A Critical Review of Recent Urban Social Geography in Japan

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Abstract: This article aims to explore the progress and the agenda of urban social geography in Japan. Urban geography in Japan has a long history, but studies of cities from social aspects have increased in earnest, rather recently. One factor is that Japanese geographers have been attracted mainly by changing patterns of the urban landscape and its economic functions. However, recent decades have seen a diversification of themes of research from gentrification, socio-political movements and social stratification, community restructuring with demographic changes, life-world of ethnic minorities to gender matters. The future agenda of urban social geography in Japan would be to deepen the research contents and to explore new frontiers along with theoretical advancement.

Key words: urban social geography, urban community, social stratification, urban politics, urban ethnicity

Introduction

Urban geography has a long history in Japan. It is evident from the fact that to date, a variety of text books on urban geography have been published (Kiuchi 1951, 1979; Yajima 1956; Yamaga 1964; Tanabe and Watanabe eds. 1985; Takahashi et al. 1984, 1997; Hayashi 1991a, b, 1995, Hasegawa et al. 1992). These text books, however, have put emphasis on economic aspects of cities, so that social matters of urban areas have not been fully investigated. This is also the case with Abe, K. (2003), which reviewed Japanese urban geography in the 20th century. For a long time, Japanese geographers have not been particularly interested in spatial stratification of Japanese society due to an ‘idea’ that social segregation was not so evident in Japan. It is a rather recent phenomenon that research on social and community movements in urban areas, urban ethnography, urban politics, and gender-related matters in the urban context from geographical perspectives has grown in number. This article aims to explore the progress and the agenda of urban social geography in Japan mainly from the 1980s. The decade from 1980 was a turning point for the Japanese society in terms of local-global context.

It is fair to say that Suitsu (1964, new edition in 1980) was a pioneer of social geography of Japan. He investigated the living space (seikatsu kuukan), especially that of rural areas in different places of the world (North America, Europe, and Japan). In his analysis of living space, he confirmed the existence of the “fundamental region” (kiso chiiki) and examined its size, function, structure and evolution. Later, Saito (1982) studied social geography in the urban context with an emphasis on urban development. Following the sections which examined basic concepts of social geography, particularly those of previous West Germany, such as human society and space, urban areas in the north-west of the country and Japan’s Kansai metropolitan area (Kyoto-Osaka-Kobe area) were investigated in terms of its spatial structure and the moving patterns of residents.

Recent decades have seen an emerging interests in (urban) social geography, partially influenced by “spatial turn” of other academic fields such as sociology, cultural studies and architecture. A geographical magazine entitled “Chiri” (‘geography’ in Japanese) prepared a number of special articles on social geography from 1993 to 1994, in which Japanese geographers discussed the problems and agenda of social geography in Japan as partially introduced above. The De-
partment of Geography of Osaka City University is one of the significant centers of Japanese social geography and has been publishing a series of journals called "Kukan, shakai, chiri shiso" (Space, society, and geographic thought), including a book entitled "Shakai kukan kenkyu no chihei" (A frontier of study of social space) on social geography since 1996. And the Department of Geography of Hitotsubashi University in Tokyo has also been contributing to advance Japan's social geography. A book titled "Toshi, kuukan, kenryoku" (City, space, authority) edited by Takeuchi (2001) is a recent outcome. At the same time, Aramaya and Oshiro co-edited a book of social geography "Kuukan kara bashoe" (From space to place) in 1998, which explored a variety of topics about space and society. All contributors to this book were under 40 at the time of publication, and this indicates that in Japan, young scholars are playing an important role in the current (urban) social geography. "Kuukan no shakai chin" (Social geography of space) edited by Mizuuchi in 2004 and "Toshi kuukan no chirigaku" (The geography of urban space) co-edited by Kato and Oshiro in 2006 are the most recent encouraging works in this field.

In this article, followed by two brief sections on theoretical discussion and on the recent urban scene in Japan, studies on urban residential characteristics with remarks on community will be discussed. Next, those on broadly-defined political matters, including gender, related to urban society will be examined. And finally, those on urban ethnicity, which has attracted an increasing number of Japanese geographers, will be taken into consideration, followed by concluding remarks on the future agenda of the field. Due to space restrictions, the main review focus will be on previous studies about urban areas in Japan which have been published in Japanese geographical journals.

Theoretical and Methodological Discussion

Urban social geography first developed in the Anglo-Saxon countries, represented by the United States and the United Kingdom, from the 1950s (Knox 1982; Carter and Jones 1989). The so-called "social area analysis" conducted by three sociologists, Shevky, Williams and Bell in 1949 and 1955 attracted many geographers' attention. This time was the beginning of a theoretical revolution, often called "paradigm shift" or "quantitative revolution," came to start, responding to a claim of "geography's exceptionalism" by Shecauer in 1953. Theoretical research fashion based on logical positivism spread first in the United States and the United Kingdom in the 1950s, especially among young scholars who began to use computer, a new analytical device, which came to be available to university researchers (Johnston 1991). Later, the revolution also reached Japan and attracted not a few scholars and quantitative research grew in number from the 1970s (Tezuka 1988). Radical geography, which dates back to the 1930s, and humanistic studies have also played a role in Japanese geography (Sakamoto and Hamatani 1985). But unlike the United States and the United Kingdom (Johnston 1991), theoretical and methodological discussion in Japan has not appeared so brisk until the early 1990s.

Even among those Anglo-Saxon countries, however, it is possible to say that social geography is still a developing sub-field of geography. As Carter and Jones (1989) and Pacione (1987) have claimed, the agenda and methodology of social geography has continued expanding without a clear and solid core. On the one hand, humanistic geographers have been putting emphasis on human perception and experiences in urban everyday life, and on the other, geographers taking political-economy approach claim the importance of socio-economic structure which affects human behavior in the urban area. As a representative scholar in the former camp, Ley (1983) has said that urban geography is a geography of human experiences and has insisted on the critical viewpoint from the ground where people live; while Carter and Jones, representative scholars in the latter camp, have defined (urban) social geography, drawing on Harvey (1973), as an academic field which deals with the spatial expression of various systems, which give rise to social problems such as racial discrimination and poverty, and as a field which addresses itself to the active role of space in those social structures.
So far, in Japanese social geography, social space, human group and spatial behavior have been basic keywords. According to Saito (1982: 61), social space is a general term for the distribution and spatial behavior of all the human groups in a region; the human group is a large number of people or households who perform the same or similar spatial behavior; spatial behavior is perception, selection, and behavior of individuals or households related with the use of place and space. Also, he defines social geography as a field of geography which studies the space of human groups and the forms of social space, and their relation to the environment (Saito, 1982: 62). As Shimazu (1993) has argued, however, social space is originally an ambiguous word even in the geographical context: broadly it means the geographical space as a whole which is socially produced, built and organized, and narrowly it is the geographical space clipped as the place of life in which a certain social group resides. At the same time, Mizuoka (1993) has demonstrated a unique view about social space from the radical geography perspective. Mizuoka has argued for the relations between absolute space and relative space, and has insisted that social space embedding the uneven built environment inside is produced on the ground through negation of the physical space. Mizuoka is sharply critical of the Japanese human geography as sticking to its old tradition and he emphasizes the academic position of social geography as a social science.\(^1\) It might be true that Japanese geographers have not had vigorous argument on theory building. But it is possible to say that multiplicity of research viewpoints and methods helps to develop geography as an academic field.

**Recent Urban Scene in Japan**

After World War II, particularly in the 1960s, Japan experienced rapid urbanization. Major metropolitan areas, especially the Tokyo area, grew rapidly with the influx of a large number of young people seeking better educational opportunities and jobs. The double oil crises in 1973 and 1979 slowed down Japan’s economic growth and urbanization processes. Also, the rapid appreciation of the yen after the “Plaza Agreement” in 1985 affected Japan’s economy and urban development negatively. However, the late 1980s saw an economic surge. The discussion about the global city at that time upgraded Tokyo into a major world city along with New York and London (Friedmann 1986; Sassen 1991). But it did not last very long and evaporated like the “bubble” and Japan experienced a long stagnant period, the so-called “lost decade.”

Now, Japan’s society is in a watershed. In 2005 its total population began to shrink for the first time since World War II. This population change is due to its aging society with more aged people and less children: the share of persons above 65 years old surpassed 20 percent of the total population, and that of children under 15 was only 13.6 percent (11.6 percent in Tokyo and 13.8 percent in Osaka) as of April 1st, 2007.

In the post-bubble stagnant period, Tokyo and a limited number of urban centers such as Nagoya, however, enjoyed relative growth. The decrease in the land price, and closure and relocation of manufacturing plants made it possible for real-estate agents and developers to construct new commercial and residential buildings in central Tokyo. And those newly-built apartments, which are mainly high-rise and relatively cheap, have been successful in attracting good numbers of residents, both young and post-retirement. This new trend has led to the re-urbanization of Tokyo, called “toshin kaiki” in Japanese (Miyazawa and Abe 2005).

On the contrary, a majority of provincial cities have suffered from economic stagnation and a slowing down in their population growth (sometimes negatively). Especially, small-sized cities are struggling to survive in this era of the shrinking state. The city of Yubari in central Hokkaido went bankrupt in 2006 mainly due to its bad budget management, but the aging of the population also contributed to its shrinking tax revenue and to an increase in social welfare costs. This example is not an exceptional case. Many small cities and municipalities might face the same undesirable fate unless effective measures are taken by the central and prefectural governments.
Urbanization and Suburbanization, and Changes of Residential Characteristics

Urbanization has changed the landscape and its land use patterns, which have attracted much of the attention of Japanese geographers so far. A variety of studies have been conducted in urban areas. For example, Tsutsumi (1996) has examined changing land-use patterns in trading through a micro scale analysis of the central part of the city of Nagano, located in central Japan, and later Tsutsumi (2003) analyzed the land conversion processes based on landowners' decisions in a case study in the rural-urban fringe of the city of Maebashi in Gunma Prefecture, north of Tokyo. Tsutsumi has claimed that there is a different trading and land-use pattern between the central business district and its surrounding area due to the urban land-use potential at the site.

The urban landscape is also considered as a built-up environment, which houses residents inside it. Kato (1999) has made a critique of postmodern geography and its interpretation of cities drawing on Harvey and Soja's works (Harvey 1989; Soja 1989). Kato is wisely suggesting two directions for a postmodern geography of the modernist gaze on the urban condition: the politics of representation and that of scale. In concluding remarks, Kato has said that if we place the critiques of the modernist gaze as a 'voyeuristic' way of seeing the city, then it would be possible to have a paradigm shift in human geography. However, geo-philosophical analysis of Japanese cities, including those from radical perspectives, are in few in number and need to be conducted more vigorously in the future.

Along with transformation of the hard characteristics of Japanese cities, their soft sides, that is, the society embedded in the built environments, has also experienced changes. To date, changing residential characteristics in the context of urbanization have attracted much of the focus of Japanese geographers. One of the reasons for this tendency is the fact that residency is a visible feature of (urban) human life. And another reason is the fact that the Japanese way of living has dramatically changed after the rapid economic growth period in the 1960s. One typical changing character in the way of living along with urbanization and later with the aging of society is an increase of single dwellers. Concerning population structure and its changes, Naganuma (2003) has examined the relationship between residency changes and aging population in Tokyo, claiming that unrealistic land-related restrictions and the difference in life styles between the first and second generations make it difficult to perform effective housing renewal. Nishi (2005) has examined aging processes of single elderly persons and their housing issues in her case study in central Tokyo. At the same time, Yui and Yano (2000) have discussed residency problems of single-parent families, mainly women-headed families, with relation to availability of welfare facilities for them in Tokyo. They have found that most single-parent families are women-headed, and that the mother has a tendency to migrate to an urban area in order to cope with her heavy duties, such as getting a job and child care, and also in order to be free from prejudices of nearby residents. It is suggestive that scarcity of public housing is contributing to place women-headed single families in more difficult conditions.

Another typical character of urban residency is a rapid increase in the number of apartments and apartment complexes in the outer ring of the metropolitan regions represented by that of Tokyo (Tama New town, west of Tokyo) and Osaka (Senri New town, north of Osaka) built in the 1970s. Now that the people living there are getting old after decades of residency, the resident composition of those apartments and apartment complex is also changing. Yui (1991a, b, 1993) has examined the increasing average age of residents in public housing and differentiation of residents according to the types of housing supply through case studies of Fukuoka, the largest city of Kyushu, a southern main island, and Hiroshima. We need more case studies, not only in large cities but also in small and medium-sized cities, to take measures against the problem.

Expansion of urban space has caused a social mixing in the urban-fringe area between original countryside residents and new urban dwellers, called “konjuka” in Japanese. The 1990s saw an increase in the number of studies tackling the
mechanism of this social mix. For example, Sawa (1990) and Furuta (1990) have explained continuing processes of “konjuka” in a case study in suburban Hiroshima, and Tabuchi (1991) has examined the adaptation of residents in a mixed community through residents’ behavior in an urban fringe area of Okayama. According to Tabuchi, new kinds of social problems are seen in “konjuka” area: they are conflicts of interests and relative lack of solidarity between newcomers consisting of “rural non-farmers” and “urban non-farmers,” and original residents consisting of “rural farmers” and “urban farmers.” A finding that child-related ties play an important role in creating the harmony between newcomers and original residents is a critical point to investigate further in depth.

On the other hand, private apartments are likely to be located in the inner city and its nearby suburbs. Kagawa (1984, 1988) has studied locational patterns of private apartments in downtown areas and influences caused by the construction of condominiums on surrounding areas in his case study of Osaka, and Otsuka (2005) has examined the relations between the supply pattern of apartments and resident-seekers’ choices based on various questionnaire and interview research. Otsuka has emphasized the significant roles of administrative supports and sincere actions of residents for creating better urban area residence as social necessity. The concept of “social necessity,” however, needs to be clarified.

During the bubble economy period, some local residents in the central Tokyo were forced to move out due to the sharp rise of land prices which resulted in skyrocketing land property and inheritance tax, and also by “gang-like” real-estate agents called “jiageya” (literally, “land price risers”). Most of the gentrified spaces were used for (luxurious) commercial and business purposes. The abrupt end of the “bubble” economy and the following economic slump period have driven the land price down and also produced vacant spaces in the inner city area, which had not been suitable for residential use due to the expensive price of the land. As a result, real-estate agents obtained an opportunity to build apartments and sell them at rather reasonable prices for middle-income workers. Now, we are witnessing a returning population of both young and old to the downtown areas not only in the major metropolitan areas (for example, see Yabe (2003) for the case of Tokyo), but also in major cities of prefectures in countryside.

**Urban Society and Political Matters**

Japanese society, including that in urban areas, is believed to be quite homogeneous compared to those of western countries, but actually, (ethnic) minorities such as Okinawan and Ainu people, the original inhabitants of southern and northern Japan, respectively, and Korean and Chinese who have come and settled in Japan in a variety of ways, voluntarily or by force, have played an undeniable role in the urban society of Japan (see next section for detail). There have also been a group of oppressed people in “buraku” (literally meaning “village or settlement,” but also referring to discriminated areas, especially in western Japan), who are thought to be partially the offspring of the suppressed people in the Edo era (1600–1867). Wakamatsu (2004) has argued about the relationships between public housing projects and buraku liberation movements in Wakayama. Concerning class and social space in Japanese cities, Mizuuchi has described it in his series of papers mainly from the view of the marginalized side through detailed case studies in Osaka, which houses the largest number of homeless people in Japan (Mizuuchi 1982, 1998, 2001). Also Fielding (2004) has elaborately examined the spatial characteristics of social segregation in Kyoto from a foreign perspective. Haraguchi (2003) has explained the emerging processes of “yoseba” (an inner-city district where employment agencies for day-laborers are located) and its implications, while Mutooka (2007) has described the disappearing process of a squatters area called “Barrack Town” in post-war Kobe. In these studies, the social exclusion thesis, which has attracted researchers’ attention recently, has played an important role. Spatial meaning of social exclusion will be a critical point of view for geographers to investigate more in depth.

The Japanese urban society has developed unique local residential associations called *jichikai* (or *chonai*). The history of *jichikai*...
is said to date back to the Edo era. The main purpose of jichikai is to create a good neighborhood through the mutual cooperation of residents. So far, sociologists, especially urban sociologists, have led the study of local community and jichikai (for example, see Yoshihara (2000) and Kaneko and Morioka (2001)). In geography, however, there is a paucity of studies in this field in spite of the fact that the (local) community is a significant component of urban society. Among the few studies, Taira (1990, English version in 2003) has examined the transformation of a local community with depopulation in downtown Tokyo, and has suggested a possibility of an enlarged local community by the merger of traditional "jichikai" communities, based on public primary school districts. Onjo (1992) has presented a similar analysis of community in urban space through an investigation of a traditional festival sustained by the urban residents in central Fukuoka in northern Kyushu. At the same time, concerning social network of urban residents, Hara (1994) has focused on their localization processes in a case study in a suburb of Osaka, and Nakamura (2004) has analyzed characteristics of socialization of residents in a town in Saitama Prefecture, north of Tokyo, using a social network approach. For retirees local behavior, Kimura (2006) has examined their involvement process in community activities in the suburbs of Tokyo.

The urban community is not limited to one formed by rather permanent residents but also to another which is temporarily organized in urban space. A night entertainment community which appears in a portion of a central city is a good example. Sugiyama (1999) has performed a unique study on "sakariba" ("amusement quarter" in his translation) as social space constructed in the urban setting. Sugiyama has found that in the study district, located in downtown of the city of Toyama in central Japan, the place where girl and boy hunting called "nampa" are conducted, is equivalent to subjective social space and plays an important role for the youth to maintain their identity.

Social justice and cities is a topic of importance. So far in Japanese geography, however, the number of studies on this topic is rather limited except for the few examples discussed above. But the theme has the potential to expand further in the discipline. Industrialization and urbanization have brought a variety of benefits to urban residents. At the same time, however, they have caused many kinds of environmental and social problems, and grass-roots social movements have been organized against them, especially in the Greater Tokyo and Osaka areas and other industrial areas. In geography, Kagawa (1998, 2001, 2003) has analyzed the characteristics of a series of social movements along with industrialization in the local context in Kawasaki (Kanagawa Prefecture), Mizushima (Okayama Prefecture, western Japan), and Wakayama (south of Osaka). Kagawa has claimed that in Japan most social movement studies are concerned with environmental degradation, while in the Anglophone countries they are recognized as research in political geography. So in Japan, it would be necessary to grasp environmental movement issues in the context of political processes with emphasis on their spatial characteristics.

In the age of post-industry and post-modernity, urban areas in Japan are facing new challenges (for example, see Nishiyama (1997), which has argued restructuring urban space and community structure, and above-mentioned Kato (1999), which has attempted a critical understanding of the modernist gaze of the city). Although, so far, urbanization has been accompanying residential dispersion towards the suburbs, not a few newly retired persons, with their physical abilities declining, have found that life in suburbia is not as convenient for shopping or going to hospital as they had imagined. Local governments have also recognized that the concept of a "compact city," in which residential, commercial and public functions are concentrated in downtown, is critical for making the city sustainable in the age of shrinking population and limited budget.

So far, however, urban politics did not drew much attention of Japanese geographers. But recently that tendency has begun to change. Particularly, social governance is becoming a topic of discussion. Kawada (2007), for example, has examined the progressing social governance in urban planning in the city of Mitaka, a western suburb of Tokyo, stressing liberal leadership of
the city mayor with his open information policy and the corresponding citizen participation in city politics. Urban redevelopment measure is also a point of issue. Kohara (2005) has vividly described its social meaning from the residents’ perspective in relation with the city government through a case study in the inner-city district of Osaka. In this case, the residents were said to have benefited from the redevelopment based on their land ownership and community action.

Urban political institutions face immediate challenges of natural hazards such as earthquake which no Japanese city can evade. The Hanshin-Awaji Great Earthquake in 1995 significantly damaged the urban societies of the Kobe area. The local government and the residents have struggled to rebuild the city and the community. Not a few Japanese geographers have participated in the reconstruction activities in Kobe and have reported the causes and damages of the earthquake, and recovery processes. Ishii et al. (1996) has analyzed the distribution patterns of damaged housings and has made it clear that those damaged buildings are concentrated in the old and densely built semi-industrial areas in the inner-city of Kobe. Those areas have been likely to be left behind in the urban renovation. On the other hand, at and after the earthquake, local community contributed to reduce the damages and local schools became important shelters and centers for evacuees. Ito (2007) has described community restructuring through land readjustment project in the Rokkomichi district in eastern Kobe, claiming the importance of the equal partnership between the professionals of urban politics and planning and the local residents.

In the mean time, aging and the decreasing population of Japanese society have led to a decline in tax revenues both for the central and local government, and as a result, political restructuring has become unavoidable. Recently in Japan, mergers of local municipalities have been carried out all over the country; the number of local municipalities called “machi (cho)” and “mura (son)” (towns and villages, respectively) decreased dramatically. Arai (2003) has described the processes of the merger of the cities of Tanashi and Hoya located in the western suburbs of Tokyo and their changing locality. This aging of population means, in a way, also a diminishing number of students, which has resulted in closures and mergers of local public schools. In some cases, such measures evoked opposition movements by residents and alumni of those schools, especially when the schools have long histories and a good reputation. Miyazawa (1996) has presented a detailed examination of the spatial restructuring of the public school systems and residents’ movements against it in the case of Chiyoda ward, central Tokyo.

At the same time, urban space is constructed unevenly in terms of gender and age groups; it could exclude a certain group of people based on their physical characteristics. Women have been thought to have different spatial behavior and life courses from men. Kageyama (2000) has explained characteristics of “gendered space” in pre-war downtown Tokyo based on her detailed analysis of a typical apartment for women; Nakazawa and Kamiya (2005) have reported about spatial differentiation in women’s lives and its factors through a case study of the alumni of two high schools in Kanazawa (central city of Ishikawa Prefecture in central Japan) and Yokohama. For spatiality of masculinity and male residents, Murata (2000, 2004) has demonstrated unique works based on detailed field research. In the former study, Murata has analyzed the characteristics of places where middle-aged single men feel alienated, mainly through the narratives of the male informants in order to explain the current situation of the masculinity of geographical knowledge, and in the latter study, he has tried to elucidate the role of a male architect in a social housing project in the suburbs of Gifu (the main city of Gifu Prefecture). So far, feminist geographers have criticized a masculinity bias in place construction and its interpretation. But Murata has claimed that gendered space does not privilege all men, but only those men who meet certain conditions of masculinity. There is a need for more gender studies which focus not only on the power structure of gender in space but also on that inside the same gender.

Finding Urban Ethnicity

Japanese society is often considered to be
highly homogenous compared to other developed countries. However, as Amino (1999) shows, it has been a rather multi-ethnic one since its beginning. And as Oguma (1995, 1998) claims, the idea of the homogeneity of the Japanese society was “created” through education under the control of the new Meiji government in order to make the “nation-state” in the late 19th century. But as the Japanese territory expanded by colonization of Taiwan (1895), Korea (1910) and other nearby regions, Japanese society became inevitably multi-ethnic in earnest. In geography, Abe (1999, 2000) has examined the working conditions and changing residential patterns of Chinese laborers in the Tokyo metropolitan area in the 1920s and Yamashita (1979) has described the lifestyle of Chinese residents of the China Town in Yokohama.

After the defeat of Japan in the second world war Japan lost its colonies. But a number of former “Japanese” coming from gaichi (outer territory of Japan such as Taiwan and Korea) remained in the original Japanese archipelago, called naichi (inner Japan), especially in the urban areas, concentrated in Tokyo and Osaka region. Concerning the spatial segregation of Koreans, Fukumoto (2004) has vividly described the transformation of their enclaves in Osaka during the period from the 1920s to the 1950s.

Since the late 1980s, the Japanese society entered the globalized era in earnest. The number of foreign inhabitants in Japan, especially in its urban areas, dominated by Tokyo and Osaka regions, suddenly increased. Those who have settled in Japan in this period are called “new-comers,” while those who came to Japan before and during the second world war and their offspring are called “old-comers” in academia and the media. Currently, the share of foreign residents in Japan is about two percent of the total population of 130 million. The share is still small compared to those in other developed countries. But thinking of the historic transition of Japan’s ethnic composition, this share is quite remarkable to the Japanese.

In reality, the “new-comers” mentioned above are stratified roughly into two groups: “elite” professionals and manual laborers. The former group, dominated by Americans and Western Europeans, are likely to reside in “good” neighborhoods in the big cities such as Minato-ku in Tokyo, which houses the Roppongi district and many foreign embassies and has good accessibility to the downtown working places. On the other hand, the latter group are rather scattered in Japan with a number of concentrated areas in Gunma, Shizuoka, Aichi and other prefectures in which many manufacturing plants offer places for them to work, especially for male residents. Abe (1997) has studied the changing working structure and residences of the Chinese in Nagasaki, and Fukumoto (2002) has outlined the living space of those “new-comers” in Osaka.

Foreign women are likely to be engaged in the third sector, specifically in the entertainment-related jobs such as those of cafes and pubs, and sometimes they are put in a kind of forced labor. Abe (2003) has examined the emergence of the space of Filipino pubs and the social structure of symbolized buildings in the case of Nagoya. It is another fact that among the latter group, those who are of Japanese descent occupy a significant part. As in the multi-ethnic cities of American and European societies, they are also creating their own communities inside Japanese cities. Geographic concentration of foreign residents in a city has made it possible to establish ethnic businesses such as restaurants, food shops and video shops in the area. Kataoka (2004, 2005) has wisely demonstrated the emergence of ethnic business and their relation with the local society in Hamamatsu, Shizuoka, located between Tokyo and Nagoya.

Increasing attention since the 1990s on these “new-comers” has also led to a focus on “old-comers,” who had not attracted Japanese geographers for a long time in spite of their existence. Narita (1995) has called for attention to the ethnic minorities in Japan, discussing the case of ethnic Koreans called “Zainichi” (literally “residing in Japan”) in Tokyo and Osaka. To date, urban ethnicitv has been argued mainly from job-related perspectives: Jo (1995) has examined the working conditions of elderly Koreans in the industrial ward of Ota, Tokyo; Yamamoto (2002) has explained emerging ethnicity in Kobe based on the case study of its roles in the chemical-shoes industry complex. Lee (2002) has reported about the changing socio-economic characteristics of ethnic Koreans through job—
search networks.\textsuperscript{9} It is time to discuss the future of desirable multi-cultural and multi-ethnic urban societies in Japan from geographical viewpoints.

**Conclusions**

This article reviewed recent scientific research trends in Japanese urban social geography. It has become clear that the scope of research has expanded from residential characteristics to urban community, stratification, politics and to ethnicity, along with the rapid transformation of Japanese urban society in a globalization era especially since the late 1980s.

Now, Japan faces serious new challenges. Japanese population reached its peak in 2005 and began to decrease for the first time in its history. Aging population and shrinking numbers of youngsters are urging the central government to take imminent measures to make Japanese society a more "family-with-kids friendly" society, and to consider the possibility of introducing more active and open immigration policy. At the same time, in the large metropolis such as Tokyo, Yokohama and Osaka, the existence of multi-ethnic communities due to the globalization of the urban socio-economy is already a fact despite the image of homogenous society.

On the other hand, the free market economy policy, which was strengthened and accelerated under the Koizumi government, has resulted in socio-economic problems in growing gaps and in working conditions; the diminishing number of full-time workers are forced to work much longer, and the number of part-time workers are rising rapidly in spite of the unprecedented profits of Japanese major global corporations. The number of karoshi (death due to overwork) does not seem to fall. The word "working poor" attracts attention from the Japanese media, which have continuously reported the hard experiences of people in such conditions.

So far, Japanese geographers have been trying to tackle these issues, but there is still a lot of works to do. Our future agenda should be to deepen the contents of research in order to understand the characteristics of the changing Japanese urban society, along with discussions about theoretical advancement. Also, it will be necessary to explore a new frontier of urban social geography, which will overlap with other sub-fields of human geography and other disciplines. One possible frontier might be a cultural study of the urban society of Japan from geographic perspectives, as Yamaguchi (2002) has demonstrated in his research about street performance and street artists in Osaka.\textsuperscript{10} Because it is possible to say that city and society inside are entities which are culturally constructed, multi-culturalism will be a key concept for the contemporary and future city. The growth of urban social geography in Japan will surely contribute to the development of human geography not only in this country but also in the larger changing world.

**Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Paul Batten, my colleague of Kagawa University, for his valuable comments on my English writing.

(Received 25 July 2007)  
(Accepted 7 January 2008)

**Notes**

1. For the definition of social geography, also see Tsutsumi (2004: 1) and about social space, also see Buttimer (1969, 1972), Yamano (1979), Kushiya (1984).
2. For land use change in downtown areas of Japanese cities, also see Ishimaru (1988).
3. For the relations between economic geography and social geography, see Mizuoka (1993).
5. About Okinawans in the urban space, see for example Mizuuichi (2001), and about Ainu people, see Endo (2006).
6. Also, see Kagawa (2004) for the history of social movement theory and its relation with geography.
7. About Tokyo from a foreign view, we have an excellent study by Cybriwsky (1998).
8. Also see Taira (1990, English version in 2003), and Sakagawa (2004). Both of them are claiming the significant role of public (elementary) schools as a center of local community.
10. For cultural turns in contemporary Japanese society, see Fukuda (2005).
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