that if she had been able to have children, she would have put the Nishinari area behind her long ago. In other words, the very fact that she still lives in Nishinari is a reminder of the future she never got to build. In addition, UK1 moved into Nishinari due to financial exigencies: in between jobs, he was forced to make a rational decision during the poorest stage of his life in Japan. For him, this area is not only a place for "have-nots" to congregate, but also represents painful memories of economic uncertainty when he too could not afford to live elsewhere. While others in Nishinari inherited poverty, UK1 moved into it by necessity—a bitter sign that life was not going as planned.

It goes without saying that this study is limited in its ability to distinguish between discriminatory perceptions toward one's place of residence and explanations of the hardships one experiences whilst living there. However, the readily observable differences in the favorable descriptions of the area and lamentations over its public perception from the "Positive Defiance" type and the harsh criticisms levied by the participants in this section reveal the more general role of life satisfaction in determining one's response to territorially-based discrimination. In this way, we cannot separate how one chooses to narrate their "perception of Nishinari" from their sense of contentment in the area.

4.4. "Inferiority Complex"

"Inferiority Complex," the final "perception of Nishinari" analyzed in this study, is both the most complex and ambiguous. This type includes characteristics from "Positive Defiance" and "Internalized Discrimination," but also demonstrates an irresolute view toward discrimination. Only two participants (K5 and K7) fit this type, both of whom are Korean women with a long history in Nishinari. Despite a large age difference, both worked temporarily at a local shoe factory before moving on; the former to become a housewife, the latter to qualify for social welfare. Now, they spend most of their time in the Nishinari area and have many acquaintances in the community, most of whom are immigrants from South Korean or have Korean ancestry. Their lives are similar in many ways, except that K7 is married to a Japanese man, while K5 is married to a *Zainichi* Korean, whose parents moved into the area during the pre-war period and stayed there.

This type is unique in that it does not take a firm stance. While both women speak to the area's advantages (geographical convenience, friendly people, easy lifestyle, etc.), they also acknowledge its shortcomings and readily point on the impact of discrimination and negative

social status. However, this narrative differs from that of "Internalized Discrimination" in that it is not a personal indictment of Nishinari, but rather a rephrasing of the public discourse, with no individual value judgment mixed in. In other words, these participants are acutely conscious of the views imposed on them from the outside and equivocate when asked about what the Nishinari area means to them.

> K5: "I'm a little different from my husband. He grew up here. I didn't know the first thing about Nishinari when I moved in, just another neighborhood in Japan. I found out what Nishinari is like later on, though."
> Author: "And what did you find out?"
> K5: "Well, I'm not Japanese, but I speak as someone who has lived here for a long time, not as a foreigner. This place has a bad image. In the past, the people here were very discriminated against. It's not the same now, but if I didn't know about the history, I guess I'd think differently, I wouldn't care so much. But when I talk to people, I can't help but wonder what the other person is thinking."

K5 mentions numerous facts about the area—its history, the existence of discrimination—without inserting her personal opinion. She does admit, however, the fear and anxiety of painful social interactions.

K7 similarly interweaves public discourse and personal experience, making it difficult to determine where her narrative begins and ends. At 71-years-old, K7 reflected on her 23 years in Nishinari in the passage below:

> K7: "I don't think much has changed here because we were always poor. People say that (the area) has gotten much worse. I'm not so sure. I mean, I guess it's a little worse now than it was before."
> Author: "So it's changed somewhat?"
> K7: "I think so."
> Author: "What has?"
> K7: "But *we're* the same, you know. I haven't worked for about 10 years now, I'm still on welfare, so I guess it's the same."
> Author: "What do people say?"
> K7: "Well, I often hear that the community is getting worse. 'It's getting worse every day,' that kind of thing. A lot of people seem to have that feeling. Things are more expensive now, rent is going up, you know, like a downward spiral. I keep hearing that, and maybe it's just me, but not much has changed."

In this single quote, K7 wavers back and forth between two different positions. In the first half, she agrees with popular opinion that the area is deteriorating, but as she continues, she seemingly becomes less convinced, and finally asserts that "not much has changed." While K5 focused more on discrimination and its ill-effects, it is still evident that these two formed their "perceptions of Nishinari" on a solid foundation of public discourse.

Given the passive nature of this worldview, the content of their narratives is fluid and ambiguous, making it difficult to follow at times.

> K7: "So, Nishinari is… well, when I tell people that I live in Nishinari, it's like I left a bad taste in their mouth or something. Because that's the image, that's how people think of this place. I don't have children, but I think young families should live somewhere else. For the kids' sake. If I had the money, I might want to move to a different place. Who knows? But I'm old, so I gave up on all that long ago."

In this quote, K7 makes a distinction between her "perception of Nishinari" and the "Positive Defiance" and "Internalized Discrimination" types. Although K7 does not harbor as strong an attachment to Nishinari as the participants of the former type, she herself is not prejudiced against the area and does not condemn it or its residents, as one might expect from the latter. However, the manner in which she declares that she would hypothetically like to move out given a family or financial resources, only to immediately deny it as a mere pipe dream is interesting. Even after residing in Nishinari for many years—and admitting that she is significantly happier living there than in Korea—it remains an uneasy topic of discussion for her, one that she prefers to avoid if possible. Of the 31 immigrants

interviewed, these two were the only participants who talked more about the negative public perception of the area than their own lived experiences. It is this sense of inferiority that lies at the core of their "perceptions."

K7 concluded the interview by saying, "To put it simply, Nishinari is a great place for the poor and downtrodden: they can live here, they can survive." In passing, this seems like something an immigrant from the "Positive Defiance" type might say, but close examination of this statement reveals an embedded sense of inferiority. Even when upholding the area as "a great place," she qualifies this praise by pointing out that it is "for the poor and downtrodden." It is not a place to grow and thrive, but rather one where residents—herself included—can "live" and "survive." While a detailed analysis falls outside the scope of this paper, Wacquant and others have noted that this heightened sense of awareness toward one's place of residence is a manifestation of territorial stigma, which can influence even the most benign social interactions (Wacquant 2007; Arthurson et al. 2014).

5. Concluding observations: Change and variability in the "perceptions of Nishinari"

To summarize the typology of the "perceptions of Nishinari" laid out thus far, I focus on the variability in participants' perceptions to identify meaningful patterns. In doing so, it becomes clear that each individual immigrant's "perception of Nishinari" is not fixed, but shaped by a dynamic interplay of various factors over time. However, I do not aim to simply reiterate that the subjective consciousness of immigrants in a new environment is subject to change. Such an assertion actually misses out on a crucial part of the participants' narratives.

A. Portelli (1991: 50), a leading expert on oral history research, writes about the potentiality of interview data and the meaningful subjectivity of oral history as follows,

> "Oral histories tell us not just what people did, but what they intended to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did."

In the context of this paper, Portelli's assertion reveals that when participants speak about the Nishinari area, they are not merely recounting their subjective experiences, but also situating their place of residence within their lives and ascribing meaning to it. Beyond the surface-level judgment of whether the Nishinari area is a good place to live or not, their narratives are saturated with messages about what kind of place the area was in the past, what kind of place they hoped the area could be, and how they themselves have changed as a result of residing there. As such, it is important to consider what the participants reveal about themselves through their portrayals of Nishinari, in addition to interpreting the specific "perception of Nishinari" being expressed. This analysis will focus on general trends that can be observed in each type.

As is evident from the examples introduced in the previous section, immigrants' "perceptions of Nishinari" follow a step-by-step formation process. All of the immigrants who had no say in their place of residence initially go through a phase of "Ignorance is Bliss," typically harboring positive first impressions of the area in comparison with their home countries. Whether or not their perceptions change often depends on the extent to which their understanding of Japanese society evolves—usually as a result of improved Japanese language skills and the development of new relationships with Japanese people. This process of "socialization" represents a transition from "Ignorance is Bliss" to another type.

This study indicates a few possible results of the socialization process. While participants like P1 and K1, who admit feeling confused initially, were able to transition from "Ignorance is Bliss" into "Positive Defiance," the progression is generally not so seamless. K6, for example, explains that socialization led to significant dissatisfaction—both with her life and

environment—that lingered until she eventually adjusted. In her own words,

> K6: "I was shocked, honestly. I mean, I saw men with skin diseases and naked men wandering around. I didn't understand anything at first, but it sure seemed like there were a lot of crazy people hanging around Nishinari. It was really hard for me to get used to. I couldn't accept what was going on around me."

K6 was one of the staunchest supporters of the Nishinari area in this study, but it is clear from the quote above that she moved through a period of "Internalized Discrimination" before arriving at her current type, "Positive Defiance." There are, however, those who do not make the second transition. Of the four cases presented in section 4.3, three of them changed from "Ignorance is Bliss" directly into "Internalized Discrimination," and still maintain a negative stance toward the area.

Another pattern recognizable from the data is the transition from "Ignorance is Bliss" to "Inferiority Complex." Given that the narratives typical of the "Inferiority Complex" type are ambiguous, it is possible to interpret them as currently undergoing the process of transition, on the way to finally settling on a different type. However, it is not the case that these participants are deciding between embracing the path of "Positive Defiance" or falling into "Internalized Discrimination." The contradictions apparent in the narratives of K5 and K7 are not the result of a "socialization-induced" paradigm shift, but rather speak to the conflicts that regularly emerge in their daily lives and interactions. As such, it is better to read this instability not as an indication that their "perception of Nishinari" will inevitably change in the future, but rather as a feature of this type itself, subject to subtle changes even from one day to the next.

The diverse lived experiences of the immigrants in this study and the typology of "perceptions of Nishinari" presented here point toward complexity, variety, and depth, challenging the reductive explanations relied upon in prior research. Indeed, in contrast to conclusions drawn in earlier studies of marginalized and impoverished areas, most participants did not perceive their place of residence as inferior—highlighting the importance of recognizing cognitive diversity (Porgham 2016). Among them, some are entirely unaware of Nishinari's social standing, while others consciously fight against it. By accounting for the variable of time, we can even observe the same participant change their perception of Nishinari (and by extension, Japanese society) by 180 degrees over the course of their residency. In each of these cases, the "perception of Nishinari" and its mode of expression are not uniform, but fluid and constantly evolving, often irrespective of the public perception of their place of residence.

However, as mentioned at the beginning of this paper, there are aspects of the "perceptions of Nishinari" that need to be examined beyond the frameworks of variability and cognitive diversity. The typology presented in this paper uses interview content—positivity, negativity, the degree of accuracy versus the degree of exaggeration, and so on—as the primary focus of analysis, but we must also be careful not to overlook how factors like the participants' life stage and sense of self are reflected in their narratives. Although the "Ignorance is Bliss" type has limited knowledge of Japanese society and is therefore limited in its ability to accurately assess the situation in Nishinari, the narratives tend to emphasize two key points: safety and freedom. While asylum seekers represent an exception, many of the participants in this type are young people—mainly international students and short-term missionaries—from developing countries, and their narratives are replete with the desire for a life unburdened by the daily stresses and persistent anxieties that characterize their experience back home. To the "Ignorance is Bliss" type, questions concerning his or her place of residence in Japan take on a fundamentally different meaning from that of a permanent resident. For the former, whose future in Japan most likely remains uncertain, the act of moving

into the Nishinari area represents a continuation of their first departure from home, symbolizing both the pursuit of adventure and their initial sense of independence. Even if these individuals were to learn the language and remain in Japan long enough to experience socialization, they are likely to maintain a positive view of Nishinari as long as they remain apprehensive about returning to their home country.

As described in the previous section, the positive evaluation offered by the "Positive Defiance" type is fundamentally based around the convenience and "livability" of the area, and many of these participants explain that their lives improved upon moving into the Nishinari area. For example, it was in Nishinari that Chinese immigrants C2, C4 and C5 obtained permanent residency; in Nishinari, Indian male H1 escaped the frantic pace of Tokyo and found suitable living conditions to match his laid-back personality; and in Nishinari, K4 purchased his first apartment, allowing him to settle down and devote himself to family life. Following a period of extreme poverty and separation from her family, P5 obtained long-term resident status and transformed her life after establishing a successful business in the Nishinari area. This success enabled her to bring her two children, who had remained at home in the Philippines, to live with her in Japan. Although few other cases in the "Positive Defiance" type have backstories as dramatic as that of P5, we can observe a distinct betterment in each of these participant's lives. Through "Positive Defiance," these immigrants do not only seek to expose the inaccuracy of public perceptions toward Nishinari. For them, Nishinari represents profound personal transformation, regardless of the extent to which these life events are related to their place of residence. In this sense, "Positive Defiance" is not merely a stance against discrimination and inequality; it is also an effort to safeguard a place they see as essential to their self-actualization. When Nishinari is disparaged, their journey to find happiness in Japan is endangered as well.

Conversely, "Internalized Discrimination" falls at the opposite end of the spectrum. In these narratives, the Nishinari area is commonly paired with hardship and strife. As noted in the previous section, these participants found themselves in challenging circumstances while residing in Nishinari. For P2, the Nishinari area is a signifier for confusion and loss of agency; for UK1, economic instability; for K2, it serves as a place of disempowerment; and for K3, a place where she could not start a family. Although the problems these immigrants face vary, each offers their own painful narrative of Nishinari. To process the struggles of the past, they distance themselves from—or openly reject—the Nishinari area and its residents, symbolically cutting ties with distressing memories.

In sum, the "perceptions of Nishinari" are not merely the subjective perceptions of one's place of residence, but also expressions of these immigrants' self-identities. Just as residents engage in a reciprocal relationship with their place of residence, the "perceptions of Nishinari" are inherently dual in nature as well. They reflect not only the subjective judgments immigrants make about the area, but also a reflection of their evolving identity in relation to place and society. While this paper is limited in its scope, the "perceptions of Nishinari" framework offers important insights into the dynamic and complex experiences of immigrants living in marginalized areas.

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論文

山田實の追求
―釜ヶ崎の労働運動家として―

中井佳誉子 *

Kayoko NAKAI *

A Labor Activist in Kamagasaki: The Aspiration of Minoru Yamada

概要

釜ヶ崎日雇労働組合（以下，釜日労）の委員長として，釜ヶ崎の日雇い労働者を 1980 年から 30 年間牽引し続けた山田實は，次のように語りかけた。「日雇い労働者がどういう目に遭っていたかも含めてね，疎外の極地であるよね，ある意味ではね。労働下の，ま，普通の，一般的な労働から疎外されている訳ですから。日々雇い入れ，日々解雇のね」。山田は，釜ヶ崎の「越冬闘争」および「夏まつり」の実行委員会の委員長を 45 年間，認定特定非営利活動法人釜ヶ崎支援機構の理事長を 25 年間務めてきた人物でもある。1970 年代の二度にわたる石油ショック，日本に居座り続けた「失われた 30 年」，そしてコロナ禍と，山田は困難な時代のなかで釜ヶ崎の労働者たちを懸命に先導してきた。しかしながら，労働運動家としての山田の追求は「まだ終わっていない」と言う。彼が追求することとは，一体何なのか。本稿は，山田へのインタビューを通じ，その一端を明らかにすることを試みる。

1. 日雇い労働者として

山田が先輩に誘われて，大学退学後に勤めた仕事を辞め釜ヶ崎で日雇い労働を始めたのは，1973 年である。山田は，その頃のことを次のように振り返る。

> 「1973 年の 7 月の 20 日過ぎぐらいに（釜ヶ崎へ）来ましてね。前，働いていたところで 20 日頃に給料をもらって，25 日ぐらいか（先輩から釜ヶ崎へ）すぐに来てくれということで，こっち（釜ヶ崎）に来て。で，ま，3 日後にはもうセンター（あいりん総合センター）に，地下足袋履いて立っておりましたね。当面のドヤは「末広」というのが，センターのちょうど隣，東側にありましてね。ま，畳一畳型の，変形の改装の，大きなドヤだったんですけども。そこをしばらくねぐらにしてましてね。畳一畳のところに，私を呼んだ先輩も寝てましてね。暑いものですから，戸をあけっぴろにして。ま，二人で畳一畳のところでゴロゴロ寝てた記憶がありますね。」

釜ヶ崎へ山田を誘った先輩と，畳一畳の部屋に住み始める。そして釜ヶ崎に到着した「3 日後」には，日雇い労働に従事し生計を立てることになったと言う。ここから山田の，釜ヶ崎の日雇い労働者として逆境を生き抜く人生が始まる。

> 「朝，やっぱ 5 時過ぎには行かないとね。ま，遅くてもその時は仕事があったからね。6 時か，7 時ぐらいまではね。でも，6 時ぐらいまでには（あいりん総合センターへ）大体行って。」

山田は，自宅のドヤを出て，「5 時過ぎ」から「6時ぐらい」までにはあいりん総合センター（以下，センター）に

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到着し，日雇いの仕事を探さなければ生計が成り立たなくなった。単身である山田が，その日の日雇いの仕事に確実に就くには，毎日「朝 4，5 時に起き」身支度をしてセンターへ行き，日雇いの仕事を必死に探すのである。その日の仕事を見つけることができれば，山田は事業所の車両に乗りこみ，まずは飯場に連れていかれたと言う。そこで朝食を食べ，その後飯場で用意された昼食を持ち，就労現場へ向かう。山田は，その頃の飯場での経験を以下のように話す。

> 「大体，在日の飯場が多かった。……もう朝からキムチとかバーンと出てる訳だから。美味しいものがね。キムチからなにから。色んな食べ物が出てる訳だからね。……だってみんな，着のみ着のままの人も多いわけやから。お金がないから朝飯も食われへん人もおる訳やから。とりあえず働かすためにはごはんを食べささなあかん，てね。それは当たり前だったような時代だったんじゃないのかね。大概の飯場がね。……昼の弁当は，あんまりいいものはなかったけどね。……てんぷらがちょっととか。ちくわが出てるとか。佃煮とか。いわしとかいうパターンもあったし。それも多分，そこの飯場で，まかないさんが作って，新聞紙にくるんでるようなやつやったけど，昔は。」

このように多くの釜ヶ崎の日雇い労働者は，飯場で用意された食事，または「センターの上（の 3 階の食堂）とか」，センターの「下（の 1 階の売店）から買ったカップ麺とか」で食事をとり，肉体労働に従事する。そして仕事が終わって帰るのは「（午後）7，8 時やんか下手したら」とその後，「飯食って，風呂（に）入」り，汚れた作業着を洗濯する。そして「朝 4，5 時に起きて仕事探そうと思うと，夜 9 時までには寝んとあかん」と，夜のはじめ頃には床に就き翌朝の日雇いの仕事に備える。仕事から「帰ってきたら飯を食って寝るパターン。それの繰り返しやから」と，山田はどんなに精を出し仕事を遂行しようとも，来る日も来る日もセンターに行ってその日限りの仕事を探さなければならない毎日であったと言う。一日あたりの不安定な就労と生活が繰り返される日雇い労働という果敢ない生きざまを身を挺して知るとともに，生きていくにはその就労が欠かせなかった現実に直面する。

こうした釜ヶ崎での生活のなか，山田は「暴力手配師追放釜ヶ崎共闘会議」（以下，釜共）のメンバーであったOさんに出会う（第 2 章で後述する）。そして山田は，そのOさんを通じて釜共が構える事務所に通い始めるなか，日雇い労働者の悲痛な労働相談に遭遇する。釜共事務所へ持ちこまれる日雇い労働者の相談に対し，山田は自身も抱えてきた現場での違和感とも折り重なるようにして次第に，労働者たちの相談を引き受けるようになっていった。

> 「釜共の事務所が，今の太子の 1 丁目，野鳥の会という形でね。狭い 3 畳ぐらいの事務所がありましたね。野鳥の会という名称で維持がされていたみたいですけども。……そこで賃金の不払いとか，いろんな問題，皆さんが交代で取り組んでおられました。で，そこのなかで，ま，私が行った時に誰もいなくて。……ある業者のところで（賃金の）不払いがあって。（賃金不払いの）お金を取りに行ってくれ，つうことでね。ま，相談があったのを受けて。」

山田は，日雇い労働者から上述のような賃金不払いに関する労働相談の他にも，就労場所で行われた暴力や労働条件違反などの相談も受けたと言う。「当時はそういう暴力支配……チェーンで吊るし上げるとかね，労働者を。木の枝に労働者を吊るし上げてね，放置するとか」。山田は，日雇い労働者の就労場所で発生した，上述のような労働者への不当な扱い，そして日々山田らへ寄せられるさまざまな労働相談を眼前に，手配師や人夫出しといった日雇い労働に纏わる仕組みに対し，強い疑念を抱くようになっていったと言う。

> 「やっぱりね，当たり前のことが当時は，当たり前としてね，認められないというか，通用しないというか。理不尽さに対する，やっぱり，なんとかせんとあかんというかね。怒りというか。そんなのんをずっと持ってましたから。だから理屈抜きにして何とかせんとあかんということでね。だって，労働福祉センター（西成労働福祉センター）の上には職業安定所（あいりん労働公共職業安定所）がある訳じゃないですか。その軒先でね，暴力団が絡むようなね，人夫出し業者。……罰則規定もある訳ですよ。にもかかわらず，なんでそういう業者がね，職安の下で大手を振ってね，やってるんだ，ということになる訳じゃないですか。」

2. 釜ヶ崎日雇労働組合の結成

山田が釜ヶ崎で働き始める前年の1972年5月28日，労働者たちは自らの労働環境の改善を求めて「S 組組長」に謝罪を要求するという，いわゆる「S 組闘争」が発生した（原口 2021）。この革命的とも言われた労働者たちによる「闘争」を足掛かりに，「暴力手配師追放釜ヶ崎共闘会議」（以下，釜共）が同年6月に結成する。しかし山田らはのちに，この釜共のメンバーから「釜共の旗を使わせない」という事態に直面したと言う。1970年代の釜ヶ崎の日雇い労働者が置かれた厳しい就労環境のなか，山田らは日雇い労働者の権利を守るため独自の組織づくりを迫られる。

> 「（釜共には）グループが色々あって。我々のグループしか活動してなかったのね，ある意味では。ただ我々にはね，釜共の旗を使わせないみたいなね，言い方する人がおって。釜共はね，誰が使ってもいいんだ，釜共の旗は。ここに良さがあったんだけども。これを否定されたら，もう釜共じゃないな，てね。また釜共で争議を構えても，これ労働団体じゃないから，正式な。だから弾圧されやすい訳ね。だからね，弾圧をできるだけ遅くするというかね，かわすためにもね，やっぱり組合っていう枠をうまく利用しようという形で，組合をつくろうと提起したんですよ。……労働者の権利を守る，あるいは獲得するためには，組合という看板を利用するという形でね。……それで釜日労をつくった。」

こうして1976年7月，「釜ヶ崎日雇労働組合」（以下，釜日労）が結成，山田は副委員長に就任する。釜日労が結成された70年代は，山田は「暴力飯場」や「地域の暴力支配に対して，どう歯止めをきかしていくか」に注力したと言う。そして1980年，山田が委員長に就任した後の「80 年代以降になって仕事が出始めて（かつて言われた）列島改造論が本格化する時期」においては，労働者たちの要求に応えて「やっぱり労働条件の改善なり，飯場での処遇の改善，生活改善をめぐってやろうということでね。そうした設計で動いていった訳ですよ」と，飯場での暴力そのものばかりでなく，広い視点から日雇い労働者の労働や生活環境の改善に向けて運動を展開しようと，できる限り多くの人たちを巻き込む戦略を考案したことを明かす。たとえば 1980 年から山田が特に注力した日雇い労働者の賃金の改善に向けた運動，つまり「賃金闘争」については，以下のように展開したと述べる。

> 「釜共が 70 年代に作り出した地平をやね，もう一回勝ち取るっていう形の発想になってね。それで，旧釜共のメンバーにも呼びかけてやろうと。その時にね，争議団ってね。釜日労は釜日労。それと元々組合運動なんて嫌だっていう人が釜共に集まっている訳だから。そういう人を組合に糾合するにあたって，賃金闘争争議団ってね。賃金闘争の目的を持った争議団ってね，そういうのをつくっちゃった。この二つの，いわば二重構造でいっちゃったのね。それでもって，ダイナミックな展開ができた訳よ。色んな人を含んでやね，その時。……大きく見たら，釜日労・争議団って当時は言ったけどね。厳密には，賃金闘争争議団ね。」

当時の空前のバブル経済の波と山田らの精力的な運動が相まって，日雇い労働の賃金は年々上昇していく。山田が釜ヶ崎でのこうした運動を指揮するなか，「黒い車」から「来とくんなはれ」と，山田一人が呼ばれることもあったと言う。

> 「……うち（釜日労）の事務所に迎えに来て，黒い車でな。で，来とくんなはれ，と。分かったって，行って。……黒服着た奴らがざっといるわけだよ。……第一声が，『わしらに取って代わる気ですか』と。……取って代わる気はない，と。こっちとしたら，ちゃんと基準法（労働基準法）を遵守しろと。それだけだと。で，暴力的な運用をしない，と。民主的な経営をしろ，と。残業をしたら，ちゃんと残業代を法定通りに支払う，と。労災が起きたら，ちゃんと労災保険をかける。不払いも起こさない。」

山田の指針は，いかなる場面においても一貫していた。すなわち日雇い労働者の権利を守ることである。山田はさらに，次のように続ける。

> 「70 年代，暴力飯場の件で労働省に行って，しゃべった時に，そんなことがあったら是非言ってください，なんて国は言ってたけどもね。取り締まるという発想でな。言うてたけども。現場の基準局とか嫌がって行かないんだもんね。……やくざ業者に電話してもな，

逆に脅される訳じゃない。だってお金を送る義務がない訳やから。払うって言うてるんだから，行っておいでしか言いようがない。……泣き寝入りやわな。だからそういった事件が，うち（釜日労）に来る訳や。なんとかしてくれって。」

では山田が率いた釜日労は，日雇い労働者の労働相談に対して，いかに向き合ったのだろうか。山田の脳裏にいまも鮮明に刻まれ，自身の教訓ともなったと言う，日雇い労働者 A さんの「Y 糾弾闘争」の経緯を次章で詳しくみていきたい。日雇い労働者の A さんが，1980 年に釜日労へ持ち込んだ Y（事業所）への労働相談において，釜日労がどのような対応を行ったのか，そして山田がこうした「闘争」を繰り広げるなかで山田自身の学びになったということを紐解いていく。

3. A さんの「Y 糾弾闘争」

日雇い労働者の A さんの「Y（事業所）糾弾闘争」について報道した新聞の一端が，以下のように残されている。

（一九八〇年十一月）二十五日午前九時半ごろ，……市立＊＊小学校（＋＋校長，千五百人）敷地内の児童用トイレ新築現場に労働者約五十人が入り込み，「Y の社長に会わせろ」などとハンドマイクで叫びながら座り込んだ。
……午前十一時すぎ，現場工事を請け負っていた Y の○○社長がかけつけ，労働者と話し合った結果，近くの公園で団交することになり，ようやく全員引き揚げた。
××署の調べでは，この労働者たちは大阪市西成区の釜ヶ崎日雇労働組合の組合員らで，今月四日，同工事現場で作業中の組合員が，同建設会社の現場監督に殴られ，ケガをしたことに対する抗議のため座り込んだという。

釜ヶ崎日雇労働組合の北川満特別執行委員の記録によると，日雇い労働者の A さんは，1980 年 11 月 4 日，あいりん総合センターで X（社）から手配された後，Y が請け負う小学校のトイレの増築現場で仕事に従事した。その現場で，Y の社長（通称：オヤジ）の「息子」がコンクリートバイブレータを使う傍らで，A さんはスコップでコンクリートをならしていた。A さんは，コンクリートに弱く，その日の午後は別の作業現場に移らせてほしいと願い出る。すると「息子」が「なんで現場におらん」と，A さんの胸を小突く。そのためによろけた A さんは，Z（社，Y の元請）の現場監督に羽交い締めにされ，「息子」らから殴打された。本件で A さんから相談を受けた山田は，以下のように回顧する。

「オヤジの息子が，小学校の建設現場で，スコップでしばきあげてな，スコップで。もっと働け，ってな。」

A さんはその後，日当のみを手にしてどうにか釜ヶ崎へ戻る。負傷した A さんの姿を見た労働者たちが，「センターにいけ」と助言する。A さんはセンターへ相談するが「ラチがあかず（原文ママ）」，Y と Z の「住所だけきいて帰」ることになった。その後 A さんは，釜日労事務所を訪れる。A さんが釜日労事務所に提出した 1980 年 11 月 6 日付の医療診断書によると，A さんは「頭部外傷 I 型（頭部打撲を伴う）」および「顔面，左胸部打撲症」により「労働不能」と診断されている。山田は，A さんのことを思い出しながら，次のように述べる。

「その相談を受けて，小学校の現場に行ったんだけど。この時もオヤジはそういう感じやったよね。息子がしばいて何が悪いって感じやったわな。」

北川の記録をさらに紐解いていきたい。A さんが負傷した翌々日の，1980 年 11 月 6 日，山田は早速，もう一人の釜日労の組合員とともに Y の現場に行き，A さんの負傷についてオヤジと息子と直接，話をする。しかし息子は「たんなるケンカ」と主張，そしてオヤジは「筋を通して，話をもってこい」と突き放す。そしてその日は一旦「ひき上げ」ることになったことが記載されている。

こうした Y の反応をみた山田たちは，A さんへ再度の詳細な聞き取りを行っている。本事案の経緯，A さんが受けた傷害の深刻性（のちに二枚目の医療診断書の発行）などを再確認する。

A さんへの聞き取りを終えた釜日労は，以下の三つの「獲得目標」を掲げる。ひとつは「A さんの休業補償をきちんと勝ちとる」，二つ目に「A さん及び釜ヶ崎労働者

に対する謝罪」，最後に「（Y）事業所の民主的運営の確約」である。

同年 11 月 17 日，釜日労は Y 社長に団交を申し入れる。しかしながら「決裂」したと記録されている。釜日労が Y 社長に申し入れをおこなった際，Y 社長が「雇ったのは（手配師の）X だ」，「こちらは責任はない」，「息子（一人息子）は，イイムスコ」，「団交には応じられん」などと主張したと記されている。さらに，Y 社長が「50 才ぐらい」の「在日朝鮮人」で，「現場でのたたき上げという感じ」だったとも書かれている。

上記のような Y 社長の断固とした姿勢に，釜日労は粘り強く調査活動を続ける。そして Y への対応を協議する「争議団拡大会議」を，幾度にわたり繰り広げるのであった。こうした「会議」を重ねるなかで，釜日労は Y だけを追求する手法は「枠が狭」いと結論づける。つまり，釜日労が掲げた上記の三つの「獲得目標」を達成するには，Y のみを標的にしては糸口を見出すことは難しく，A さんの事案を事実上黙認する本事案の公共事業発注者である市，そして元請の責任についても追求し，問題を「社会的にする必要がある」と結論づける。したがって「闘争」前日の 11 月 24 日の「争議団戦術会議」において，A さんの事案を社会に広く伝える「ビラ」は，「市民向けの分」および「センターでまく分」の二種類が用意され，それらの「ビラ」を手広く配布することが話し合われた。そして本事案の経緯について市民や労働者に伝えた上で，釜日労・争議団が，Y の現場がある小学校へ行き，Y へ団交を求めるということで組合員らが一致する。

「闘争」当日の 11 月 25 日午前「6:30」，釜日労・争議団は「（あいりん総合）センタービラマキ」を開始，そして「7:00」に「情宣」をはじめる。「8:00」，釜日労・争議団約 40 名を乗せた「バス」が「センター出発」，「9：00 すぎ」に Y 建設現場の小学校に到着する。そこには Y 社長がおらず，Z 社の現場責任者がおり，釜日労・争議団はその Z 社の責任者に Y 社長を呼び出してもらう。Y 社長が小学校へ到着するのを，釜日労・争議団が小学校で待つあいだ，約 60 名の警察官が小学校の周囲を取り囲む。ようやく小学校に現れた Y 社長は「現場に入らず，門前で，K さつ（警察）に守られて待機」，「オヤジの条件『後日に団交を設定しよう』」などと記されており，Y 社長が当初は釜日労・争議団と向き合おうとしなかった様子が伺える。

オヤジはその後「公園で（団交を）行なおう（原文ママ）」と話し，午前「11 時 40 分」，「団交（が）開始」される。そのときの Y 社長の言動について，北川は以下のように記している。「暴力の事実はない」と「開き直」り，今度は「公園ではこれ以上話されないから，自分のところでやる」と。そして午後「2：00 から Y（の）事務所で再開することにな」った，と書かれている。午後 2 時，釜日労・争議団が「Y（の）事務所につく」と，「朝鮮総連××支部の支部長が，この争ギの間に入りたいと申しでてくる（原文ママ）」と記されている。山田は，この時のことを以下のように述べる。

> 「なんか後から，総連の人が来てたんだけどね。……そしたらね，向こう（総連）の××の支部長が C さんっていう人で，ハングル語でオヤジ（Y 社長）をガンガンって怒り始めてな。何を言っているのか分からんけど，強烈に怒っているのが分かる訳だよ。そしたらオヤジがね，急に恐縮してやな，分かりましたってことになっちゃってね。……その時は総連の人が来て，話を理解してくれてね。……それがなかったら，もうどうなっていたか分からんわな。」

そして午後「2：35 Y のオヤジが（釜日労・争議団の）バスの中に入りこんできて，みんなの前で謝罪」し，Y 社長は「補償はきちんとやる」，「二度とこういうことのないようにやっていきたい」と述べ，釜日労と以下の「確認書」を取り交わす。

> 十一月二五日，Y と釜ヶ崎日雇労働組合との間で話しあいをもち，以下のことを確認しました。
> 十一月四日，＊＊小学校便所増築工事現場において，Y の現場責任者が行なった A さんに対する暴力事件について深く謝罪します。それとともに，A さんに対する被害の補償を責任をもって行ないます。
> 全釜ヶ崎労働者に対する謝罪を行ないます。
> 今後，労働基準法等を遵守し，今後，問題が生じた場合は，組合と話し合いをすすめる中で解決していきます。
> 一九八〇年十一月二五日
> 釜ヶ崎日雇労働組合

委員長　山田　実
Y
代表　○○

山田はこうして Y 社長をはじめ，多くの事業所と直接的に幾度も，そして多く時間を費やし話し合いを重ねるなかで，飯場の経営者たちも，困難な立場や歴史を抱えてきたことに気づかされたと言う。

「在日の人っていうのは，重層下請けに組み込まれている訳だよな。要は，真っ当な稼業につけなかった歴史もあるんだろうけどね。結局は，違法的な人夫出し業でやるしかなかった，力のある人はね。……強制連行されて，日本人にどつかれながら，飯もろくに食べれないながら，強制労働させられた訳やんか。戦後，帰りたい人は帰ったらしいけどね。……帰れる船もなくなっちゃってね。だから結局は，自分の力とスコップしかなかったって言うやんか。で，こりゃくそって気合ある奴っていうのは，人夫出し業者になっていった訳だよ。でもその経営方法としてはな，同じように日本人にどつかれたノウハウを身につけている訳やから。働かん奴は縛りつけるって感じでやる訳やね。働かん奴しばいて何が悪いねん，って。よく飯場にも労働相談で行ったけども，また日本人がいじめに来たって，一世のオヤジなんかはね。いつも俺に，ワーと怒鳴ってね。ワーと，わめいていたわ。またいじめに来たって。話にならないよね。日本人と同じことをして，何が悪いって。」

4. おわりに

山田は，とりわけ自身が日雇い労働者として働いた 70 年代や 80 年代にみた前章のようなAさんの労働事案，また手配師や人夫出しといった日雇い労働に纏わる仕組みにおいて強い「怒り」を抱いていた。しかしさまざまな立場の人と直接話し合い彼／彼女らの状況や社会的な背景，そして全体の社会構造を理解したうえで，社会的な課題に立ち向かう姿勢の重要性を知り，いまでは以下のように話す。

「手配師問題とか，構造的な問題じゃない。ここだけで解決できる問題じゃないからね。……それを形だけみて違法ですって，禁止しますっていっても，なかなか難しいのが現実だろうね。かと言って，野ばなしにしてそのまま放っておいたらダメだよね。それやったらね，社会的に手配師とか人夫出しとか，今でいう派遣業じゃないか。必要なんであれば社会的に認知してな，地位を保証して。その代わり悪いことをする人は，タガをはめると，いうふうにすべき……それ（手配師や人夫出し）がなかったら，（日本経済が）動かなかったのが現実じゃない。で，汚れ仕事を押しつけて，知らん顔をして，自分たちだけがきれいごとを言うてやで……だから人夫出し業者が悪いっていうんじゃないんだよね。」

すなわち，一人ひとりの働きを社会が認知し，そして承認するとともに，そうした人たちの就労と生活を保障するという，その人たちの尊厳を傷つけることのない仕組みを，当事者とともに社会が考案し整備していくことを，山田は追求し続けているのではなかろうか。

「汚れ仕事，キツイ仕事を全部押し付けちゃってな。だから，これが問題だから，そういったところを社会的にどう啓発してね，どう解決していくかが問われているんだろう……やっぱり認めさせて，同じ産業構造の一部として組み込んでね……雇用調整弁は必要だと思うよ。景気っていうのは常に一定ではない訳だから。……だから，そういったところで社会的に，みんなでどうやっていくか，というところが必要なんじゃないかな。そういう観点を共有して，役割分担でやっていったらいいんじゃないかなって。」

社会的，あるいは身体的な難しさ，さらに近年では多様な事情を抱え来日する外国籍の人たちなど，人それぞれにさまざまな困難を抱えながらも，社会が必要としている仕事を懸命に担っている人たちが存在する。そうした人たちの就労や生活の保障についてはその人たちの「個人の問題」とし，彼／彼女らに「押し付け」るものであろうか。同じ社会を生きる人間として，「社会的に，みんなでどうやっていくか」，そのことが問われてこそ，だれもが「同じ産業構造の一部として組み込」まれる社会が形づくられるのではなかろうか。

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講演

釜ヶ崎，あいりん体制，まちの変革
—招待講義記録から西口さんを偲ぶ—

西口宗宏 *

Munehiro NISHIGUCHI *

**The Record of an Invited Lecture Entitled
“Kamagasaki, the Airin System, and the Transformation of the Community”:
In Memory of Mr. Nishiguchi**

まえがき（水内俊雄）

西口宗宏さんは，2024 年 9 月 22 日に急逝された。64 歳であった。どこか生き急いでいるようなところがあり，心配はしていたが，それがいきなり現実となってしまった。そのショックは大きかった。

ここで紹介する西口さんの招待講義を行った 2010 年当時，ちょうどそれまでの約 10 年間，この地において，ありむら潜さん，織田隆之さんとともに水内も加えさせていただいた 4 人で，絶妙のコンビネーションを発揮しながら，新しい動きを支える裏方を担っていた。

西口さんはその中で常に舳先に立ち，時代の変化を敏感に感じ取りながら，大波小波を果敢に，そして繊細に釜ヶ崎丸というかあいりん丸を操舵していたと言える。その腕前をわれわれは深く信頼しており，2010 年代に入ってからの西成特区構想の 10 年においても，この地のキーマンとして，絶妙の操舵力を発揮してきた。それだけに，この喪失感は実に大きい。

招待講義の紹介に入る前に，この喪失感をありむら潜さんが実に的確に小文として綴っておられるので，まずそれを紹介としておきたい（転載許可済）。

まちのキーパーソン
～西口宗宏さんを偲んで～

私は今，深い喪失感の海の底にいる。釜ヶ崎のまちづくりのキーパーソンだった西口宗宏（にしぐちむねひろ）さんが急逝した（享年 64 歳）。簡易宿所やサポーティブハウスやゲストハウスのオーナーであり，第六町会長を一四年間つとめ，萩之茶屋地域周辺まちづくり合同会社の社長役であり，釜ヶ崎のまち再生フォーラムの副代表だった。釜ヶ崎で生まれ育ったことから，自分の立場を超えて，地域労働者や野宿生活に陥った人々の生活実相や心情も，支援団体の論理もよく理解でき，商売人としての才覚もあった。なので，いつも立場や利害の対立する課題での調整役だった。「自然発生的なまちの政治家」と言えた。2018 年に世界銀行が視察に来たとき，アフリカのある都市の首長さんが問うた。「宿を経営するあなたがなぜ，わざわざホームレスの人々を救援するアパートに転換したのか？」。彼いわく「あの人たちが現役時代にうちの宿に泊まってくれたおかげで，私は大学まで行けた。その人たちが路上生活をしているのを見るに堪えなかったからだ」と。視察者たちはその心意気に感動した。かと言って，彼は聖人などではなく，その反対だった（笑）。もともとサーフィンや沖縄が大好きで，やんちゃで，酒飲みで，要するに遊び人

* サポーティブハウス協議会副代表／簡易宿所組合理事（当時）

だった(笑)。私たちもどれだけの量をいっしょに呑んだことだろう。それが肝臓や食道を傷めて，寿命を縮めた。私も罪深い。単純に波乗りだった(失礼……)彼を，「ご所有のホテル・サンをサポーティブハウスに転換して，まちづくりに参画しませんか」と誘い込んだのは私だった。そこから彼は稀有な才能を発揮して，上述のような役割を果たしつづけた。まちづくりは異なる多様な立場の人々の協力で進展していくものだ。我々のフィールドだと次のような人々だった。簡易宿所という超柔軟な居住資源を持つ西口さん。社会福祉法人等の施設活用に熟達した O 職員さん。貧困論やまちづくり論での知見や学生・院生というマンパワーを持ち込んだM教授たち。そうした人々が出会う場を設け，社会へのアナウンス役もする私などなど(僭越ながら加えさせてもらう)。釜ヶ崎のまちづくりの黎明期(2000 年前後)から見事な役割分担ができたのは誠に幸運、かつ効果的だった。今は，別れを嘆くより，西口さんに出会ったことの幸運を噛みしめたい(涙)

(ありむら潜　福祉のひろば 2024 年 11 月号)

ありむらさんの言う，西口さんの稀有な才能—まちづくりに対する嗅覚ともいうべき独自の技—を，西口さんがいなくなった今，活字として共有しておきたいというのが，この追悼の主旨である。

たまたま西口さんには，学生や院生を連れて現地で幾度かレクチャーをしていただいたが，その中でも特に印象深い招待講義を，映像と音声で復元している。

音声の方は，西口さんが大阪市立大学文学部・水内俊雄担当「地理学特殊講義I」(2009 年度後期)の受講学生に対して行ったゲスト講演の書き起こしである。講演は，2010 年 2 月 1 日午前 11 時から 12 時 15 分まで，西成プラザにて行われた。

また，映像の方は，翌年度の同講義(2010 年 11 月 6 日)でも西口さんに授業を依頼した際の記録である。その模様を，テロップ付きの動画として下記 URL および QR コードから視聴できるようにした。

https://youtu.be/Kl_eViVfHXo

生い立ち

簡易宿所組合の理事，それと町会長，それと釜ヶ崎のまち再生フォーラムっていうネットワークそちらの方副代表という形でやらせていただいております。あとNPO とかの理事とかもいろいろあるんですが，肩書ばっかりならんでいるんですけどやることは私，これからのまちっていうのをどうしていくっていうときに，そこに住んでいる人，そこを利用しているひと，そういう人をよう知っとかなあかん。

私の生まれた場所，4 と数字書いてあるとこ，西口アパートというのがありまして，そこで 1960 年に生まれました。今月で 50 歳になるんです。釜ヶ崎の第一次の暴動っていうのは僕生まれた次の年。それで全国的に釜ヶ崎っていうのが有名になりました。で暴動が起こって釜ヶ崎ってネーミングがやっぱり悪いん違うかってことになってあいりんっていう名前になりました。僕の話はあいりんっていう言葉はあんまり使いません。行政から押し付けられた言葉。それに，あいりん体制の中でこのまちが地域に住んでいる人であったり，利用している人，その人らの意向に関係なくまちづくりが行われてきた。こういうこと言うのは僕くらいだと思うんですが，そういうことを説明させていただいて未来にどう繋げていくのかという形で一時間ほど話しをしたいと思います。

あいりん地域とあいりん体制

まずこの赤いところがこれがあいりん地域っていうとこなんですが，昔は一応あいりん地域として地図上にこういう線が出てたんですが，今大阪市に聞くと地域としての境界線は持っていませんという答え返ってきます。釜ヶ崎っていう部分になるともうちょっと小さくなるんですが，この三角形のところが釜ヶ崎って言うんですけど。そこに居てる労働者の方々って言うのは，ご存知だとは思うんですが，やっぱりこう集められてきたっていう形跡があるんですね。1970 年の万博に向けて，やっぱり万博っていうのは工事ぎょうさんあります。そこで人出が足りないっていうことで全国に声掛けて，全国から日雇いの労働者が集まってそんで，九州とかでもよくあったんですが，炭鉱の閉山の時期と重なっていますから炭鉱の方々が来られたっていう。それまでは一応部落的な形態があって，私がまだ子供のときには子供とか，家族連れの人とかも居てました。それを 1970 年万博に向けて簡易宿所を建て替えるようにという指導，お願いがありました。そこで行われたのが結局は単身の労働者のまち。人を集めることによって今の労働者のまちに。

その結果 1970 年以降に，ここに市立更生相談所っていうのがあるんですけど，もともとは愛隣会館。ここの斜め前にあるんですけど。で，愛隣会館って隣保事業で入ったものに、大阪市の市立更生相談所という労働者福祉の相談所として生まれた。あの一あの一それ以降 30 年以上はこのまちはでさっきから言う，あいりん体制っていうのはあの一治安は警察，労働に関しては労働センター，それで福祉は市立更生相談所，それと医療に関しては医療センター，んで住まいに関しては簡易宿所。でここだけが民間で動いていきました。

あいりん体制の中で一番最初に行われたのは労働者に対して行われたのは仕事の斡旋。仕事の斡旋は公的なとこしかだめって決まっていたんですが，このまちでは，手配師っていって仕事を斡旋する人がいはるんですが，このまち早く来たら車が止まってて仕事の内容と値段が書いてある車が止まっていて，そういう仕事を斡旋する人が多々おられます。でもそこには法律上目をつぶったんですよ。

その次に目をつぶったのが屋台の問題であったり，犬の問題であったり。屋台は最近はなくなりましたが，小学校の横にずっと屋台が並んでたり，ゴミの問題であったり，犬の放し飼いの問題であったり，あと大きいのはシャブ，覚せい剤の密売という問題の中で，それを目をつむって全部抑え込んできたっていうのが今までのあいりん体制の中で行われてきたです。

簡易宿所の危機，新たな挑戦！

だから町会員っていうのは 10%弱です。労働者っていうのは 90%強っていう中できました。1990 年代くらいに入ると野宿っていう問題が出てきました。野宿の問題っていうのはやっぱりこのまちの元労働者の人が野宿になったり。そのことによってどないかしていこうっていうのが釜ヶ崎のまち再生フォーラムで，いろいろ考えていく中で簡易宿所，大阪の場合は旅館では生活保護は受けれません。東京・横浜では受けれたんですが，大阪では受けれないということで旅館業を廃業して，共同住宅に変えていく。

もともとこのまちは簡易宿所 200 軒くらいありました。で，今やってるのが，80 軒から 90 軒くらいだと思うんですが。で逆に共同住宅に変わったところがやっぱり 80 軒，90 軒くらいになって，要するに半分ずつくらいになってあとの 20 軒くらいは老朽化であったり，廃業という形になっています。

それで高齢化が進んでいる，じゃあ，次の未来はどうなっていくんや。労働者集められた 1950 年代・1960 年代に集められた人，この人たちが年老いていったらどうなっていくか，あるいは死んでいくしかないんですが。死んでいくってじゃ今人口比率でいう 90%が労働者。その 90%の労働者の人たちが居なくなる日がいずれ来るだろう。そうなったらこのまちってどうなる？

じゃ今考えられるのは今ほんまに，生活保護支給でなんとかしのいでるまちなんですが，生活保護者が亡くなっていく時代にいずれなっていくでしょう。そのときに何をしたらいいのか，だから今のうちにある程度次のこ

とを考えていきたい。でなるか，ならんかわからんけど，そういうことに挑戦していきたいとそういう風に考えています。

新しい取り組みに向けて：排除につながらない

観光化のことについてお話したと思うんですが，OIG（Osaka International Guesthouse）委員会の委員長をしているんですが，なんで僕が委員長をしているのかという話になりますが，やっぱり労働者の排除につながるんじゃないかっていう意見，金儲け主義で労働者の排除に繋がるって言うときに，私なら労働者に説明できる。逆に言うとお金のほうでいうと，貧困ビジネスちゃうかってい言われたときに町会の方に説明できるっていうことがありまして，そういうことで私が委員長をやらせてもらっているんですが。それと私，商店街等とも町会の関係で協力と要請もできるとうことで忙しい中で委員長をさせていただいています。

それでこのまちっていうのは，悪いこと多いと思うんですがこのまちの利点って何か言える方おられますか。このまちの利点はね，交通の便なんですよ。こんなに交通の便のいい場所ってね。次に変えていく時期，そのときのためにそろそろホンマに動かなあかん。っていうことで誰もいなくなるという危機感の中で，それでこのまち自体，面積一番占めているのは簡易宿所。もともと200 軒くらいあった簡易宿所。その人らが生きにくい場所になっていく。労働者が減っていく，高齢者が減っていく。面積を持ちながら次の絵を描かないということは，お金のある資本に買い漁られていって，もともとこのまちを利用していた人たちが，このまちの再生というものやまちづくりというものにまったく関係の無いところに押しやられたという結果になりかねない。

まちの体制は，まちづくりの拡大会議

それにどんだけ対抗できるか，どんだけ真似ができるか。今まで言ったように長いあいりん体制の中で全然まちづくりであったり，まちの意見って聞かれることが無かった。というのも屋台の問題，去年の 12 月 20 日くらいには最終的にはカタはついたんですが，この問題も 30 年間ほったらかしにされてきて，というのも今までの歴代の町会長，連合町会長，小学校の横にありましたもんでしたから，PTA 会長，というのは役所に何とかしてくれという要望を出しました。けど，一切動いてくれません。理由は暴動につながる恐れがあるから。要するに，労働者の人が暴れだす恐れがあるから。で労働者は違う問題というと，地域のほうの同意が得られてないなど，真っ二つ状態。それではこれから衰退していくであろう，このまちのまちづくりが出来ない。ということで，

おととしの 12 月にまちづくりの拡大会議で労働者の代表，小学校の校長，それに地域や，簡易宿所組合，それと街づくり研究会，それと保育園，それと子ども会，そこで屋台の問題やっぱり問題あるよ，と。子供の環境守るのが大人の責任。で子供をどれだけ大事にできるか，で一致しまして，それでやっぱり屋台の問題がちょっと出てきまして，小学校の横とあとわかくさ保育園っていうところの横にありまして，それが 30 年以上無視していたのが，みんなで話し合えた結果です。と言うことで，役所としては逃げようがないんです。今まで意見が一本化されてないから，動けないという理由を挙げていたんですが，そこで根回しが全部合わっていたんですが，役所にいうてもなかなか話が通らない。それが一年位，根回し終わった時点で，お前ら何しとんねん。こんな状況になって先が見えへん。今問題解決せんかったら，未来ないねん。という形で説明していったら，暴動も起こりません。

これだけの人と話をした結果ですと言ったら，やっと政治家が動き出して，そこで次に平松市長，市長来ても彼もド素人さんですから，このまちに関しては。問題は重複して山積みされていますからそれを解いていくのは難しいですね。難しい問題がなんとか考えていきますってね。ようするにお断りの言葉ですね。私その場におったもんですから，いや簡単なことからやってください，とりあえず犬の問題，こういうやり方あるでしょていうと，じゃあ出来ることからやりましょうていう形で。

やっぱり言えるのは地域の中で何が出来るのか，政治家であったり行政であったり，今まではそういう手法でこのまちずっと来たんですが，このまちのなかで意見をどないして集約していくのか，その人口比率の問題を乗り越えてどうやって集約していくのか，で，そこが乗り越えれたら，行政も政治も見てくれる。いう風なかたちで今回は動いてくれました。一回動くと次も用意していかないと，止まると彼らも逃げてしまうので次のこともやっていきたい。未来につながるということで。

このまちのポテンシャル

これは私だけの考えなんですがこの立地条件の中，もうちょっと活性化できるだろ。観光化に向けて，地図でみますと，ここが新世界ですよね。串カツブームでいっぱい人来るようになりました。じゃんじゃん町，商店街，この辺が観光の人，去年でも 8 万泊くらい来てると思うんですが。要するに大阪に来ている 5%強の人がこのまち，海外から来て利用しているまち。

でここに動物園前商店街っていうのが点線のところにあるんですね。そこが全然活気づいてない状態。でここが今宮商店街，ここが萩之茶屋商店街という形でこの商店街が全然利益がない状態。要するにここに泊まりに来た人が泊まるのはここ，食べるのはここ，遊ぶのは難波。難波からこう，ここに泊まって，で，ここに泊まる理由っていうのは南海があって JR がある。関空行くのに唯一なんですよ。二つの線が使えるって要するに，阪和線ってすごい人身事故とかが多くてよう電車止まったりします。それで止まってしまうとここなら南海で行くこともできる，南海に何かあったら JR で行くことのできる。唯一の場所なんです。でここで今観光化っていうのを進めています。

国際ゲストハウス化を利用したまち変革の芽

ここの商店街の若手をそろそろ観光化っていうものを意識してメニューの多言語化などを進めてきました。で，ここの白い部分なんですが使われてないんです。これず一っと南海線が天王寺と天下茶屋を結んでる線があってこれ廃線になって，ここが全く使われてない状況それをさっきいうた屋台の問題であったり。

そのときに考えたのは，六町会という町を作るときに排除しないでみんなで食っていけるまちという理念作りました。でそのときに排除しないと創ったもんですから，ここを排除してしまうと，ここの屋台を排除してしまうということになるので，それならこっちでルールをちゃんと決めここで屋台をやってもらうと屋台街が出来るんとちがうかで要するに海外のバックパッカーの集まる場所の近くに屋台街があるんですね。それでやっぱり

水内科研香港ホームレス支援調査の一コマ
2003 年 1 月（垣田裕介氏提供）

屋台街がここに出来たらここの観光客も流れていってくれるであろう。要するにでこの商店街を通ってここに入るという，出たらこっちに‥

海外のバックパッカー集まるとこってのは近くに屋台街が大抵あるんですけども，それというのはやっぱり屋台街がここにできたらここの観光客も流れてきてくれるやろ，要するにこの商店街を通ってここに入ってくる，出たらこっちの商店街，こっちの商店街ありますから，ここまで来たらこっち行くやつとか，こう回っていくやつとかの人の流れてできるんちがうかな。それと，今ここまで人が来てるんですね，ジャンジャン町のとこまで。じゃ，この人らもここに住んでいる海外の人とか，観光に来る人らがここに流れていくようなだけやなく，こっからも流れてくる可能性あるん違うか。まあそういうカタチで，ここの道の使い方，今はフェンスの中なんでそこの使い方を考える。

既存の施設にまちづくりの目玉や新しい機能を

で，つい最近なんですが，あいりん総合センターのまわり，ここの部分をどないか使われへんかと。いやそういう風に。ここもともと 200 軒の旅館があった地域で，200 軒というのは部屋数にするとだいたい 2 万室ぐらいあります。で使ってんのが，その住民といわれる労働者の人ていうことになると，最大の避難場所いうのはここなんですね。小学校，中学校。まあこっちにも高校もあるんですが。その 3 つになってる。で，労働者の人と，あの一地域紹介の人が一緒に交わってしまって，で結局，災害が起こると地域の人がお世話する。全く人口比率が違うなかでそういう風に行政の押し付けですね。他の地域とおんなじようなかたちで持ってる部分ですが。ここあいりん総合センターが，耐震の補強するていう話ですからその時は耐震の，災害が起こった時の避難場所として，労働者の避難場所として確保できるん違うか。

それともう 1 点，ここの地下の部分に，あのーシャワー室と，クリーニング屋さん入ってたとこあります。でこの地域のなかで，SHINGO☆西成を知ってる方もおるかもわかりませんが，あいつ頑張ってくれて，SHINGO☆西成はミュージシャンで頑張ってくれています。でそれから，結構三角公園の夏祭りであったり，越冬であったりというときに歌うたってくれたり，そのかたちで色んな歌手等が入ってきたり，中にバンド作ってる人，その人らも三角公園でライブ見たり，その若い子らの芸能活動っちゅうか文化発信として，そこの地下の部分をライブハウスにできへんかと。地下になりますからここに住宅あるんですが，そこにも音響かへんやろういうかたちで，ここの部分で若い子，まあ駅近くやしライブハウスっていうかたち，まあイベントルームでいいんですが，そういうかたちをつくる。で，こっちには観光っていう，屋台と観光っていうかたち。人の流れ出来てくるんちがうかと。

仕掛ければ，街はおのずと変わる

それと，そういう風に人に使ってもらえる街っていう風になると活性化する，ほんならもう，その時にはたぶんもう高齢化の年がきている人が多くて，この辺が空いてきてしまう可能性があるなと。つまりここに活性化すれば仕事があるわけですから，ここに人住みだしてくるんちがうかと。それも，ファミリータイプが住むようになってくる可能性があるなと。それとさっき言ったように単純に仕事している人も住むような展開にもなってけーへんかと。地域の活性化で，生まれたとこで仕事するファミリーていうのが出てくる。

ファミリーにこだわる仕掛けも

ていうのもこのファミリーにこだわるのも，さっきここの利便性がすごい良いとこですって言うたんですが，子育てにとってもそうで，さっきのとこにもあったんですが，子どもの里とか，子どもの家，山王子どもセンターていう，子どもの面倒見るところっていうのが3つもある地域。この範囲だけで3つあるんで，ようするに共働きの人でも子どもの，学校終わったし保育園終わったし，そういう面倒見てくれるとこも結構整ってる。それもみんなキリスト教関係で，子どもの里なんかは，あと山王子どもセンターは夜回りしたりするんです，野宿して

いる人のとこ夜回り。ようするにこの街で苦しんできた労働者の人たちの生活であったり，今の実態であったり，野宿している実態なんかを繰り返し子どもたちが今もう出てきて高校生になったり，でこの子らが次の世代の子どもたちを世話していると。学童保育，そういうかたちで3つあるわけですから，そこと小学校，保育園，それを繋げていく。

あの子ども，ここまで「子ども会」のものですから，子どもが公的に来るのが小学校と保育園なんで，その子どもたちの繋がりというのがあり，今も70名ぐらいの生徒というのが萩之茶屋小学校，そう廃校の問題もでております，でもこの学校を無くしてしまうと次ファミリーになる可能性がある，こんなに立地条件が良くて子育てもし易い可能性がある街をファミリーにオープン化しないっていうのはおかしいんちがうか。あとは観光化，ファミリー。

うまく機能分化を

それとやっぱりここの街っていうのは一人一人が住みやすい街っていうかたちで今まできています。まあ環境的には住みやすいとは皆さん思わないと思うんですが，一回ここのなかで生活してしまうと出て行きにくい，色んなサポート等もありますし物価も安いです，一人で住むには最適な地域っていうのが今までからずっとあるんです。それを支えていくような団体っていうのも多々あります，ていうことは一人でも住みやすい街の部分，それとファミリーが住む部分，それと観光化。ていうかたちでやっていけば，ここの街っていうのはまだ利用してくれる人っていうのがずっと続いていく。

労働者にもきっちり選択肢を提示

でも今とりあえず行政の，あいりんの名のもとに行われてきた労働者一色の街，今は生活保護と労働者の街。それがある程度終焉を迎えるとその人たちの排除につながっていく。そういうことで，排除に繋げないようなかたちでどうやったらいいのか。ていうことは労働者が抱えている問題だったり野宿で抱えている問題，それをどう解決していくか，それと街の問題を一緒のレベルで考えていこうというのが最近起こってきている流れ。ようするに，この街の中，ここの公園，それと三角公園なんですが，この3つの公園てのは結構野宿されてる方が多いんです。で大阪市全般でいうと，大阪市のほうが，巡回相談員を回してるんですが，このあいりんの街ってのは巡回相談員が回ってきません。なんでなんかわかりませんが，ようするに野宿状態もほったらかし。で他のとこで野宿の人をみつかってここのなか入れてるというケースあるんですが，まあこれも施設，そういう施設を使いながら，野宿の問題施設色々使いながらやってきた，ようするになんかあったらこの街に持ってきてるていうのがあったんですが，この街の中の問題て言うのは全然解決されていない，未だにされてないままで。

たとえば今宮中学の横の道があるんですが，ここを行政代執行というかたちでブルーテントを取りました。したら隣の公園にテニスコートがあったんですが，ここのテニスコートにみんな入り込んだ。そこでそらおかしいやろて言うたら，（行政の人が）いえ，私らは道路管理者であって公園管理者でないもんですからっていうことで何十年もほったらかし。でここには何の相談業務もなく，この地がずっと押し込まれてるっていう状況です。ようするにこれから言いたいのは大阪市全般でやってることも，この街に入れてきてよ，ようするに巡回相談員の人が回って一人ずつ丁寧に顔を見て自立支援センターに行くなり，まあ生活保護というかたちも選べますよというようなかたち，なるべく選択肢を用意して説明していけば，そこで我慢して今野宿されている方が，どっかそういう形で動いていこうかというようなことになる。ようするに，野宿の問題ていうのをある程度解決していく。

ちゃんとした認識で，住民票，定額給付金問題

それと労働者が抱えている問題ですよね，労働者の人，今でも6000人ぐらいは常におるかと思うんですが，住民票を持ってない方が多いといわれるんですが，逆

に持ってる方も多いんです。ていうのは日雇い労働手帳ていうのがあるんです。失業保険のための手帳，あるんですが，それを作るのに簡易宿所の宿泊券，宿泊証明でくれたんですが，2006 年にやっぱり住民票がないとダメっていうかたちになりまして，そこで起こったのが3年ほど前にここにある解放会館ていうところに3500以上の住民票が流れ込む。で他の方は簡易宿泊所にあるとか，それと釜ヶ崎支援機構，ふるさとの家であったりというところに住民票。その人らが一斉に住民票が奪われました。

ようするに今の時代は仕事行くのに身分証明必要なんです。そういう免許証持ってないとか，パスポートはもっと持ってないやろし，そこで自分の身分証明ができる，せなあかんのでここに住民票が集まった。その住民票を次は職権消除にきた。まあ裏ネタでいうと，ある市会議員が，ここの生活保護増えてるんで一気に選挙行きだしたら怖い，やから住民票先取ってもうたろとうのがもともとのはじまり。でそれの言い草が生活保護を不正に受給するためにここに集めたんや言う話ですが，生活保護受けるのに住民票必要ないんです。思いっきりド素人の発想，でそういうことを言っていく。

そのあとこの前起こった定額給付金ですよね。住民票ない人には貰えない。日本国民全てに渡します，在日の人にも渡しますて言うたのに，日本の国にこうやって働いてきた人，その人たちに住民票を奪い取るだけ奪い取って定額給付金も貰えてない。そういう不条理なことが起こってます。そういうことを，僕一応町会長なんですが，これ当たり前なんです，これ今までの高度成長期の中でここはね，店すれば流行る。人口密度一番の密集地域ですから商売すればなんでも流行った。ずーっとそういう時代来ました。でもこれから先はそれが衰退していきますよ，その時どう考えましょていうかたちなんのですが，その時には労働者の抱えている問題において理解したうえで商売も一緒にいかなあかんやろし，まちづくりもしていかなあかん。そこに切り替えれる人がどんだけおるかねってここのまちづくりが変わっていくやろし。

町会員の意識も高めなければ

で現に私，町会長やってるんですが，西成区で一番若い町会長です。42 歳からやってもう 8 年目になるんですが，それでも未だに一番若い。ようするに周り，いくつやねん，いつのおっさんなんか，街の代表としていてんねん。ほんまに衰退していこうとするこの街の中のことを理解できているか，したらやっぱり，半理解ていうのが多いんです。ようするに，労働者との話し合いがなかったために暴動が起こるたびにみんな被害を受けます。で，みなさんここの街，親御さんとかに聞いたらたぶん言われると思うんですが，暴動で暴れたおす人たちていうのをマスコミが取り上げてそこだけで，その理由ってなんで暴れたんかっていうの全くなしのまま来ました。

理解の貧困が招く誤解

ようするにそれで原因の一つとして起こったのはやっぱり，結婚差別なんですね。ならここで商売してます，お嫁さんほしいです，でも家もここ，商売もここ，ならその街の中で，うちの娘そんなとこにようやりませんていうような結婚差別と，逆に娘さんの場合は旦那にここに来てもらってここで商売続けたいと思っても，そんな怖いとこでよう就かん。いうかたちでそれも，あと就職差別も起こってきました。

それっていうのは地域の町会の人から見たら労働者が暴れたからや，そこで解決してるんですが，一番最初，暴動起こったんが，この交差点ですが，この交差点でタクシーに労働者の人が轢かれました。でその建物のところに警察，ポリボックスありまして，そこに駆け込んで，轢かれた，救急呼んだってくれと，来た時ムシロ被せたんですね息ある人に。昔亡くなった人にムシロかけるのは分かるんですが，息ある人にムシロかけて救急呼ばなかった。それでほんまに死んでしもうた。それでなんちゅうことすんねんということで，暴動が起こったと。やっぱり大きな暴動ていうのはやっぱり警察が人権を無視したか，行政のものが人権を無視したか，そういうことで起こってるわけで，地域のなかの人の揉めて大きな暴動って起こったことないんです。

そういうことで何が悪いねんていうことを，ほんまに現象だけを見てきた世間の人であったり，この街のある程度の高齢の人，そこの理解が薄いんちがうかなと。でそこを理解してもらったら，そうじゃないと，やっぱり人権であったり，彼らの生きることをもっと大事にしていかないとそこはもうあかんのよと，次の発想は無いのよと説明するんですがやっぱりその暴動ていうのを恐れてるというか，その亡霊ばっかりを追い続けている行政，それと地域の町会ていう部分。もうだいぶは変わってきたんですが，ここ 1 から 10 まで十町会ありますが，だいぶ意識変わってきて今 4 つぐらいの町会，まあ次今度なって 5 つぐらいの町会がたぶんその辺が理解できる町会っていう連合町会っていうかたちに変わっていくかな。

未来のために，こどもらにつなぎたい

でやっぱり選べることといつも言い続けるんですが，僕ら何のためにやってるんか，未来のため，子どもらに繋ぎたい。僕だってここで生まれたし，HY 君の場合は彼で 5 代目なんですけど，明治時代から。で，私は 2 代目ですが，やっぱりここの街っていうのは僕らの次の世代，僕らの子どもたちにもやっぱり利用できる街になってほしい。で，後輩たちもいっぱいいてるんで，その後輩たちにもここでやっぱり仕事や商売をし続けられる街になってほしい。そのためにはやっぱり街を利用する人たちっていうのをどんだけ呼んでこれるか，どんな街にするか。そこまでの発想がどんな街にしたいんやっていうようなかたちが見えてくる。それをまた種蒔いて引き出すいうことは今始めてます。

というのも，色んな取り組みっていうんは市のほうからできるんですね。この 1 から 10 までの連合町会，この連合町会は西成区に 16 個あります。で 16 個あって，それで運動会で 1 位から 16 位まで決めていくんですね。んでここの地域はもともと 14 位とか 15 位の地域で，萩之茶屋連合ていうんですが，萩之茶屋は無茶苦茶弱いと言われてまして，で私一応その町会長なったとき総監督するようになって，もう今は強いっていわれるようになったんです。子どもの数は減っていってる。子どもの協議体はあるわけで，でやっぱり若い身体の動く人が出てもらわなあかん，特に多いのは子どもがいるのはこっちの 26 号線より西の地域になってしまいます。私は 26 号線より東のこっちの釜ヶ崎です。でこっちの西の地域の若い人がもう一緒に協力してやってくれる。で子どもたちも協力してやってくれる。そのことによって，ここの地域，弱かった地域が今やもう優勝候補に名前が出るような地域になった。

なんでそんなことムキになってやったんやというとやっぱり未来を背負う人に意識持ってほしいと。未来を考える人に意識を持ってほしい。で子どもたちもやっぱり今はもう，おっちゃん，今度も頑張ろなと言うてくれるようになる，ようするに子どもたちも，楽しくない子どもたちですらかなりこうやる気がボンボン出てきた。でやっぱりその若い人たちの力っていうのを結集していって未来にも残るかと。んで，そこでやり方がまずければ，高齢の先輩方がこういう風にしたらええんちゃうかと，そこ訂正したらええんちゃうかと。

意識が変われば，行動も変わる

そういう風な雰囲気になってきて，ほんで労働者の方，生活保護受給者の方，特に生活保護受給者の人の生き方ていうのはこの街の中で，かなり順位を引っ張てくるだろう，この人たちが住民意識が薄ければ，やっぱりその辺で立ち小便したり，酒飲んだりていうことじゃなくてやっぱり未来のまちづくりていうのにはマイナスになっていくやろう，んじゃあこの人たちが街のお手伝い，公園等，学校等のお手伝い，公園の管理いうのは地域町会でされますから，地域町会に高齢化が進んでますが，その人口比率というとかなり少ない人たちで公園の管理やってます。そこに生活保護受給者の人が草抜きであったり，管理の手伝いであったりとそういうかたちで子どもたちの運動会の設定であったり片付けであったりていうのを，そういうのをずっと続けていく。そしたらやっぱり人の目に触れるわけですから，何年もやっていけば子どもたちも大きくなっていくし，父兄の人も知り合いになっていく。んじゃ知り合いがようさん

増えることは小便したり，その辺で酒飲んだりし難くなる。

まだみんな子どもの中歩いてないそうですが，あの道に座り込んで酒飲んでる人ってようさんいると思います。多い日でだいたい 200 人ぐらいおるかもわからん。でもさっき言ったようにここの街には 2 万室の部屋があります。そこで 200 人ですから，もうパーセンテージにしたら，すごい少ないんですが，街を歩いているそういう人が目につくんで，そういう人たちの街やと思われがちなんですが，実際はアルコール飲まない人結構多いんです。私もサポーティブハウスというのをやって今 100 名の人が住んでますが，半分以上はアルコール飲まない。

まあ僕らはお話しや研究会や集会やっちゅうて，毎回その後で，飲み会を開きます。で，飲み会で交流っていうかたちで色々情報を頂くんですが，まあかえってここの労働者っていうのはアルコール飲む人が少ないって言われたそうです。飲む人がやたら飲むっていうのはあるんですけど，低い理由もわかりますよね，高いところで仕事したら危ない現場に行きますから，酒飲んで行って事故起こしたら二度と雇ってもらわれへんとか，それとか，自分の身体が危ないということで身体資本で生きてる人があまり酒飲むっていうのは良くないと思うてる人はやっぱり多い。とまあ当然かなあとは思うんですが，ようするにそういう人たちの力をどないか，内外の活動であったり，災害の時にその避難や救助でお手伝いしてもらうとか，なんらかの組み合わせを作っていくことによって，ここの街を利用している人の力をまとめ上げていく，まとめ上げていくことによって環境というのにも切り込んでいく。環境に切り込んでいくということは次の未来のまちづくりに繋がっていく。

やることをちょっとずつやっていこう

それからあの，社会福祉とかそちらの学生もよう来るんですが，結局大事なのは人大事にせなあかん。福祉が大事，福祉によって未来の活性に繋げていくことができる。それのモデル地域になるのはこの地域や。それも長い間，時間かけることができないもう衰退の方が早く進んでますから，またすぐにでもここは取り組んでいくことによって，ほんまに今までのまちづくりっちゅうカタチやなくてね，ほんまに一人一人が福祉っていう部分で，社会保障っていう部分で守られながら生きていく。それを真に迎えたら，次は活性化が大きくなっていって，次のファミリー型の将来に，そうしたら人数が減っていってる小学校っちゅうのは統廃合せずに残しといてもらうようなまちづくりであったり，そんなもん一回なくしてしまうと次つくるわけいきませんから，そのために，これ残して次のまちづくりの要として学校は残っていく。

ようするに，言いたいのは今までとガラッと変わるんじゃなくて，やることをちょっとづつ変えましょと。まあここに，医療センターってあるんですが，医療センターも今もう利用する人はかなり減ってます。でも労働者の数が減ってるから減ってるんというのも違う。そうしたら，労働者も受け入れるような体制を取った病院，地域の労働者がほんまに困った時，高齢者が，使えるような病院に変えてもらう。昨日ちょっと前にやってる，労働センターもそうしてる，労働者が減ってるんで，もうちょっと地域の防災拠点であったり発信基地であったりという部分。で，一人づついてる人に対しての支援とかできる，ポイントとして残っていってほしい。

でまあ，ここにある NPO 釜ヶ崎支援機構，日本最大の NPO の一つなんですが，そこも高齢者のあとは次はまちづくりとしての関わりを持ってほしい子どもたちとかのことを色んなかたちで後押ししてほしい。でまあ先ほど言った3つのこどもの世話する学童保育のとこがある。

一番変わらねばならない簡宿業界

ある意味一番関わらなあかんのが，このでかい建物をいっぱい持っている私たち簡易宿泊業界なんですよ。1980 年代に，一斉に建て替わりました。今の建物は 1980 年代に建て替わってるんですが，ようするに私たちの親であったり，私たちの先輩が一応何年かかけて建て替えてるわけですよ。未来があると思って建て替えたんですその時は。それが，今のままやったら未来が

あんまり見えてないんで，そのまま廃業して転売していくってのはでてきそうや，そうじゃなくて未来をここで描くことによってこの 1 番上をちょっと占めてる，ここらの市営住宅あたりがが一人で住めるスペース，まあワンルームであってもなんでもいいからそういうスペースを作る，で逆にファミリーでも住める，今は一人で住んでるとこばっかりなんですが，それがファミリーで住めるというカタチ。そこに挑戦していこうというそういうまちづくりの絵ができればそこに挑戦していく人も増えるやろう。

しんどいからこそ，やれるまち

やからこのまちづくりっていうのは，ほんまに地域の中の合意，それと地域がどう生きていくねん，一般的なまちっていうのは高齢化の問題であったり，少子化の問題そこだけで済むんですが，ここの街の場合はほんまに無くなっていってしまう，今までいてた人が全く分からんくなってしまうっていう危機感かなり強い地域なんで，今んところ日本で一番ひょっとしたら変われるとこかなあと。で変わり方も簡易宿所が共同住宅になるなり，ワンルームになるなりっていう立地状況に根差しながらちょっと変わっていく，それを大きく変えましょうということになるとみんな怖気づいてしまう。だから簡易宿所以外のとこは小さくちょこっと変えるだけで済む。で簡易宿所は昔建て替えた経験があるんやから，もういっかい借金で店建て替えてこの街を維持して，次の展開の街ってうのを作っていきませんかというかたちで。

全然取りとめもない話なんですが，ようするに過去があって未来があるよと，未来っていうのはまた違う絵をある程度用意していかないと今の行政だけの街づくりっていうのは未来に繋がりません。学校等の統廃合の問題で役所と話したら，未来を見て考えてるかと，考えんと学校を無くすのはおかしいんちゃうのと，そこの面積をどうしましょうと，僕たちももう，まあ役所の人は「僕たち」って言いませんが，ここ数少ないだけで終わってどうすんねん小学校やら，それだけで店じまいさす必要あらへんがな，未来考えたうえでここが必要かどうか，そこの話し合いもせんと何ぬかしとんねん，というのが今の街の流れ，普段役所の人にはそういう言葉で言います，ほんまにそれぐらいの気持ちをもってこのまちづくりっちゅうのをやっていきたいなと。

でもうある程度後輩たちが集まってくるようになってきてます。簡易宿所の組合でも私入った時は 2 番目に若かったんですが，今やもうかなりだいぶ年齢も上になってくるようになりました。ていうことはみんながこのままやったらあかんと思うから，若い人たちが色んなとこから現状を聞いてきてくれる。町内会の人もしかり，地域の中でやってた運動やってた人らもしかり，次をどう描くんやっていうことで，一本化される。右肩上がりの経済の時は別に一本化されんでもみんないけた。でもみんなが思うてんのは右肩下がり，右肩下がりやからどないかこの街っていうのをやっていこう，やっとその辺の意志疎通がとれるような状況になってきた。あとはどんなグランドデザインを用意するのか，いうことで，そういう時は学生さんであったり，大学の先生等，意見を聞かしていただきたい。あなたたちもまだ若いんで，もっとこんなことしたらおもろいで，もともと何も発想無い地域ですから，なんかおもろいで，おっちゃんこうなったらおもろいんちゃうっていうのあったら，またドシドシ教えてもらえたら，やれることは取り組んでいっていきたいと考えております。話長くなりまして，ありがとうございました。

■ 編集後記

本 28 号では、大幅な編集方針の変更を行った。掲載論文のラインナップでおわかりの様に、英語論文が全体の約 5 分の 4 を占め、日本語論文との二本立てとなった。また、英語論文の編集主体は、奥付に記した通り EARCAG が担うことになり、紙媒体ではなくURLからのダウンロード方式に移行した。

こうした変更の背景には、編集代表が持っていた中規模科研の不継続により紙媒体維持の資金が途絶えたこともあるが、より大きな契機は、2014 年の大阪以降日本（福岡・九州大）で開催された EARCAG での継続的なニューズレター刊行に関する議論にある。その国際運営委員会において、『空間・社会・地理思想』を継承し、副題として EARCAG 年報とすることが正式に承認されたことが、今回の大きな転換点となった。

本号の刊行は、EARCAG2025 の開催が 2 月であったため、半年ほど遅らせることになった。150 本近いエントリーを集めた第 11 回大会の盛況ぶりには正直驚かされたが、その背後には連帯の精神をもつ国際運営委員会の尽力があった。1999 年発足時の新進気鋭の委員たちがリタイアや逝去を迎える中、今回は若手メンバーが大幅に加わり、東アジア・東南アジア・南アジアを核に、欧米からの参加と寄稿も見られた。

査読誌としての体制はまだ整っていないが、短報的であっても理論的・実証的に濃い議論を掲載できる点を本誌の持ち味として伸ばしていきたい。EARCAG は隔年開催であり、その前後に英語でアジアから発信する意義は大きい。読者の皆さんには、ぜひ本号のURLを広めていただきたい。また、この少々風変わりな編集方針のもと、勢いのある小論の寄稿も歓迎する（SSGT.editor@outlook.com まで）。

長年本誌を支えてくださった日本の読者には、この変更を残念に思われる方もいるだろう。しかし「地理思想科研」から積み上げてきた系譜は、日本語パートで継承していく。翻訳掲載も含め、メジャー誌に収まりきらない、エッジの立った議論や社会実装を生むような実証研究を、今後も皆さんの寄稿を通じて発信できたらと願っている。

編集にあたっては、イップ・モーリスさんに大変尽力いただいたことに感謝申し上げるとともに、EARCAG2025 を見事に運営され、大きな果実を生み出してくれたコルナトウスキ・ヒェラルトさんと、ウォン・キッピン・タミーさんには心よりお礼申し上げる。

『空間・社会・地理思想』第 28 号
編集代表者
水内俊雄

■ EDITORIAL NOTE

This 28th volume marks a major editorial shift. As readers will notice, roughly four-fifths of the published papers are in English, making this volume a bilingual issue with both English and Japanese sections. In addition, as noted in the colophon, the editorial responsibility for the English papers has been transferred to EARCAG, and the publication has transitioned from print to a digital, URL-based download format.

Behind these significant changes lies the discontinuation of the medium-scale KAKEN research grant previously held by the editor-in-chief, which had supported the print edition. More importantly, however, this shift stems from the continuous discussions about publishing a newsletter within EARCAG, which has been held in Japan (Kyushu University, Fukuoka) since 2014. EARCAG's International Steering Committee formally approved my proposal to inherit the legacy of *Space, Society, and Geographical Thought* and designate it as the Annual Report of EARCAG, marking a turning point in the journal's trajectory.

Publication of this issue was delayed by about six months because EARCAG2025 was held in February. The 11th conference attracted nearly 150 submissions —a level of participation that was both impressive and inspiring. This success reflects the dedicated efforts of the International Steering Committee, bound by a strong spirit of solidarity. As some of the founding members from EARCAG's launch in 1999 have retired or passed away, the current committee now includes many younger scholars. The network continues to expand, centering on East, Southeast,

and South Asia, while also drawing participation and contributions from Europe and North America.

Although the journal does not yet operate as a peer-reviewed publication, our editorial policy emphasizes concise yet theoretically and empirically rich discussions. Given that EARCAG is held biennially, the opportunity to disseminate ideas from Asia in English around each conference remains highly valuable. We invite readers to circulate the URL of this issue widely and to contribute short, vibrant papers that resonate with this somewhat unconventional editorial vision (please contact us at SSGT.editor@outlook.com).

To our long-standing Japanese readers, we acknowledge that this shift may come as a disappointment. Nonetheless, the intellectual lineage built through the Geographical Thought KAKEN project will continue within the Japanese section. Including translations, we aim to maintain the journal's role as a venue for discussions that may not fit into mainstream journals —those sharp-edged inquiries and grounded studies whose empirical weight can inspire social transformation and practical implementation.

Finally, I would like to express my deep gratitude to Maurice Yip for his dedicated editorial work, and to Geerhardt Kornatowski and Tammy Wong Kit-Ping, who successfully organized EARCAG2025 and brought forth remarkable outcomes.

Toshio MIZUUCHI
Editor-in-Chief, *Space, Society and Geographical Thought*, No. 28

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英語セクション ENGLISH SECTION

Special Section EARCAG 2025: Caring and Knowing East Asia in Times of Polycrisis

General Contributions

日本語セクション JAPANESE SECTION