Development of Economic Geography in Japan and Activities of the Japan Association of Economic Geographers: 2001–06

MIYAMACHI Yoshihiro (University of Oita)

Introduction

This paper aims to highlight development of economic geography in Japan and recent academic activities of the Japan Association of Economic Geographers (JAEG). In Japan, economic geography as an academic discipline has a long history over fifty years and the substantial number of geographers, some 800 in terms of the number of memberships of the JAEG, have been involved in economic geographical research. Unfortunately, mostly because of the language barrier, such works are not well-known to academics who do not understand Japanese. Therefore this paper also aims to stimulate international academic exchanges between Japanese and non-Japanese economic geographers. The following are structured into five sections. Section one summarizes post-war history of the JAEG; Section two describes various academic meeting activities of the JAEG; Section three reviews recent research trends of economic geography in Japan in terms of number of papers appeared in the Annals of the JAEG; Section four and five explain other institutional activities of the JAEG such as additional publications and research promotion.

Brief history of economic geography and the JAEG

The Japan Association of Economic Geographers, founded in 1954, celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2003. In the President’s lecture at the 50th conference, Professor Toshifumi Yada (Kitakyushu University), looked back the post-war history of Japanese economic geography and divided its academic development into four periods: pre-establishment, start-up, growth and transition (Yada 2003). The first ten years after the War (1945–54) are seen as the pre-establishment period. During this period, geographical research in Japan remained heavily influenced by conventional approaches such as “environmental determinism”. A growing number of geographers realized the limit of the old approach and were looking for a more scientific one to advance understanding of the geographic nature of economic systems. In 1954, some 80 scholars, consisting of both geographers and economists, got together in Tokyo and announced their intention to establish a new academic society named the Japan Association of Economic Geographers.

Economic geography in Japan then experienced a start-up period from the late 1950s to the
early 1970s. By the late 1950s, the Japanese economy had overcome its postwar disorder and entered a rapid growth stage that was built upon rapid modernization of heavy and chemical industries. Geographically, this resulted in a rapid industrialization of urban areas, in particular in Pacific coastal zone which stretches from Tokyo, Nagoya, Osaka to Fukuoka. In contrast, rural areas suffered from a decline of primary industry as well as a depopulation due to the out-migration of the younger generation. These geographical changes, especially the widening of regional economic disparities stimulated many economic geographers to get involved in empirical research throughout the nation. During the start-up period, a large number of detailed regional monographs about the changing geography under a climate of rapid industrialization were published and they created a new research trend called “regional economic geography” (keizai chishi ron). These studies were primarily descriptive, but explanations were based on the historical and economic contexts of the studied region, not on the physical environment. On the theoretical side, a number of papers on industrial location analysis also appeared. Location studies, which have a century-long tradition in Europe after the pioneering work done by von Thünen, Alfred Weber and Walter Christaller, had been introduced to Japan before the War and were adopted and developed by economists and geographers through this period. Meanwhile, the number of researchers who joined the Association grew quite substantially. From the starting point of 80 people in 1954, the number exceeded 300 in the early 1960s and then 500 in the early 70s. As the Association grew, the number of members living outside of Tokyo and its surrounding area increased significantly. This situation enabled the JAEG to establish new regional divisions, firstly in Osaka-based Kansai area in 1964, and then in Nagoya-based Chubu area in 1975. The role of Tokyo, then, became twofold: the nation-wide headquarter and the Kanto regional division. At the end of this period, economic geography came to be recognized as a distinguished discipline in the Japanese academic world.

The late 1970s to the early 1990s were classified as the “growth period”. The above-mentioned research trend of “regional economic geography” had produced a pile of empirical articles and case studies of regional economies throughout Japan. However, there was a limited scope for integrating these various studies. In the 1970s, a new research movement that aimed to understand the overall structure of the economic landscape in Japan emerged. Economic geographers who supported this movement got together and formed a new research school called “regional structure” (chiiki kozo ron). The Japanese word kozo literally means “structure” in English, but its nuance is actually wider-ranging, meaning “a kind of system”. This school looked upon a national economy as a spatial system of regional economies and asserted that economic geography as a discipline should analyze overall spatial structure of the national economy by integrating theories of industrial structure and industrial location. The “regional structure” approach was certainly ambitious as it sought to cover a wide array of issues as industrial location, natural resources development, and regional planning and policy. The research outcomes of the school were published consequently as a six-volume set one after another from 1977 to 1988 under the series title of Regional Structures of Japan. Thus this school became and remains influential among economic geographers in Japan. However, at the same time, other approaches including location analysis, “regional economic geography” and political economy were also active. For JAEG such developments brought increased member-
ship during this period from 587 in 1976, to 700 in 1992, as well as the establishment of the fourth regional division, Seinan (the southwestern part of Japan), at the end of this period.

The period since the late 1990s has been deemed the “transitionary period”. For a decade after the collapse of “bubble” economy, largely led by the rise of land prices, in 1992, the Japanese economy experienced a long-term recession and this has greatly changed the economic landscape. The revolutionary development of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) and globalization of economic activities has also accelerated these changes. Consequently economic disparities among regions became wider. In these circumstances, economic geographical research has had to reorganize its approach to provide a better understanding of the changing economy of the regions. The existing research trends including “regional structure” and “location studies” while undergoing a restructuring has not yet led to a new research agenda of the discipline. Some geographers who have been keeping their eyes on the developments of economic geography across Europe and the America have started to introduce these works into Japan. Arguments such as the spatial division of labor, new industrial spaces, world city hypothesis, learning region and so forth have become influential progressively among Japanese geographers. Neo-classical economics-oriented studies, such as “new economic geography” or geographical economics have also become well known among academics as well as policy makers. Such active “importation” of academic achievements from foreign countries characterizes the transitionary period. The number of JAEG members exceeded 800 in 2001 and the fifth regional branch, Hokuto, was established in northeastern part of Japan. By 2006, though, JAEG seems to have entered a maturing phase as an organization because the number of members throughout the 2000s has remained constant around 800.

Meetings

The JAEG holds three kinds of meeting activities: an annual conference, a regional conference and regional division meetings. The annual conference is not only the biggest event of the JAEG but also the most important occasion for research presentations in economic geography in Japan. Held on a weekend in May, a university is nominated to act as a host of the conference. The conference usually takes three days: day 1 for “roundtable” and “frontier” sessions, day 2 for the symposium, and day 3 for a research excursion. The preparation committee for the annual conference specifies the theme of the symposium, makes a call for presentations, and then selects individual presenters and his/her discussants respectively. The symposium, open to every JAEG members, is one of the unique features of the Association because other nation-wide academic organizations within the discipline of geography are largely oriented to individual paper readings. All of the presented papers along with abstracts of comments and discussions made at the symposium are published afterwards in the fourth issue of the Annals of the JAEG each year. The themes of the symposium, as shown in Table 1, reflect the problems and aspects of regional economy in Japan. The protection of the environment, for example, was chosen as a topic of the 2001 conference held in Kyoto, reflecting concern with the further deepening of the destruction of regional environments in urban areas in Japan. Industrial restructuring and regional unemployment were discussed at the 2002 conference held in Tokyo at a time when neo-liberalism dominated the discourse of the Japanese government's
policy-making. The hollowing-out phenomenon of industries and a need to revitalize local economies reflected the both symposia of 2004 on renovation of the old industrial areas, and of 2005 on the innovation of industrial agglomeration. The JAEG symposium deals with not only empirical matters but also theoretical. The Association maintains a kind of tradition to discuss theoretical approaches within the discipline every ten years. In this respect, the topic entitled "Methodology of economic geography in the new era" was chosen for the 50th commemorative conference held in Tokyo in 2003.

As the Association grows, the symposium becomes bigger year by year. The number of participants of the symposium has exceeded 200-300 since the 1990s, which does however make it rather difficult to exchange opinions and ideas within an intimate atmosphere. Since the 47th conference held in 2000, JAEG started a new smaller meeting called the "roundtable". This workshop deals with a more specific topic compared to the symposium and is designed to correspond to not only further subdivision of research areas but also to the expansion of research interests across the discipline. The topics discussed at the roundtable since 2001 are shown in Table 2.

The second kind of meeting activity is the regional conference which is held annually in each autumn. This conference is held at a city outside of the Tokyo metropolitan area. The conference normally lasts for two days: day 1 for presentations and discussion on a specific topic and day 2 for an excursion. Compared with the annual conference this is smaller in size, but quite unique

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Themes of the annual conference's symposium during 2001–07</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conference</td>
<td>Theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#48 (2001)</td>
<td>Diversification in environmental problems and economic geography: Agenda for creating cyclical society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#49 (2002)</td>
<td>Restructuring of Japanese economy and its impact on geography of employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#50 (2003)</td>
<td>Towards a new perspective of economic geography on the methodological reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#51 (2004)</td>
<td>Industrial renovation in old heavy industrial areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#52 (2005)</td>
<td>On the innovativeness of industrial agglomerations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#53 (2006)</td>
<td>Reorganization of regional economies in the era of low fertility and aging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#54 (2007)</td>
<td>Regional development and disparities in the process of economic recovery</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Topics of roundtable meetings during 2001–06</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>1. ICT development and restructuring of distribution industries 2. A scenario for urban renovation based on city planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>1. A perspective to internationalize Japanese economic geography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1. Economic geography textbooks and higher education 2. New development of the national land policy of Japan and South Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>1. Industrialization of agriculture and restructuring of its spatial structure in Japan 2. Explanation for the 20th century system of the Japanese economy: an economic geographical perspective 3. The relationship between research and education in economic geography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>1. Local finance and economy 2. Local development based on local studies 3. The relationship between research and education in economic geography (2) 4. Explanation for the 20th century system of the Japanese economy (2): Towards a new approach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

-66-
because the topic dealt is very specific to the place where the conference is being held, as shown in Table 3. Thus not only researchers but also non-academics including policy makers, business people and local NPO members take part in the conference. For example, the 2006 regional conference held in Naha dealt with the controversial topic of economic autonomy of the Okinawa islands. Although Okinawa became free from US rule in 1972, its economy remains heavily dependent on the expenditure of the US military. In order to lift the local economy, a new strategy to develop industry such as tourism and call-center businesses has begun. Other topics of the regional conference are shown in Table 3.

The third kind of meeting is regional division meetings which are held in the five regional divisions: Kanto, Kansai, Chubu, Seinan and Kokuto (Figure 1). The place where the meeting is held moves from university to university within the region. Economic geography is a science that can be used to address local and regional problems. In this respect, the local activities of the JAEG including division meetings are quite important. This local embeddedness is a unique feature of the Association. Each regional division holds a meeting four/five times a year and two/three papers are read at a meeting. Consequently, some 50 papers altogether are presented in the division every year. The Kanto and Seinan division normally hold a meeting every April (the start of the new academic year in Japan), for young researchers who have completed an MA dissertation. The division meeting thus functions as the gateway for the start of an academic career for graduate students in economic geography.

The Annals and research trends

The Association publishes an academic periodical entitled the *Annals of the Japan Association of Economic Geographers*. The Annals publishes peer-reviewed feature articles, review articles, research notes, forums and book reviews. The first issue came out in 1955, a year after the establishment of the Association, and the latest is volume, number 53, was published in 2007. The Annals is published quarterly, but five times in odd-numbered years since 2003 when a new English-language edition commenced. As mentioned above, No. 4 of each volume is designated to publish articles presented at the annual conference symposium. Therefore most of the original articles submitted to the editorial committee appear in issues from No. 1–3 of each volume. Articles can be subdivided into three groups: original articles, symposium articles and articles for the English-language edition. Although peer-reviewed, authors of each article of the latter two are basically nominated by the Association/editorial committee.

Articles in the *Annals* chronicle the significant change of scholarly interest in economic geography. Table 4 summarizes number of articles appeared in the *Annals* for six years from 2001.
Figure 1  Regional Divisions

Table 4  Number of articles appearing in the Annals by subdivisions of discipline (No. 1, Vol. 47-No. 2, Vol. 52)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group of Articles</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theory and location studies</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional problems and policy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public administration and environment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary industry</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary industry</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary industry</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare and social services</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population and labor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban studies</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Symposium articles: 3, 3, 5, 3, 5, 19
English language edition articles: 4, 4, 8
Grand total: 14, 16, 22, 15, 24, 4
Development of Economic Geography in Japan and Activities of the Japan Association (229)

(No. 1, Volume 47) to 2006 (No. 2, Volume 52), classified by subdivision of the discipline. In the following, trends of economic geographical research during the first half of the 2000s are explored by reviewing papers which appeared in the *Annals*.

Papers that tackled theory and location analysis during the six years were only four, among which three papers were based on an approach of neo-classical economics. While theory is an essential base of the discipline, unfortunately the number of theoretical works appearing in the *Annals* has been decreasing recently. This does not mean that there has been a tendency among economic geographers to avoid theoretical issues. As mentioned already, Japanese economic geographers started to discuss the issue shortly after the War and it was one of the reasons why economic geographers decided to separate themselves from conventional geography and to establish a new academic body of the JAEG in 1954. Since then, theory has been the most controversial issue, and not a few articles have been published in the *Annals*. In the symposium of the 50th anniversary conference, most of participants showed a keen interest in theoretical development. Recently, however, most of theoretically-based works tend to have appeared not in refereed journals including the *Annals*, but in books or non-reviewed periodicals such as working paper series, as was highlighted by K. Yamamoto (2006).

While regional problems and policy are long-standing and important subdivisions of the discipline, the number of papers on this area, appearing in the *Annals*, have been decreasing and only three papers came out during 2001-06: Wada (2002) studied three newly-constructed long bridges which connect Honshu and Shikoku islands and addressed their effect on regional development policy; Nakanishi (2005) discussed a regional viewpoint of government policy vis-à-vis coal mining closures; K. Yamamoto (2006) points out that, in recent times, just like as theoretical pieces, policy-oriented ones tend to come out in non-reviewed journals. He also claims that this tendency poses an important question within the discipline.

On the other hand, works dealing with local government administration have been increasing in the *Annals*. Among industrialized countries, Japan is known as a country where government expenditure has played a more significant role partly because of its Keynesian-oriented economic policy. Geographically, the rural economy, endowed with limited industries and opportunities for income generation, is particularly inclined to be dependent on local public expenditure. In such areas, instead of primary industry, jobs in construction for improving local infrastructure as well as public services become a major income source for local residents. Since the middle of the 1990s, however, the Japanese government has been suffering from a huge financial deficit and consequently financial assistance to local governments has been decreased significantly. The changing economic structure of rural areas has attracted the interest of economic geographers of a younger generation. This is reflected by a growing number of publications in this area such as Kajita (2001; 2003) and Tsutsui (2002). The public sector also plays an important role in the management of regional environmental problems. Environmental problems affect so many aspects of the economy that researchers of various disciplines are now paying greater attention to them. As mentioned already, the 2001 JAEG symposium was organized around the theme of environmental problems, and the papers presented there were published in the *Annals*. In addition to these, two articles were published in the *Annals*: one was the study on domestic waste disposal by Kurishima (2002) and the other was
the study on an evaluation of environment management system of a regional city by K. Ito (2003).

Let us go on to review the industrial studies within the discipline. Generally speaking, studies on spatial organizations of the primary industry including agriculture, forestry and fishery have been decreasing as its proportion within the national economy has become smaller. However, a new type of agricultural geography has gradually emerged, shifting its focus from production to related economic activities such as food distribution. H. Araki has published a series of works in this area from the viewpoint of food supply system and two papers written by him appeared in the *Annals* (Araki, 2003; Araki and Chai, 2004).

Despite tertiarization of the economy, manufacturing still attracts a lot of research attention. The geography of manufacturing location is a major research area of the discipline. According to Matsubara (2002), the research interest in this subdivision is twofold: globalization and geographical agglomeration. On the one hand, the geography of transnational corporations, in particular, Japanese corporations, is expanding and this is a reflection of the globalization of business activities. In the *Annals*, three articles were published. Taira (2001) studied location of Japanese businesses in the Seoul metropolitan area, South Korea, Schulunze (2003) investigated locational adjustment of the management system of Japanese manufacturing companies in Europe and K. Yamamoto (2003) made a case study on new plant location by the German car manufacturer, BMW. A review article written by Kondo (2004) dealt with geography of large enterprises, focusing on the locational behavior of manufacturing firms.

On the other hand, studies on geographical clustering became one of the most popular research areas, largely influenced by discussion among Anglo-American scholars around the concept of industry cluster, first developed by Michael Porter in the 1990s. Two annual symposium held in 2004 and 2005 were organized around this topic, as already explained. In the *Annals*, Fujikawa (2001) explored customer-supplier relationships in the automobile industry’s agglomeration in the Kyushu region and concluded that the lack of a higher-tier function of business management in the region caused the underdevelopment of the business linkage. D. Yamamoto (2004) also investigated the bicycle industry agglomeration in Osaka and described the process of forming production linkages in and between places. As is well known the Japanese automobile production is uniquely characterized by the use of a just-in-time (JIT) production system. This has attracted a lot of research attention among economic geographers because JIT develops very close relationships with a functionally tiered system of suppliers and encourages geographical proximity between customers and suppliers. Nojiri and Fujiwara (2004), for example, reviewed the literature which studied the spatial implication of JIT from the viewpoint of economic geography. Geographical clustering often act as a base for knowledge accumulation, learning and innovation. As in Europe and America, spatial aspects of innovation became an issue of considerable debate. Mizuno (2005) reviewed a large number of papers that studied the geography of innovation in the context of industry agglomeration and raised a research agenda to investigate not only geographical proximity itself but also connectivity between the clusters. A cultural shift in the industry cluster research in Japan was revealed in the following two articles that appeared in the *Annals*. Hanzawa (2001) studied the agglomeration of Tokyo’s world-famous animation industry, which is quite unique and highly competitive. Hara (2005) also explored the
same topic from the viewpoint of "competitive advantage" raised by M. Porter.

Research on tertiary industry has been growing since the 1990s as the economy has progressively shifted to the service-oriented sector. As shown in Table 4, this area is the second largest in terms of number of articles published in the *Annals* through the 2000s. Economic geography in Japan is now experiencing the process of a research interest shift from production-centered to service-centered analysis. The Japanese government deregulated the law of location of large-scale shops in the middle of 1990s, aiming to stimulate commercial activities and consumer expenditures especially in non-metropolitan areas, most of which were suffering from economic depression. Since then regional cities in Japan have experienced, one after another, the development of new huge shopping malls in the suburbs, which in turn have caused the reduction of sales volume or even the closure of small family shops, most of which were located in the town center. This phenomenon of "hollowing-out" of commercial activities from the town center has been commonly observed throughout Japan and it has raised a new regional problem that needs to be considered. Tsubota (2001) dealt with this topic when he did a case study of a large shopping center's economic impact on a rural village. Otsuka (2004) described the regeneration process of a once-depressed shopping street, largely facilitated by an urban renewal including a new condominium construction. T. Araki (2005) summarized the juridical change concerning city planning and explored a new guideline vis-à-vis the location of large-scale stores. Neda (2001) also published a general review article on the spatial organization of retail industry in Japan by examining a series of empirical case studies. Yasui (2002) also contributed to the debate by providing an introductory paper on the geography of theme parks in Japan.

The spatial organization of the distribution industry attracts a growing attention from younger researchers. The *Annals* published a special issue on the topic entitled "reorganization of distribution space" in 2005. In this issue, seven papers that studied various aspects of distribution appeared. Arai (2005), acting as a guest editor, contributed an introductory paper of the special issue, arguing that social stratification brings about the polarization of consumption in Japan. Ikeda (2005), Kaneko (2005) and Nakamura (2005) addressed recent changes of the distribution of vegetable supplies, clothing stores and pharmacies respectively. Kawabata (2005), a leading figure of retail studies, put forward an argument about the internationalization of Japanese big retailers in the respect of property management. Aoyama (2005) drew up a research agenda of the discipline that was shifting from a production-centered to a distribution and consumption-centered approach. In addition to the special issue, Ikeda (2003) and Hata (2005) also dealt with the distribution system of clothing manufacturers and book retailers respectively.

With the expansion of female employment, various social welfare services including nurseries for children and care for old people have become an issue of local importance. Two papers examining nursery provision were published in the *Annals*. Yatera (2002) studied changes in day nursery services provided by public sector and Kukimoto (2006) investigated workplace nurseries provided inside of a private company. In the area of medical services, Kamiya (2002) discussed recent locational shifts of psychiatric clinics into urban areas, and Kamo (2002) explored the polarization of a local nursing job market.

Although population study seems to have been losing its popularity in the discipline during the latest decade, younger researchers have shifted
its focus to the study of the labor market of highly-skilled or intelligent workers. Nakazawa has been actively publishing articles which explored the migration of research workers in the information service industry (see Nakazawa, 2001; Nakazawa and Arai, 2003, 2004). Sato (2004) shares a similar interest, analyzing the case of R&D workers in pharmaceutical companies. The annual symposium in 2002 also dealt with this topic.

While transportation studies fails to attract as much attention as in the past, papers in this area have been published relatively constantly in the Annals. The development of motorways and its effect upon manufacturing and office location were (re) examined by S. Abe (2003) and Kikuchi (2005) respectively. Both Dai (2003) and Hotta (2003) did a case study on the topic of the development of international transportation and distribution.

Urban studies have been a long-standing and major subdivision of economic geographical research since the 1970s, when urbanization in Japan was in full-stream. In the Annals, nine articles were published through 2001–06 and they can be further divided into three subgroups: urban economics, inter-urban systems and intra-urban systems. Kameyama (2001, 2003) contributed two papers, exploring urban and industrial diversity based on an urban economics approach. In the subgroup of inter-urban systems, K. Abe (2004), a leading figure of the area in Japan, published an introductory article which reviewed the change of Japanese urban systems from 1950 to 2000 by analyzing the location of head and branch offices of major firms. Both Fujimoto (2003) and Park (2004) discussed the same topic by using different data. Studies on intra-urban organization appeared in the Annals covering topics such as urban housing, e.g. Hasegawa (2002) and T. Ito (2003).

The Annals has started to publish an additional special issue in English since 2003. This new initiative aims to develop communication between economic geographers in Japan and overseas on various research activities as well as provide information about the changing economic geography of Japan (Matsuhashi, 2003). The first issue featured spatial reorganization of the Japanese economy in the 1990s. The 1990s, sometimes called the "lost decade", witnessed a long-term economic recession and political change towards neo-liberalism, bringing about a profound change of spatial organization of industrial activities throughout Japan. In order to explore the topic, four major industries such as manufacturing, distribution, agriculture and construction, were chosen. Togashi (2003) provided an overview of the shifts of manufacturing towards globalization on one hand and localization on the other. Hashimoto (2003) described spatial restructuring of the commodity distribution system caused by the rapid development of ICT. Araki (2003) extended his focus from agricultural production to cover other related activities including food distribution and in turn pointed out the regional gaps within Japan’s food system. The fact that the construction industry as well as agriculture has become the major income source in rural areas led Kajita (2003) to explore the role of construction jobs in the regions experiencing change in public investment expenditure.

The second issue, published in 2005, featured the changing agglomeration of the Japanese manufacturing industry. Studies on industrial agglomeration have been reflooshing in Anglo-American countries since the 1990s and they have had a considerable influence on economic geography as well as regional economics in Japan. The special issue, consisting of four papers, aimed to summarize the development of industrial agglomeration research in Japan and to
articulate theoretical studies of the topic between Japan and overseas. Oda (2003) provided a general overview of the historical development of the Japanese industrial agglomeration. Tatemi (2005) highlighted the changing features of the clothing industry's clustering, adopting the theory of "world of production" developed by Storper and Salais (1997). Matsunaga (2005) studied the relationship between the recycling industries and the agglomeration of the existing heavy industries. Yamasaki (2005) contributed to the debate by providing an introductory overview of Japan's industrial cluster program which was led by the central government.

Before closing this section, let us summarize the research trends of the discipline in the first half of the 2000s. First, although studies on industrial clustering occupy a major position, research interest is evidently shifting from production-centered to non-production-centered topics. A number of works dealing with services, information, knowledge and distribution has undoubtedly increased. Second, as Ueno (2003) pointed out, issues relating to better social living such as work style, welfare services and public administration have attracted the interest of young researchers. This tendency could be termed as the "social living turn" of economic geography. Third, the intersection between economics and geography in the field of economic geography, broadly defined, is progressing to some extent, but it is not so fast as that in Anglo-American countries because only a couple of works written by economists appeared in the Annals. Fourth, by examining the articles published in the Annals, "cultural turn" of the discipline is not so obvious in Japan compared with Anglo-American countries, although Yamamoto (2006) argues that there is a tendency to incorporate culture into economic geography from the mid 2000s.

Other publications

A unique and meaningful publication of the JAEG is a series of books entitled Economic geography: achievements and future tasks that aims to review research trends of the discipline by examining works published by JAEG members for a fixed period. The first volume which reviewed and summarized the achievements for the ten years after the foundation though 1955–1966 was published in 1967, and then subsequent volumes were published in 1977, 1984, 1992 and 1997. The latest, sixth volume, was published in 2003 which covered research from 1996 to 2001. The structure of each volume has been changing considerably in order to fit the research trend of each period. The content of the latest volume is structured into seven chapters: theory, regional structure and problems, primary industry, secondary industry, tertiary industry, urban study and overseas research. Although every volume is written in Japanese, it could act as an all-in-one guidebook to understand the achievements and tasks of economic geographical research in Japan.

JAEG, in commemoration of the 50th anniversary, produced another publication entitled Fifty years' history of the Japan Association of Economic Geographers, describing its development chronologically in three sections: research activities, administration and regional divisions. Recollections of Association's foundation were written by leading figures of the discipline and various aspects of Association's activity are also included.

Promoting young scholars' research

In recent years, JAEG has initiated two programs in order to promote a new generation of researchers within the discipline. First, a JAEG
research award was established in 2002. The selection committee, consisting of seven senior members, reviews articles and books published within past two years by authors under the age of 40 years old and select the best publication within the discipline broadly defined. The first award was given in 2003 to Togawa's book entitled *Automobile and its recycle*, and the second was given in 2005 to Kageyama's book entitled *Urban space and gender*. Second, the “frontier” session was introduced at the annual conference since 2004. In the JAEG, although the opportunity for young researchers to present papers is sufficiently provided at regional division meetings, there is no similar opportunity at the nation-wide annual conference. The “frontier” session is specially designed to paper presentation for distinguished young researchers who have just completed their Ph.D. dissertation. So far the session has been successfully organized and two/four papers have been presented in each year.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my gratitude to my colleague, Dr. Steven Day, University of Oita, for correcting and emending my manuscript. This article was firstly published in *Information Bulletin of the Union of National Economic Associations in Japan*, No. 26, 2006 and revised slightly afterwards. A part of this paper was presented at the Second Global Conference of Economic Geography held in Beijing in June 2007.

References


日本における経済地理学の発展と経済地理学会の活動

宮町良広

要旨

本稿の目的は、日本における経済地理学の発展と経済地理学会の活動を英文で論述することで、研究の国際交流に貢献することにある。矢田（2003）によれば、戦後日本における経済地理学の発展は、近代科学への変貌を推し進め、経済地理学会の設立に至った「初観期」（終戦〜1950年代前半）、実証分析としての「経済地誌論」と理論分析としての立地論研究が興隆した「離陸期」（50年代後半〜70年代前半）、「経済地理学」と立地論の統合を志向し、その一部が「地域構造論」として結実した「発展期」（70年代後半〜90年代前半）、アプローチが多様化し、海外研究の「輸入」が進んだ「転換期」（90年代後半〜）の4つの時期に区分できる。経済地理学会の研究集会活動は、全国大会、地域大会、支部例会の3つに分けられる。全国大会と地域大会では、日本における地域経済の諸問題や現実の動向を反映した統一テーマを設定して議論を行う。全国5つの支部に分かれて開催される支部例会では、地域密着という学問的特徴があらわれている。

2001〜06年の『経済地理学年報』に掲載された論文には、経済地理学における近年の研究動向が反映されている。学問内の分野別にみると、理論・方法論や地域政策に関する研究は、『年報』をはじめとする査読学術誌での掲載が減少し、各大学の紀要など非査読誌での掲載が多くなっている。製造業とりわけ産業集積に関する研究は近年でも盛んであるが、サービスや情報・知識など非製造業関係の論文もまた増加している。また若手研究者を中心に、就業や福祉、行政のあり方といった生活・社会に関わるテーマの研究が増加している点も近年の特徴である。最後に、経済地理学会における『年報』以外の学術書の刊行および若手研究者の研究奨励活動について紹介した。