Human Geography in Japan:
Its Development and Current Circumstances

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I Introduction

This essay presents an overview of the historical development and current situation of the discipline of human geography in Japan, while also touching upon some of the conditions surrounding the larger Japanese academic world recently. The contents of what will be related here are well known to everyone involved with human geographic research and education in Japan today, but the purpose of this essay is, by publishing it in English, to serve to inform non-Japanese readers of the situation.

However, the author will not discuss in detail the individual research trends in the various sub-fields within the discipline of human geography in Japan. Aside from the fact that this would be difficult for a single author to attempt, this decision is also based on the fact that review articles on research findings in Japanese geography (both human and physical) are often published in English through the medium of such journals as the Geographical Review of Japan (Series B).

II Development of Human Geography in Japan: a historical outline

(1) Up to 1945

The first work to be published with the words ‘jimbun chiri’ (human geography) in its title was Hasegawa Kenichiro’s Jimbun Chiri (Human Geography) which appeared in 1913. In that book, the influence of the natural environment on a wide range of human activities was explained in detail. Works of a similar nature published before then had titles like Jinsei Chirigaku (Geography of Human Life) or Jimbun Chigaku Kowa (Lectures on Human Earth Science) which show that the translation of ‘human geography’ was not yet standardized as ‘jimbun chiri’.

From the 1920s into the 1930s a number of publications with the words ‘human geography’ included in the title appeared. Among translated works, books by Ellsworth Huntington, Otto Maull, and Jean Brunhes appeared, and among works by original authors, Ogawa Takuji’s book Jimbun Chirigaku Kenkyu (Human Geography Research) is probably representative. Also, a Human Geography Association was formed by a group centered around Odauchi Michitoshi and others which published as its journal Jimbun Chiri (Human Geography). However, this association did not continue for long and ceased to be active after a few years. In contrast, as an academic journal that dealt with geography comprehensively, the first issue of Chirigaku Hyoron (Geographical Review of Japan) was published in 1925 by the Association of Japanese Geographers, which was founded by those associated with the geography department at the Imperial University of Tokyo; there were also Chiri Ronso (Geography Essays) published by the geography department at Kyoto Imperial University (1932–43), Ohtsuka Chirigakkai Ronbunshu (Ohtsuka Geography Association Essays, 1933–35) by researchers at Tokyo University of
Literature and Science, and *Chiri* (*Geography*, 1938–43). Additionally, academic papers in human geography were also published in both *Chiri Kyoiku* (*Geographic Education*, 1924–41) and *Chirigaku* (*Geography*, 1933–44) whose readership was mainly teachers in primary and secondary schools.

Before 1945 in Japan, outside of the three universities mentioned above, there were very few universities where one could specialize in geography, and even at those schools very few of their graduates had studied geography. On the other hand, among graduates of normal schools and higher normal schools (teachers colleges) there were people who gravitated to geographic research and wrote books and articles. Odauchi Michitoshi, mentioned above, a graduate of Tokyo Higher Normal School, is representative of this group.

Characteristic of human geography research during this period in Japan was that it often stressed the influence of the natural environment on human and social phenomena. In other words, we can say it was heavily tinged by environmental determinism. Also, in its primary dependence on methodological works from Germany, could be seen a bias towards landscape theory. On the other hand, about 1930 there were advocates of regional quantification, who can be said to be the forerunners of later quantitative geography, among some of the younger researchers at the Imperial University of Tokyo, but this approach was attacked by other researchers and did not fully develop.

(2) **From 1945 to circa 1980**

Immediately after the defeat of World War II, responsibility for the war was questioned in the world of Japanese geography and geographic education, some university teachers were fired, and geography was dropped for a while as a subject in primary and middle school education. Subsequently, in the restructuring process of geography and geographic education, the label ‘human geography’ was widely adopted, perhaps as a way of intentionally emphasizing a discontinuity with the pre-war years. One example of this is the fact that the subject ‘human geography’ was established in the social studies curriculum in the high schools. This subject was established by the 1949 revision of the High School Curriculum Guidance Directives and it continued for about fifteen years. It was not compulsory for all students, but in the system from 1956 onwards, students had to take two subjects from among three, Japanese history, world history, and human geography. Also, in spite of the subject title ‘human geography’ the contents included basic principles of physical geography as well.

At about the same time as this establishment of ‘Social Studies Human Geography,’ the Human Geographical Society of Japan was founded. While the name of this association reflected the fact that there were fewer physical geographers in the Kinki Region where it originated, it was not necessarily intended to make a clear separation away from physical geography. This can be ascertained from the fact that Katabira Jiro, a geomorphologist, served as the second president of the association.

Through revision of the curriculum guidance directives, for students entering high schools in 1963 (roughly speaking those born after April 1947) the subject of ‘human geography’ was changed to ‘geography’ and at the same time it was made compulsory along with Japanese history and world history. Due to this change, not only was basic geographical knowledge spread more widely, but it served as the catalyst for many graduates who had specialized in geography at university to be hired as high school teachers.

As a result of the post-war education reforms, most of what had been higher vocational
schools, high schools, normal schools or higher normal schools became universities or colleges, and among these quite a number had courses of specialization in geography. However, outside of teaching jobs, the employment opportunities for university graduates who had majored in geography utilizing their specialized knowledge and skills were extremely limited. This is related to the fact that in Japan the upper level civil service positions that deal with regional planning proposals, etc. are almost all filled by graduates of either law or economics faculties, or from engineering schools (architecture or civil engineering), which is also connected to the subjects tested for in the civil service exams.

Another aspect of the education reforms was that they gave more substance to graduate schools. As a result, the generation that came along after the reforms (roughly, those born after about 1930), in order to secure full-time jobs at universities, needed to acquire at least master’s degrees. There were few universities at the time that had graduate programs in geography. Even by the early 1960s, there were only fourteen, including six national universities, two public universities, and six private universities.

Japanese human geographers during this period, although their direct contact with the discipline outside Japan was, as is explained below, quite limited, seemed to have understood most of the debates and main currents of geographic thought by reading books and monographs published in Europe and America. In this post-war development process of human geography, Iizuka Koji (University of Tokyo) played a major role. Iizuka, in a number of books he wrote right after the war, both severely criticized environmental determinism, and among the modern French geographers he particularly lauded the academic style of the University of Paris Geography Department that continued from Paul Vidal de la Blache through Emmanuel de Martonne and Albert Demangeon. Iizuka also showed a certain sympathy towards both Marxist economics and Marxist economic geography based on its principles, and many Marxist economic geographers emerged from among his students at the University of Tokyo graduate school. Concerning France, although it was not done by Iizuka or his students, works by representative post-war French geographers such as Maximillian Sorre, Pierre George, and Etienne Juillard were translated into Japanese.

Where early modern and modern German geography is concerned, there were the introductions by Suizu Ichiro and the translations of a series of the works of Erich Otremba by Yabuuchi Yoshihiko, and regarding geography in the Soviet Union at that time, introductory essays were written by Nakamura Taizo, Ono Kikuo, and others. The only person to introduce Italian geography was Takeuchi Keiichi. Academic activities in Scandinavia or Spain and Portugal, however, were almost completely unknown in Japan at this time. As for Britain, books by Laurence Dudley Stamp, William Gordon East, and the series of books edited by Frank Debenham were translated.

The fact that the main arguments over geographical methodology in Europe were introduced into Japan, despite a certain time lag, also roughly applies to the debates in North America. For example, major works of Richard Hartshorne were translated, although it was twenty years after they originally appeared, and one volume of Carl Ortwin Sauer’s was also translated. Concerning the debates between supporters and skeptics and opponents surrounding theoretical and quantitative geography that occurred mainly in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, when these were introduced into Japan with a time lag of five to fifteen years, the debates erupted all over again in Japan. In the 1970s and 1980s, there were essays written as introductions or critical reviews of the newer research activities, mainly in North America, such as radical geography and
humanistic geography.

In general, in the Japanese human geographic world at this time, perhaps related to the strong influence exerted by Iizuka’s criticism of environmental determinism, environmental paradigms appear to have lost popularity. Instead, regional theory occupied the mainstream, followed by a strong promotion of spatial theory which advanced in parallel with the promotion of theoretical and quantitative geography.

(3) The Last Quarter Century

It is difficult to sum up the direction of human geography in Japan in the last quarter century in a single word. Perhaps ‘cacophony’ would be appropriate. Compared to earlier periods, there are probably far fewer cases where a few authorities dominate the field. A possible indication of this is that in recent years high level overview or introductory books on the directions of Japanese human geographic research written by a single author have almost disappeared. Of course, many overview books are written by multiple authors, and there are many translations published of a wide range of European and American geography books, from the orthodox to the new and trendy.

In terms of basic paradigms, in addition to regional theory and spatial theory, there are moves toward reviving environmentalism which was almost extinguished for a while. Also, even within spatial theory research, unlike the research that was strongly promoted in the 1970s in Japan from a theoretical and quantitative geographic standpoint, human geography research has appeared which has been influenced by so-called ‘post–modern’ social thought and the human geography research trends of other countries. These seem to have particular support among the younger researchers. As books which represent this newer current, one can cite the course books titled Series: Human Geography now being published by Asakura Shoten Press.

Also, one can point to the adoption of geographic information systems (GIS) in a wide range of areas in human geography as a trend in recent years. At the beginning of the 1990s when GIS was first adopted, both the hardware and software to utilize it were extremely expensive and only the researchers at a very few research institutions were able to use it, but with the lowering in price and expansion in capability of personal computers has also come a lowering in price of GIS software (there are even some free software programs), and today one can see a research environment utilizing GIS in almost every Japanese university’s geography department.

In the following sections the author would like to consider some of the other conditions related to the situation in Japanese human geography.

III Association and Research Activities

(1) Academic Association Activities

As the national academic association that covers all of geography including physical geography, the Association of Japanese Geographers has more than 3,000 members, conducts two general conventions a year, publishes fourteen issues per year (including two issues for English articles only) of the journal Chirigaku Hyoron (Geographical Review of Japan) and posts online the electronic journal E-journal GEO. There are times when the number of papers presented at conferences in physical geography exceeds that of human geography, but as far as the articles published in the Geographical Review of Japan, over the last twenty years or so the average number of articles related to human geography has been about 60%.
As far as other associations which deal with the whole field of geography, there are also the Tohoku Geographical Association (founded in 1947, it publishes the Kikan Chirigaku, ‘Quarterly Journal of Geography’, four times a year) and the Japanese Society for Geographical Sciences (founded in 1961, it publishes the journal Chiri Kagaku, ‘Geographical Sciences’, four times a year), but both of these are smaller in scale than the Association of Japanese Geographers (their membership is fewer than 1,000) and their conference activities are more or less confined regionally to either the Tohoku District and Hokkaido for the former, or Chugoku and Shikoku District for the latter. Aside from these, there are small-scale geographic associations in most prefectures covering activities only in that prefecture, and also a fair number of small associations organized by, for example, the graduates of a particular university’s geography department.

The Human Geographical Society of Japan, as the academic association that covers all of human geography, as mentioned above was founded in 1948. At present this association has about 1,500 members and nearly all Japanese human geography researchers belong to it. It is sometimes seen as an academic association centered primarily around the Kinki District (West Central Japan), but general conferences and sub-conferences are also held outside the district, and from the absence of territorial limitations in the articles contributed one can see that it is certainly not dominated by residents of the Kinki. Its journal, Jimbun Chiri, ‘Japanese Journal of Human Geography’, was published in four issues a year at its founding, but it has been putting out six issues a year for over fifty years now. If one compares the articles published in the Japanese Journal of Human Geography with those published in the Geographical Review of Japan, the former seems to include a wider diversity of content. Specifically, one can point out that Jimbun Chiri publishes a large number of articles indicating new research trends in human geography; for example, recently articles that can be seen as influenced by so-called ‘post-modern’ thought currents have been published.

As for academic associations which cover a limited field within human geography, there are the Japan Association of Economic Geographers, Association of Historical Geographers of Japan, Japanese Society of Urban Geography, etc. The Japan Association of Economic Geographers (founded in 1954, about 800 members) includes both members with an academic background in (human) geography together with members who approach economic geography from an economic standpoint, and it cannot necessarily be decisively characterized as one segment of human geography. In its journal, Keizai Chirigaku Nempo, the ‘Annals of the Japan Association of Economic Geographers’, (four to five issues per year) are published many articles written from a social science background. The Association of Historical Geographers of Japan (founded in 1958, about 600 members) is different from the previously existing Japanese Historical Geography Society, conducts activities based on a membership with a background in (human) geography, and at present publishes five issues a year of the journal Rekishi Chirigaku, ‘Historical Geography’. The Japanese Society of Urban Geography has only just recently been launched and has so far published only two issues of its journal, Toshi Chirigaku, ‘Urban Geography of Japan’. The Japan Political Geography Association, which published several volumes of essays, mainly in the 1960s, has ceased to be active in recent years.

The research findings of researchers in human geography are by no means only published in the journals listed. It is probably unnecessary to point out that they are also published in the in-house journals of researcher’s individual institutions and in interdisciplinary academic journals along with adjoining fields such as history and earth sciences.
(2) Numbers of Human Geography Researchers and Areas of Interest

Today there are about 1,500 researchers in human geography in Japan, judging from Table 1 and membership of the Human Geographical Society of Japan. This is about 1.5 times the total number of physical geographers. Of course, among these approximately 1,500 are included some who are not themselves actively engaged in research and whose main object is journal subscription. Looking at those who have made presentations at conferences or submitted articles, there are about 1,000 active members.

Table 2 and Table 3 provide information on the areas of interest within the discipline of human geography. From Table 2 we can see that the largest number of researchers are concerned with urban geography, followed by economic geography in general, primary industry, historical geography, and ethnicity and cultural geography as the areas attracting the interest of large numbers of human geographers. In contrast, interest in political geography is low. This is probably due to the fact that the contributions to geopolitics of some geographers during the Second World War are even today something of a traumatic memory for many geographers. In Table 3, again we see basically the same situation as in Table 2, but additionally we can observe the trend of change over the last fifty years. The proportion of research on farming and livestock raising declined, urban research rose during the 1970s but thereafter hit a plateau, areas showing a broad increase of interest in the 1990s were cultural geography and tourism, etc. In cultural geography, there was a great variety in content, from research with a traditional stance based on a commonality with folklore, to research along new lines that is heavily influenced by the field of

**Table 1. Association of Japanese Geographers Areas of Interest (1).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Interest</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Geography</td>
<td>1,356</td>
<td>44.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Geography</td>
<td>908</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not recorded</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>3,024</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Compiled from *The Association of Japanese Geographers Membership List 2005.*
* Members residing overseas are omitted, so the total here is not the total membership.

**Table 2. Association of Japanese Geographers Areas of Interest (2).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Interest</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural Settlement</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Areas</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Geography (general)</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, Forestry, And Fisheries</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining and Manufacturing</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce and Finance</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity and Culture</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Geography</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Geography</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Geography</td>
<td>170</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Compiled from *The Association of Japanese Geographers Membership List 2005.*
* In this list, members could list up to two areas of interest per person, so the total numbers of people do not agree with the totals shown in areas of interest in Table 1.
human geography has deep relationships with many other academic fields. But just what specifically are those relationships? The perception is that there is quite a bit of joint research with researchers in other fields, but the author’s impression is that a large number of these cases consists of surveys authorized by government bodies, including local government historical compilation projects. In contrast, there seem to be very few opportunities for interdisciplinary research done on the researchers’ own initiative.

On the other hand, from the perspective of shared utilization of findings between human geography and other academic disciplines, human geography can be seen to suffer from an ‘import surplus’. In other words, compared to the level at which human geography adopts the findings of other fields, the extent to which other fields adopt the findings of human geography is quite low. In urban research, the author has the experience of serving as a member of a committee where research results were evaluated by people from many different academic disciplines. Although there the results of geographers were praised by researchers from other fields in that they presented findings from a precise survey, on the other hand the author frequently heard...

Table 3. Trends in the Proportion of Articles by Subject Area from Those Listed in the Jimbun Chiri Gakkai’s Bibliography of Geography.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Edition 1 45-51</th>
<th>Edit. 2 52-56</th>
<th>Edit. 3 57-61</th>
<th>Edit. 4 62-66</th>
<th>Edit. 5 67-71</th>
<th>Edit. 6 72-76</th>
<th>Edit. 7 77-81</th>
<th>Edit. 8 82-86</th>
<th>Edit. 9 87-91</th>
<th>Edit. 10 92-96</th>
<th>Edit. 11 97-01</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settlements</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Geography</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
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<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livestock</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>2.7</td>
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<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forestry</td>
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<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.1</td>
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<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisheries</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>6.2</td>
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<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.2</td>
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<td>Industry</td>
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<td>4.4</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport, Communications, Tourism</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Geography</td>
<td>1.5</td>
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<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.5</td>
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<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.8</td>
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<td>Social Geography</td>
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<td>3.1</td>
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<td>3.8</td>
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<td>5.3</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>9.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural Geography</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perception and Behavior</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>20.5</td>
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<td>16.2</td>
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<td>15.5</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compiled from separate editions of the Jimbun Chiri Gakkai’s Bibliography of Geography.

* Refers to the year periods for which the edition of the Bibliography of Geography was compiled (Western calendar, i.e., ‘45-51’ means 1945 to 1951).

Shows that the category was not yet established in the bibliography.

Figures above reflect the number of pages devoted to each topic, with the numbers calculated to add up to 100% for the topics listed above. Very short pieces have been omitted.

Criteria for listing of articles in the Bibliography of Geography (for example, to what extent to include articles from related disciplines) changed substantially from edition to edition, so the numbers in the table above may not exactly reflect the numbers in each field of human geography.

Judging from the categories in the Chirigaku Bunken Mokuroku (Bibliography of Geography), the proportion of books and articles listed under historical geography is rather high, but this probably reflects the fact that many history articles were accepted for inclusion.

(3) Exchange with Other Disciplines

Human geography has deep relationships with many other academic fields. But just what specifically are those relationships? The perception is that there is quite a bit of joint research with researchers in other fields, but the author’s impression is that a large number of these cases consists of surveys authorized by government bodies, including local government historical compilation projects. In contrast, there seem to be very few opportunities for interdisciplinary research done on the researchers’ own initiative.

On the other hand, from the perspective of shared utilization of findings between human geography and other academic disciplines, human geography can be seen to suffer from an ‘import surplus’. In other words, compared to the level at which human geography adopts the findings of other fields, the extent to which other fields adopt the findings of human geography is quite low. In urban research, the author has the experience of serving as a member of a committee where research results were evaluated by people from many different academic disciplines. Although there the results of geographers were praised by researchers from other fields in that they presented findings from a precise survey, on the other hand the author frequently heard...
complaints that the possibility for application of findings to real-world urban problems was quite low. On a separate occasion, when similar research was done on a city, he heard the criticism from sociologists that the research done by geographers, when compared to that done by sociologists, tended to lack a strong theoretical underpinning. The author will avoid commenting on whether this criticism is justified or not, but at the very least we geographers need to be conscious of the importance of more positively communicating research findings to researchers from other academic fields.

On the other hand, it is necessary to point out that a number of works by foreign geographers have been translated into Japanese and published here, and they have been widely read by intellectuals other than just human geography researchers. Specifically, there are the books of Yi-Fu Tuan, Augustin Berque, and David Harvey among others. The first two have spread widely even among general readers, and even Harvey has been frequently quoted by sociologists and economists.

IV Progress of International Exchanges

(1) Personnel Exchanges

Until the early 1930s there were some cases of Japanese human geographers studying abroad in Europe or America, although the number was small. Also, there were scholars such as Francis Ruellan from France and Martin Schwind from Germany who stayed for long periods in Japan and studied Japanese geography. However, in the late 1930s exchanges between the world of Japanese geographers and other countries drastically diminished and that condition continued for almost twenty years. Needless to say, this was a result of the war and the severe foreign currency shortage after the war. But during the time of the Occupation, several American human geographers came to Japan as members of the GHQ staff, etc. and carried out exchanges with some Japanese researchers.

The IGU Regional Conference held in Tokyo and Tenri (Nara Prefecture) in 1957 had great significance for the return of Japanese geographers to international society. With 103 conference paper presentations and 85 participants from overseas, it was a small-scale meeting compared to the IGC in 1980, but even so it was far larger than the original expectations of the planners.

From the 1960s onward, in the midst of Japan's high economic growth progress, the number of university teachers able to study abroad for periods from three months to one year on government funds increased. At least several dozen geographers, possibly more than 100, were able to study abroad under this system. Additionally at least ten human geographers had the chance to study abroad through external funding by the host country. Among all the foreign study based on these various funding sources, the great majority of study destinations were in Europe or North America, but there were also a few geographers who went to Asian or Latin American countries. However, in the case of Japan, the number of human geographers who have received degrees abroad is quite small. The least one can say is, that number has never formed a majority in the Japanese academic world either in the past or at present. This situation is much different from that in many other Asian countries.

From the late 1960s onwards, a number of bilateral organizations for geographic academic exchanges were formed. Japanese–German, Japanese–French, and Japanese–British organizations began operating fairly early on. Using the Japanese–German Geography conference as an example, research meetings were held once every two or three years in Japan or West Germany
in alternation. However, in recent years these organization's activities have declined. Somewhat later than the academic exchanges with European countries, a similar organization was formed with China, and its activities continue up to the present. Recently, multilateral research meetings have also been held between the East Asian countries Japan, China, and South Korea.

The holding of the International Geographical Congress in Japan in 1980 had an even larger impact on the Japanese world of geography than the 1957 IGU Regional Conference mentioned above. More than 700 geographers from overseas participated, more than eight times the number at the Regional Conference. In addition to the plenary session in Tokyo, most of the research committees and working groups in the IGU at that time held meetings throughout the country over several days just before the main conference, and in every case Japanese geographers did the planning and execution as local organizers. If one adds the excursions after the main conference and the support work done throughout, one can say that almost every single Japanese researcher in geography at that time contributed in some capacity. To cite urban geography as an example within the author’s personal knowledge, the fact that so much research was done using the keywords ‘urban system’ in Japanese urban geography around 1980 was in response to the influence of the IGU National Settlement Systems Commission which was active at that time.

There seem to have been few cases of Japanese human geographers hired for academic posts abroad, but in the last ten years or so there have been a number of foreign human geographers hired as full-time teachers at Japanese universities. Many of these are cases where researchers found jobs after studying in Japan and receiving their degrees here. Already, one can no longer say that the world of Japanese human geography is the same thing as a world of human geographers who are Japanese.

(2) Overseas Surveys by Japanese Human Geographers

The number of overseas academic field research projects in which geographers participated was much limited until the 1960s because of insufficient foreign currency. In spite of that, there were some academic surveys carried out related to mountaineering with the backing of the news media, etc., and there was some participation in these by geographers. During the 1960s, there was a gradual increase in the number of cases of overseas surveys done with government funding. Universities undertaking such surveys at a comparatively early date were the University of Tokyo (West Asia, South America), Kyoto University (West Asia), Tokyo University of Education (later Tsukuba; South America), Tokyo Metropolitan University (Africa, but mainly physical geography), and Hiroshima University (India). Many of these were comprehensive surveys by teams of both human and physical geography specialists. However, until the 1980s there were only a few cases of approval for scientific research fund subsidies for overseas surveys, and few universities were involved outside of the ones listed above.

On this point, in the last ten years or so, in addition to scientific research funding aimed mainly at overseas surveys, it has become possible to carry out overseas surveys utilizing the research expenses apportioned by general scientific research funding. As a result, examples of overseas research by Japanese human geographers have rapidly increased, and the opportunities for oral presentations at conferences and opportunities for publication of articles in journals of those findings have also increased.

(3) Transmission of Research Findings Overseas

Until the 1970s, Japanese human geographers, like researchers in other humanities and social
sciences in Japan, rarely published or presented their research findings in foreign languages such as English. However, in universities where the geography department was part of the physical sciences, in the reviews published by the department itself or by the physical science faculty, there were cases where human geography articles were published in English. Examples of such journals where there were comparatively many human geography articles are the Science Reports of Tohoku University, 7th Series Geography and Geographical Reports of Tokyo Metropolitan University.

As for the Association of Japanese Geographers’ journal Chirigaku Hyoron, even before its English edition, Geographical Review of Japan Series B was first published in 1984, there were a few cases of articles published in European languages, but they were almost entirely limited to physical geography articles. Also, Jim bun Chiri (Japanese Journal of Human Geography) was for a long time limited to articles in Japanese. This was essentially the same situation in the other journals publishing articles related to human geography.

That situation has changed greatly in recent years, and the main geography journals in Japan have come to include a certain proportion of articles in English. The main reason for this has been a change in the rules for the government’s awarding of subsidies to the associations, but it is not only due to this external cause. One should probably point out that researchers have now been nurtured with a strong positive desire to write articles in English.

Examples where Japanese human geographers have submitted articles in English to overseas academic journals and had them accepted and published have been gradually increasing in the last twenty years. However, the number is still limited. In comparison, opportunities for presentations at international research meetings (like the IGC and IGU Commission research meetings, or conferences of the International Historical Geographers, etc.) have increased considerably.

Cases have appeared in the last ten years of books being published in English by Japanese human geographers. Some examples of these are Murayama Yuji’s book on the Japanese urban system and Soda Ryoji’s book on urban–rural relations in Sarawak, East Malaysia. There are also many examples, from the 1970s up to the present, of various kinds of teams in joint research conducted with government scientific research funds writing their reports of findings in English and distributing them to related institutions and researchers both in Japan and abroad.

In recent years, in response to the globalization of publishing, international academic journals not based in any particular country (but invariably written in English) have been published in many academic fields. In the field of human geography, beginning with historical geography, international journals have now been published in urban geography, cultural geography, political geography, population geography, etc. And among these journals stressing an international character, cases can be seen where Japanese researchers are included in the editorial committees. Probably the earliest case of this was the Journal of Historical Geography where Tanioka Takeo was an editor, (succeeded by Ukita Tsuneyoshi and then Kinda Akihiro). Examples today are Murayama Yuji at the journal Urban Geography, Ishikawa Yoshitaka at the journal Population, Space, and Place, and Mizuuuchi Toshio at the journal Antipode.

V Circumstances Affecting Human Geography in Contemporary Japan

(1) University Reform Centered on Reform of General Undergraduate Education
From the late 1940s onward for more than forty years, undergraduate education at most Japanese colleges and universities was divided into two stages, the first half being general
education or general knowledge courses, and the second half more specialized education. And at many schools, geography or human geography courses were offered in the first stage as part of general education, which contributed greatly to the spread of human geography.

However, many of the general education subjects, especially most of those in the humanities and social sciences, and the natural science courses for arts and letters students, were harshly criticized by some students and professional groups of specialty teachers as being uninteresting, having contents that duplicated material in high school courses, and being of doubtful significance for later study of specialized subjects. Partly in response to this criticism, in 1991 the Ministry of Education loosened the setting of rigid university standards and adopted a system of guidelines. Through this change, the amount of freedom for each individual university in creating new courses and dropping old ones was greatly extended. Within a few years of these new measures, the existing general education departments (organized around providing the basic education) had been abolished at most of the national universities with multiple faculties. Among private universities as well there were many places where the general education courses were greatly reduced. Courses in human geography or geography which had until then been offered as general education courses within the humanities or social sciences at many universities were dropped, or the course names were changed so as to disguise their geographical contents.

With the abolition of these basic education departments, teaching jobs for human geographers or geographers in general education were greatly reduced. Probably no geographic researchers were fired as a result, but the concern is that when they retire they will be replaced in most cases by teachers from a different discipline. However, the dissolution of the general education departments at some universities actually led to a strengthening of the specialized departments and graduate schools of human geography in a few cases, such as at Hokkaido University and Osaka University. And at Kyoto University and Nagoya University, in addition to the previously existing geography departments in the Faculties of Letters, new departments that were in actuality departments of geography were created to conduct research and specialized education in human geography. However, even at these universities, there was no increase in the teaching staff, so what happened as a result was either a decrease in the number of geography or human geography general education courses (university-wide courses), or an increase in the workload of the teaching staff concerned, or in some cases both.

At roughly the same time as the dissolution of the general education departments, a policy was introduced for ‘emphasis on graduate schools’ at the large-scale national universities with multiple faculties. Previously, all the teaching staff had belonged to an undergraduate department but also taught in the graduate school. This was now changed so that they belonged to the graduate school but also could teach in undergraduate faculties. This may seem to be just a formal change, but in fact it was not, and was accompanied by an increase in research budgets and frequently an increase in staff numbers. The quotas for graduate students also naturally increased. Involved with this change, whereas previously it was typical at graduate departments in literature or humanities faculties that doctoral candidates did not receive their degrees immediately even after they had finished the doctor’s course residency, it was now desirable that schools be strongly urged to award doctor’s degrees as much as possible at the end of the doctor’s course residency or soon thereafter. Due to these compound factors, the number of human geographers with Ph. D degrees has increased. However, because the number of job openings where such personnel are actively hired has not increased enough in response to the
increase of Ph. D’s in the fields of geography and human geography, there has been a rapid increase in the number of young researchers who cannot find regular jobs as researchers or teachers even though they have Ph. D’s. This is not a situation limited to geography or human geography, but is a common problem shared with many academic disciplines in Japan.

(2) Changes in the Treatment of Geography in Secondary Education

It was mentioned previously that from 1963 on geography became compulsory in the high schools. However, this system did not last long, and in the high schools geography as a required subject came to an end formally after about ten years and in reality after about twenty years. Especially in the curriculum guidance directives put in place from 1994 on (which have more or less continued to the present), some Western historians succeeded in a political move to make from among the three subjects, Japanese history, world history, and geography, only world history a required subject, a measure completely unacceptable to geographers. This measure has deeply damaged geographic education in Japan from that time up till now, and its bad influence is spreading into university level geography education. Also, in the ‘geographical field’ of middle school social studies, especially in the sections on world descriptive geography, there has been a change from the previously established method of treating every continent in sequence to anecdotal treatment of examples, and the argument over the appropriateness of this has still not been resolved.

At present, geography courses in the high school ‘geography and history’ curriculum are divided into two, ‘Geography A’ with few classroom hours and ‘Geography B’ with somewhat more class hours. The first of these, emphasizing human livelihood, includes content largely based on the findings of cultural anthropology and seems to be quite weak in character as a subject ‘based on the findings of geography’.

Given the decline in students taking geography in high school due to the factors above, and the influence of the a declining student population all over Japan, the number of teachers being hired for middle school social studies and high school geography has fallen to a very low level over the last twenty years. One has to say that it is truly regrettable that the door is being narrowed towards becoming a schoolteacher, one of the few jobs using specialized knowledge after graduation.

(3) Academic Governance and Human Geography

In the Science Council of Japan, an organization which advises the Japanese government on academic policy proposals, the position of geography and human geography is complicated, partly reflecting the confusing way geography has been dealt with in university organization (at the University of Tokyo, geography was in the Science Faculty, at Kyoto University it is in the Faculty of Letters). From the Council’s start in 1949 for about twenty years, there was a system in which each individual researcher registered and got voting rights, and elections were held both in ‘national district’ units in very small fields and ‘regional district’ units in larger fields, and in Section 4 (physical science) there was a membership quota for geographers. Since many human geographers were registered in the Section 1 (Letters) ‘history’ category, there was a possibility that members specializing in human geography might be also be elected in Section 1. Thereafter, there were changes in the membership election system in the mid 1980s, and when it became a system in which members were elected by representatives of registered academic associations, a position was earmarked in Section 1 for a representative from human geography, and together with the
membership position for a geographer in Section 4, it gave geography two slots. Even when the Council system was radically transformed after the year 2000, it continued to support the election of human geography researchers in the 'regional studies' subsection of Section 1 (Humanities) and of geographers in the 'earth and planetary science' sub-section of Section 3 (Physical Science and Engineering). At present there are two human geographers serving as members in Section 1, and one geographer (geographic information science) serving in Section 3.

There is also a complicated situation with regards to the framework of granting scientific research funding to researchers belonging to research institutions such as universities through the process of grant application and review. Until about 1970, geography research project grant application and funding was basically done under the 'physical science' category, but it was also possible for human geography projects to apply and receive grants under the 'literature' category. After about 1970, this was changed, and geography, both physical and human, could only be screened under the newly created category of 'compound disciplines.' This system lasted for more than thirty years, but a few years ago the system was changed, and at present the categories have been created of 'geography' within the classification for 'general fields' and 'human geography' within the area of 'humanities.' This is a complicated situation, but from a purely academic standpoint the separation of human geography from geography as completely distinct disciplines gives one a very strange feeling.

As a result of increasing Japanese government deficits over the last dozen years or so, reductions in annual expenditures are proceeding on all fronts and research budgets at national universities are declining every year. In the case of geography, including human geography, until about 2000 at national universities, almost without exception, geography as a 'laboratory course subject' was funded at a higher level than most other humanities and social sciences, but recently at some universities it is not necessarily receiving this special treatment of budgetary largesse. Also, again at the national universities, the budgets for teachers' foreign study mentioned above have been in themselves abolished, and whether to grant the funds has been left up to the individual school's discretion.

In addition to the Science Council of Japan, there is also the Japan Academy, a national institution. This exists to honor researchers with a distinguished record of accomplishments, but at least since the end of World War II when this body took on its present name, there have been no geographers, either human or physical, chosen for it, and recipients of Japan Academy prizes among geographers are virtually zero. It may be not far off the mark to say that this fact is an indication of just how low a position geography occupies in the Japanese academic world.

VI Conclusion

The author has presented above an outline of the development of human geography in Japan and its present circumstances. It must be recognized that in the environment surrounding human geography in Japan today there are severe constraints. Within this general current, one must point out that within the last ten years in Japan two publishers who previously published many geography books have ceased operations. They are Taimeido Press and Chijin Shobo Press. The direct cause may have been the aging or the death of the management, but the effect on the world of geography has been considerable. Precise comparisons are difficult, but there is an apparent significant decline in the number of geography books published in the last several years when compared to a similar several year period in the 1990s.
In spite of these setbacks, the author believes that human geography in Japan at present is certainly not stagnating. The basis for that is, as already mentioned, that the number of human geography researchers active on the world stage is gradually increasing, and the author believes that many high quality articles are now being published in the various domestic academic journals. If one were to mention an area that is of some concern, it is that in recent times a rather large gap seems to have appeared between younger researchers’ findings and those of middle-aged or older researchers concerning their research topics and methodology. It is necessary to surpass the accomplishments of the past and aim at new developments, but one must say it is regrettable to see here and there, among the work of younger researchers, research which appears to disregard the work of the past in its desire for new direction. Shouldn’t we take one more look back at the early modern development of human geography, at least since the beginning of the twentieth century?

Notes

1) Ogawa served as the first professor in the Kyoto University Geography Department, but he was originally a geologist, and at the time this book was published he had changed positions to teach geology at the same university. There is an introduction about Ogawa in Tsujita, U., ‘Ogawa Takuji’, (Freeman, T. W. ed., Geographers : Biobibliographical Studies 6, 1982), pp. 71–76.

2) The journal this article is appearing in has the same name but is not related to the earlier journal.

3) For further details on the development of quantitative geography in Japan, including during this time period, see Okuno, T.,’The Fifty Years’ Progress of Quantitative Geography’, (Recent Trends of Geographical Study in Japan, (Recent Progress of Natural Science in Japan, Vol. 5), 1980, pp. 131–140.

4) Conversely speaking, it also means that Ph. D. degrees were not demanded at that time.

5) Iizuka had already presented before and during the war a complete Japanese translation of Vidal de la Blache’s Principes de Géographie Humaine.


9) For the topics of these paragraphs, see Takeuchi, K., Modern Japanese Geography : An Intellectual History, Kokon Shoin Press, 2000.

10) Yasuda, Y. “Kankyokokagaku to kankyorekishigaku : Chirigaku ni okeru Fudo ni Saihakken (Environmental Archeology and Environmental History: Geography’s rediscovery of landscape and history” (Kusaka, M. ed., Chikeikankyo to Rekishikeikan: Shizen to Ningen no Chirigaku (Geomorphological Environment and Historical Landscape : Geography of Nature and Humankind), Kokon Shoin Press, 2004), pp. 35–48.

11) Nihongakujutsushinkokai gakubun gakubun no kenkyusenta (JSPS Research Center for Science Systems), ”Jimbun-gakubun-ya no kenkyudokoko (Research Directions in the Humanities Fields)”, Japanese Scientific Monthly, 60–9, 2007, pp. 4–37 (J). The author is not listed, but judging from the list of the center’s researchers on page 94 of the same issue, the human geographer was Kobayashi Shigeru.

12) When the author wrote part of the Jim bun Chirigakkai Gojunenshi (Fifty Year History of the Human Geographical Society), Jim bun Chiri Gakkai, 1998 (J), he wrote notes on the affiliations of society members. According to the latest membership list available at that time which was utilized (1996 edition), about 45% of society members were university teachers and about 20% were graduate students.


14) Sessions of the Association of Japanese Geographers plenary conference and two volumes published by Kokon Shoin Press are evidence of the popularity of urban systems research at that time.
15) In 2002 it was combined with Series A, but English articles are planned to be all published together online in the E-journal GEO from the second half of 2008 on.
16) In the early days of Tohoku Geography (the forerunner of the Quarterly Journal of Geography) there were cases where articles in English were reprinted from the Tohoku University Science Reports (7th Series, Geography).
17) Murayama, Y. Japanese Urban System, Kluer Academic Publishers, 2000. This book also includes portions that were jointly written by Murayama, Inoue Takashi, and Hashimoto Yuichi.
19) At Nagoya University, graduate school education was later combined with the geography courses in the Environmental Studies Research Faculty.

Human Geography in Japan:
Its Development and Current Circumstances

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This essay introduces the development of human geography in Japan and conditions affecting it at the present time. At the present time Japanese human geography, which gradually accumulated findings by absorbing and reworking methods from Europe and America beginning in the 1910s, is seeing new standpoints, subjects, and methods of research emerge from a younger generation and opportunities for transmitting findings abroad are also increasing. However, there is cause for concern in the sometimes too drastic rupture with traditional human geography.

Key words: Japanese human geography, History of geography, Sociology of geography

日本の人文地理学
——その歩みと今日の状況——

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本稿は、日本の人文地理学の歩みと、今日それを取り巻く諸条件について紹介する。1910年代から欧米の方法論の咀嚼を通じてしで Invocationに成果を積み上げてきた日本の人文地理学は、今日、新しい立場・対象・方法の研究が若し世代から現れ、また成果の海外への発信の機会も増えている。しかし、伝統的な人文地理学からの断絶もときに見られるのは懸念材料である。

キーワード：日本の人文地理学，地理学史，地理学の社会学