Jimbun-Chiri 2003: A Review

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The 2003 series of Jimbun-Chiri features the nature of a quality academic journal, which is inspiring, enlightening and enriched with information. Four points are especially noticeable:

1. Covering a comprehensive research scope, with conventional topics remaining a strength while new branches expanding impressively

The Human Geography Society of Japan and its Journal enjoy a prestigious fame in Historical Geography and historical analysis. This volume inherits this tradition. There are some six papers in Historical Geography (including study of historical map), such as studies of historical map (“The expression and distribution of Ezumura in the Kuni-ezu: a case study of Suoh and Nagoto counties” and “Changes in castle town maps and the evolution of the management of warrior’s residential area: a case study of Yonezawa”), historical exploration into theories and ideas of great Geographers (“Christaller in Weimar Germany: a history before the birth of Central Place Theory” and “How did Norinaga Motoori develop his geographical knowledge in his youth?”), historical urban geography study since 18th century (“The relationship between the centrality of market towns and landscape of market places in the Echigoplain”), and based on affluent evidence of cadastres and cadastral maps, the study of the “Spatial changes in Mok-p’o City and the neighboring district in Korean Peninsula under Japanese rule”. Even more popular is the adoption of the method of historical analysis.

In this volume, one group that merits particular attention and interest is studies in Social Geography, especially Urban Social Geography, such as “The space of Philippine Pubs”, “Hideaki Ishikawa’s thoughts on amusement places and his work in Nagoya”, and the study on “Slum eviction and housing rights in Dhaka City, 1975–2001”. “The space of Philippine pubs” examines the background for Philippine women to come to Japan to work in the entertainment sector, and the characteristics of the “space of Philippine pubs” in various cities including their allocation, ethnic makeup and agents etc. It provides a case of study into social space. Hideaki Ishikawa, a contemporary master urban planner advocating and establishing cross-disciplinary modern urban planning in Japan, has his ideas on amusement places partly implemented in Nagoya City.

The articles also concern issues in Political Geography such as administrative territory and Anti-pollution Movement, Urban Geography such as urbanization and sub-urbanization, and Human Geography such as gerontological geography, geography of youth, population recovery and migration and immigrants etc. Equally interesting are “The geographical perspectives on children’s perception” which is of Perceptive Geography, and “Broiler meat production area” and “Knowledge creation and industrial clustering” of Economic Geography. Such a variety of
themes exhibits the active climate in the field of Human Geography in Japan.

2. Keeping a close eye on research evolution and trends, and stimulating new agenda

One of the key tasks for academic journal is to introduce international research trends and review research achievements. Jimbun Chiri does a very good job in this aspect. In this volume there are five articles undertaking this task. Both the “Geographies of youth” and the “Gerontological Geography” suggests a sort of new research concerns in Japan. The latter is the first review about Gerontological Geography in Japan, while relevant studies have been hot in Western Countries for a long time. Although Japan has been entering an aging society as well, the academic community of Geography has paid far less attention to it. One of the reasons for this, the writer of “Gerontological Geography” argues, is that most Japanese studies have been undertaken research on an ad-hoc basis. The writer hence appeals for a good progress in terms of research quantity and quality in Gerontological Geography. “Geographies of youth” investigates the recent progression in youth studies, especially after the deep impact of the cultural turn in Anglophone Human Geography, and how to apply it in the Japanese context. After presenting four themes concerning geographies of youth, the writer identifies three significant theoretical aspects on which the geographies of youth mainly rely: the question of the social construction of subjects, the cultural polities of place and identity, and the ethics behind subject positions.

The “Geographical perspectives on children’s perception of the environment and education” by Kiyoshi Teramoto offers an extensive examination of studies of children in Geography. Teramoto analyses the evolution of this branch and points out that the behavioral approach into Geography from the 1960s to 1970s is the origin. This is concluded by Roger Hart’s re-interpretation from the viewpoint of various constraints in 1979. The 1980s to the 1990s sees a clear impact of the gender approach and the post-modernism. But a key turning point of the 1990s for children’s geography is the switch from an individual perspective to the socioeconomic and educational perspective; i.e. from the 1990s, children’s behavior has been explained in relation to their socioeconomic and educational context. Such a line sets the basis for the writer to suggest future research agenda.

In “Geography and migration: a review and evaluation of contemporary research”, the writer Anthony J. Fielding from University of Sussex, UK, points out that Geography’s main contribution to migration research leans heavily to quantitative description and analysis of migration patterns. The problem then is the community’s inclination to understate the significance of the cultural, political and social aspects of migration, and be biased towards certain advanced capitalist countries. Such imbalances, in Fielding’s view, have to be redressed in future research.

“A survey of geographical studies in Japan, 2002” is an important review, which clearly and completely summarizes the progress and trends in the community of Geography, especially Human Geography, in Japan. The comprehensiveness of the paper is rare to see in academic
journals in the field. Besides, two progress reports, “Changing view of the relations between development and environment” and “Urban theory”, are all very good instructive essays. Reviews with such a breadth and depth provide very practical references for domestic researchers. This could be a successful lesson to learn.

3. Based on an empirical tradition, case studies dominating the research

A common feature of articles in this series is case study relying on primary investigation and evidence. This guarantees the scientific quality of the paper and persuasiveness of reasoning. In the “Maintenance strategies of the broiler meat production area in North Tohoku against the increase in imported chickens”, a large quantity of materials and diagrams according to different broiler processors and farmer’s production scales are employed. “Locality of the Anti-pollution Movement in Wakayama” collects the data since the 1960s, covering nearly all important relevant aspects. The data describe in the context of urbanization and industrialization, the whole process in which enterprises establish, develop and expand, while pollution takes place and deteriorate and the Anti-pollution Movement emerges. The differences of locality factors in Anti-pollution Movements among three different areas are also identified. The data even cover comments / questions raised by councilors on local pollution problems in the city council, 1957–1974. Papers in Historical Geography represent another group of good examples of empirical study. All of these reflect the rigor style of academic research in Japan.

4. Young Geographers growing up, heralding a bright future for the Society

The majority of the writers in Jimbun-Chiri 2003 are young academics (postgraduates and postdoctoral fellows). Altogether they contribute fourteen papers, more than a half in this series. From the conventionally historical analysis and historical map study, to the contemporarily hot topics in Urban Geography and Social Geography, the papers cover almost all range of the themes in Human Geography, e.g. “Maintenance strategies of the broiler meat production area in North Tohoku against the increase in imported chickens”, “The locality of the Anti-pollution Movement in Wakayama”, “Construction of place and institutional practice in the process of the ‘production’ of Yoseba: the case of Kamagasaki, Osaka City”, “The expression and distribution of Ezumura in the Kuni-ezu: a case study of Suoh and Nagato counties”, “The formation of space of Philippine pubs and the social construction of representations of ethnicity: a case study of Sakae Walk Street in Nagoya City”, and “Slum eviction and housing rights in Dhaka City (1975–2001)”. This is a clear indication of the sensibility, hard-working, creativity and pursuit after truth of young Human Geographers in Japan. This implies great potential in Human Geographical research in Japan, and the outstanding group of youngsters represents the hope for tomorrow for Geography both in Japan and even internationally. As a Chinese Human Geographer, I am glad to see this and sincerely wish my neighboring young colleagues every success in their future academic career.