Preface to the Special Issue

“Rethinking Gender and Geography in Japanese Contexts”

KUMAGAI Keichi* and YOSHIDA Yoko**

* Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, Ochanomizu University; Otsuka, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 112–8610 Japan.
** Division of Humanities and Social Sciences, Nara Women’s University; Kitaauoyanishi-machi, Nara 630–8506, Japan.
E-mail: kumagai.keichi@ocha.ac.jp*, yoko@cc.nara-wu.ac.jp**

Background of the Issue

The principal reason for publishing this special issue is to present readers in Japan and around the world with a diverse range of contemporary Japanese research interests relating to gender and geography. Promoting feminist research is of critical importance because, as Yoshida, Murata and Kageyama (2013) raise, the geography of gender is not yet widely broached nor well developed as an area of discussion in Japanese academic circles.

Amidst such circumstances, Yoko Yoshida and several colleagues from the field of geography established a new study group for gender and space/place within the Association of Japanese Geographers in March 2011. The study group for gender and space/place has held regular meetings at every bi-annual Association event. Keichi Kumagai also established in 2011 a nationwide research group with members from different universities, including Izumi Morimoto, Akiko Yorifuji, Minako Kuramitsu and Orie Sekimura, with the aim of “constructing a geography of gender and a global network with local sensitivity” through a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. Both of these groups are keen to promote the younger generation of geographers. In fact, we have witnessed a growing number of young geographers joining the Commission on Gender and Geography during both the International Geographical Union’s Kyoto Regional Congress (KRC) and the Nara Pre-conference of Gender and Geography.

Nara Pre-Conference for IGU’s Gender and Geography Commission, and IGU Kyoto Regional Congress, August 2013

The Pre-Conference of Gender and Geography Commission in the International Geographical Union, hosted by Nara Women’s University (Yoko Yoshida, Yuichiro Nishimura and Mikoto Kukimoto) was held under the theme of “Gender, Power and Knowledge: Building Global Networks through Local Sensitivities.” A total of 17 researchers (10 International; 7 Japanese) presented their research findings over the following six general sessions on 2–3 August: 1) Gender, Ethnicity and Migration; 2) Globalization, Borders and Mobility; 3) Women’s Empowerment and Socio-economic Transformations; 4) Gender and Sexual Identity; 5) Gender and Public/Private Space; and 6) Toward Alternative Geographies. The Japanese researchers who presented papers in this Pre-conference are Honami Kageyama (“Japanese networks in Honolulu”), Kuramitsu (2014), Nakamura (2014), Li (2014), Yorifuji (2014), Oikawa (2014) and Yoshida et al. (2013).

During the KRC Main Congress, there were eight sessions on the subject of gender and geography. There were 26 papers in all, including five from Japanese researchers including Sekimura (2014), Ota (2014), Kushima (2014), Arakaki (2014) and Ikeda (“Gendering vulnerability reduction—Women and recovery from the 2011 East Japan Disaster”).

There was also a joint session of the Commissions on Gender and Geography and History of Geographical Thought, in which Kumagai (2014) presented his paper. It was organized under the initiative of Tamami Fukuda, Naoki Oshiro and Masato Mori, who have been collaborating as members in Kumagai’s research group of Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research since 2011.

Overall, both meetings were abundantly successful in terms of participation and growth in membership in the Gender and Geography group. The quality of papers, presentations, and discussions across all sessions serve as evidence of the very productive nature of our meeting for the Commission on Geography and Gender.

We compiled the papers of Japanese researchers presented at the KRC and Nara Pre-conference and pub-
lished in “Building global networks through local sensitivities: Japanese researchers’ contributions to gender and geography” in September 2014 (Kumagai and Yoshida 2014).

Content of This Special Issue

This special issue was planned based on the series of discussions mentioned above. In this issue, we present four papers written by key Japanese members in the research group on gender and geography.

In “Geography of gender and qualitative methods in Japan: Focusing on studies that have analyzed life histories,” Yoshida discusses the efficacy of qualitative methods for gender studies in Japanese geography with a focus on life-history research. Analysis of narratives in informants’ life histories serves as encouragement for geographers wishing to clarify the structures of space/place by focusing on gender relations enacted through power. Studies adopting life-history research can be positioned within the field of gender studies in geography as they reveal social relations in local communities and the relations of groups within particular spaces, which is to say that they demonstrate gender relations preserved by the patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity.

In “Samoan pioneer wives and ‘home’: From the experiences of living in Japan more than 20 years,” Kuramitsu explores the creation of ‘home’ through the life stories of Samoan wives who married Japanese men and have been living in Japan for over 20 years. As a person married to a Samoan, Kuramitsu has been keenly interested in the creation of a ‘home’ that derives from two different cultures. In her paper, she uncovers how Samoan wives have created the ‘home’ to survive in Japan, while the processes of creating ‘home’ varied according to personal experience in both Samoa and Japan.

In “Community building in Naha shintoshin, Okinawa from the view of gender studies,” Kageyama discusses the relationship between gender and residential space in urban Japan (Kageyama 2004). Kageyama highlights, based on her fieldwork in Okinawa, how the processes of community building in new urban areas affects power relations within community. Kageyama suggests the potentiality of alternative spaces for active women resisting traditional patriarchal regime in Okinawa.

In “Place, body and nature: Rethinking Japanese sense of fudo and Minamata disease,” Kumagai highlights the idea of “fudo” in Japanese geographical thought. Fudo is inclinations inherent to relationships between humans, society and nature. Kumagai analyzes Minamata disease through a fudo perspective via the distinguished work of two women—and chroniclers of the disease: Michiko Ishimure and Eiko Sugimoto. Their narratives reconstruct interactions among body and mind, nature and culture, and humans and non-humans that constitute the fudo relationship devalued by masculine modernities formed in Japan at the time.

We regret that a number of papers initially slated to appear in this issue could not be included due to limitations on editorial time. We wish to see that the next issue on gender and geography in Japanese contexts is filled with alternative views contributed by many younger geographers. We believe this issue will cultivate further interest in gender and geography in Japanese contexts, and activate discussion for mainstreaming gender among Japanese geographers.

References

Arakaki, M. 2014. Jibun, yuimaru, and bu (Wisdom, spirit of cooperative efforts and local community): Women’s role in Okinawa’s endogenous development after Reversion to Japanese administration. In Building global networks through local sensitivities: Japanese researchers’ contribution to gender and geography, ed. K. Kumagai and Y. Yoshida, 91–102. Tokyo: Ochanomizu University.

Kageyama, H. 2004. Toshikaukan to jenda (Urban space and gender). Tokyo: Kokon Shoin. (J)

Kumagai, K. 2014. A sense of the local with gender sensitivity: Reflection on place and Fudo (Milieu) in Japan. In Building global networks through local sensitivities: Japanese researchers’ contribution to gender and geography, ed. K. Kumagai and Y. Yoshida, 111–126. Tokyo: Ochanomizu University.

Kumagai, K. and Yoshida, Y. eds. 2014. Building global networks through local sensitivities: Japanese researchers’ contribution to gender and geography. Tokyo: Ochanomizu University.

Kuramitsu, M. 2014. Living in Japan for over 20 years: The experiences of Samoan pioneer wives. In Building global networks through local sensitivities: Japanese researchers’ contribution to gender and geography, ed. K. Kumagai and Y. Yoshida, 35–41. Tokyo: Ochanomizu University.

Kushima, M. 2014. Dwelling and gender: Focusing on the weaving princess training programme in Japan. In Building global networks through local sensitivities: Japanese researchers’ contribution to gender and geography, ed. K. Kumagai and Y. Yoshida, 103–109. Tokyo: Ochanomizu University.

Li, M. 2014. Meeting prince black horse: Sexing nationality and practicing masculinity in Shenzhen Chinese Folk Culture Village, China. In Building global networks through local sensitivities: Japanese researchers’ contribution to gender and geography, ed. K. Kumagai and Y. Yoshida, 43–56. Tokyo: Ochanomizu University.

Nakamura, Y. 2014. Emerging layered women’s agency and governance in dairy cooperative societies: from multi-scale perspectives in Rajasthan, India. In Building global networks through
local sensitivities: Japanese researchers’ contribution to gender and geography, ed. K. Kumagai and Y. Yoshida, 77–90. Tokyo: Ochanomizu University.

Oikawa, Y. 2014. Does “Art” recreate place of commons or space of new order? “Bokuto-Machimise” project and recent urban rehabilitation at inner-city Tokyo. In Building global networks through local sensitivities: Japanese researchers’ contribution to gender and geography, ed. K. Kumagai and Y. Yoshida, 9–16. Tokyo: Ochanomizu University.

Ota, M. 2014. Gender and industrial restructuring in the Philippines: Impact on urban migrant community in metropolitan Manila. In Building global networks through local sensitivities: Japanese researchers’ contribution to gender and geography, ed. K. Kumagai and Y. Yoshida, 71–76. Tokyo: Ochanomizu University.

Sekimura, O. 2014. New town turning into old town: A case study of two major suburban new towns in Tokyo and Osaka. In Building global networks through local sensitivities: Japanese researchers’ contribution to gender and geography, ed. K. Kumagai and Y. Yoshida, 23–33. Tokyo: Ochanomizu University.

Yorifuji, A. 2014. Rethinking public gambling space in gender and class perspective: A case of motorboat racing in Japan. In Building global networks through local sensitivities: Japanese researchers’ contribution to gender and geography, ed. K. Kumagai and Y. Yoshida, 17–21. Tokyo: Ochanomizu University.

Yoshida, Y., Murata, Y. and Kageyama, H. 2013. Toward the development of the geography of gender in Japan: Advances in research and prospects. Geographical Review of Japan 86B: 33–39.

(J) written in Japanese