

TSUGARU GAKU: THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF CHIHŌGAKU TO JAPANESE STUDIES

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Japanese Studies, like any place-focused area of academic inquiry, can be narrow or broad depending on how one frames the field so as to generate interest. The focus of Japanese studies is obviously on the nation-state, but the trajectories of global economics and popular culture over the past three decades have caused a shift of emphasis in some research quarters from concentration on business to examining cultural phenomena such as *manga*, or comics. As the paradigm of “Japan as Number One” of the 1980s gave way to Japan’s “Lost Decade” of the 1990s, and the popularization of manga led to its ubiquity in multiple cultural centers around the world, one wonders what will drive the next thematic orientation of Japanese Studies. It is in this context that what is termed *chihōgaku* (also *chiikigaku*; Regional Studies) in general, and more specifically the emerging field of a highly place-specific body of research and literature called Tsugaru Gaku (Tsugaru Studies) becomes meaningful. As this article point outs, not only does the more focused study of the places of Japan brought by *chihōgaku* constitute an important turn in Japanese Studies overall, but the various studies of place that are being undertaken with this trend also make contributions in the continuing evolution of these places. This is significant given the current economic instability that characterizes central government functions and the accordant decentralization that is influencing Japanese rural society.

The Contributions of Studying Place

Various perspectives highlight the contributions that studying place can make, both to Japanese Studies as a whole and to the fate of the places that are being examined.

Regional, Area and Cultural Studies: The Value of Place in Japanese Studies

Taking *chiikigaku* from an applied scientific point of view, Hamamatsu (2003) sees the field as organized on two sets of opposing principles – “individuality” versus “comprehensiveness,” and “subject curiosity” versus “problem resolution” – which yields research as well as

real-world contributions in four outcome areas: identity confirmation, comprehensive understanding, specific problem resolution, and cooperative comprehensive outlooks. Identity confirmation, based on the combination of “individuality” and “subject curiosity,” aligns with folklore studies and arises out of focus on historical themes and geographic areas of interest. Comprehensive understanding, based on “comprehensiveness” and “subject curiosity,” operates to organize and disseminate this particular identity in a manner that contributes to its integration with other knowledge. Specific problem resolution, based on “individuality” and “problem resolution,” contextualizes the specific characteristics of a place within the context of a specified issue or social problem in a manner that some action, usually in the form of local government policy, can be undertaken. Finally, cooperative outlooks, based on “comprehensiveness” and “problem resolution,” organizes understanding into a broader scheme, a national policy level for example, such that the actions of multiple actors, often with divergent agendas, can be brought together. Hamamatsu concludes by bringing these separate outcomes, and the processes they yield, together into one unified discipline, *chiikigaku*, which, given the combined specialized efforts of multiple researchers, can contribute knowledge formation and problem resolution at local, national or international levels.

Taking up Asian Studies, and by extension, Japanese Studies, on the basis of the inherent tension within Area Studies between the particularity of a specific world region versus the universalism that is sought in most social science disciplines, Svambaryt (2005) asserts that, inevitably, the focus on place of such studies must be subject to the methodologies of Area Studies. These are largely supported by the theories of the multiple traditional academic disciplines that compose it. While based on highly specific factual information about the geography and history, the economic and political institutions, and the demographic trends operating in a specific part of the world or place within a nation-state, Area Studies-oriented inquiries that address broader themes are primarily concerned with comparisons and with speculations on the differences among countries and peoples. In terms of what such Area Studies research can accomplish and contribute to Japanese Studies, Svambaryt outlines two important approaches. The first supports the intensive study of the particular languages, cultures and histories of Japan, and is devoted to expanding the factual content of Japanese Studies. It is on the basis of this work that the second approach is possible, which is to encourage innovative thinking and practices related to the specific study of Japan, and, in this

sense, use the specific content of Japan Studies to contribute to the development of the methodologies of Area Studies in general.

Schafer (2009) expanded on these arguments under the broader disciplinary scope of Cultural Studies, citing Yoshimi (1998) in asserting that Cultural Studies in Japan must focus on using the “resources and experiences at hand” in order to “find within Japan’s historical and social context the origins constituting the core of contemporary media, pop-cultural, and technological culture” (159). However, as this local re-articulation brings with it the risk of particularization and self-orientalization, Schafer asserts the importance of Japanese Studies engaging in three additional intellectual tasks. The first is to adopt a foundation based on common terminology and comparable theoretical perspectives, opening up the possibility for wider access by the international academic community. The second is to ensure a pluralization of Japanese intellectual thought in such a way as to contribute to an emerging more-global articulation of Cultural Studies at large. In this sense, Japanese intellectualism can make a contribution to a global Cultural Studies phenomenon, but only if based on the prevailing global frameworks. The third task Schafer identifies for Japanese Studies is to overcome its inherent nationalism by re-examining the socio-cultural entity of Japan against the background of East Asia.

Local Studies: The Value of Studying Local Places for Those Places

Knapp (2003) outlines a framework that facilitates an understanding of the nature of places and their evolution as human and social institutions. The framework is based on the relationship between the institutional sphere of society and the individuals of that society, as this relationship forms the fundamental meeting place where a particular and unique social consciousness of the society is continually reproduced. Place is a phenomenon that is structured in the process of one’s everyday life and hence is based on the day-to-day practices of individuals. Place is also where individuals produce and continually reproduce their material and intellectual existence, which is structured through participation in social institutions and the actions and interactions with other people in these institutions and through the meanings that emerge on this basis. Although allowing this progression is neither uniform to all places, subject to a pre-ordained order, nor a part of all place trajectories. Knapp outlines how the institutionalization of a place on any analytical level occurs through four stages: the assumption of a territorial shape, the development of a

conceptual or symbolic shape, the development of the sphere of institutions of the place and the establishment of the place both as part of a system and as part of the consciousness of the place.

The first stage occurs as a place achieves its boundaries and becomes identified as a distinct unit, a fundamental requirement for the emergence of a local consciousness among inhabitants. The development of the place, both physically and conceptually, occurs simultaneously with the development of the institutions of the place, as this includes processes that establish the symbolic significance of the place that depends on communication between individual practices and emerging institutional structures. The turning point is when the co-emergence of conceptual entity and the institutions that are producing it becomes sufficient to yield a stable local consciousness. The existence of the place became complete with the full establishment and ongoing maintenance of the institutional structures in the place, the external relevance of the symbolic significance of the place and the continuance of the local consciousness among the inhabitants of the place.

Mang (2007) outlines the understanding of place as being based on six attributes on place, which are combined as dyads to understand the place in its reality, both historical and contemporary. The first dyad is made up of two places: being “bounded and distinctive in its identity,” which outlines how, as space becomes place through building definitional boundaries and meaning, it also acquires traits that set it apart from other comparable places; and being a “place as interconnected and nested,” which indicates that place relates to a distinctive spatial location, but one that is defined in its relationship to other places, as a nested phenomenon. This implies that there must be a balance between the internal identity of place and its connection with surrounding places. If a place becomes too inward, a closed-system will result; if a place becomes too open, the place as distinct will disappear.

The second dyad is comprised of “place as concentrating and enriching,” which holds that places organized the space within into a value and meaning-rich environment, together with “place as value-adding,” which implies that the creation of place is to engage in locating and identifying oneself within a larger place. This dyad holds that places must have meaning both internally, for the people of the place and externally, by being able to transform in the limited case or to create in a more expanded approach meaning for other places. Schafer (2009) expanded on these arguments under the broader disciplinary scope of Cultural Studies, citing

Yoshimi (1998) in asserting that Cultural Studies in Japan must focus on using the “resources and experiences at hand” in order to “find within Japan’s historical and social context the origins constituting the core of contemporary media, pop-cultural, and technological culture” (159). However, this local re-articulation brings with it the risk of particularization and self-orientalization. Schafer asserts the importance of Japanese Studies engaging in three additional intellectual tasks. The first is to adopt a foundation based on common terminology and comparable theoretical perspectives, opening up the possibility for wider access by the international academic community. The second is to ensure a pluralization of Japanese intellectual thought in such a way that contributes to an emerging more-global articulation of Cultural Studies at large. In this sense, Japanese intellectualism can make a contribution to a global Cultural Studies phenomenon, but only if based on the prevailing global frameworks. The third task Schafer identifies for Japanese Studies is overcome in its inherent nationalism by reexamining the socio-cultural entity of Japan against the background of East Asia, the essence of value adding.

The third dyad is based on a combination of place as “dynamic and evolving,” which combines the two dimensions of continual change with meaningful evolution, and place as “magnetic and ordering,” which holds that this meaning can be seen as attractive in its own right and organized in such a manner that it can be understood. Places must avoid becoming entrenched in patterns that present obstacles to change, while also maintaining their central cohering and unique patterns.

If *chihōgaku* and the specific case of Tsugaru Gaku are to be seen as contributing in some meaningful way to Japanese Studies, it will be based on whether such place-based studies can be assessed as contributing to this range of theorizing regarding the value of place in a particular area of study as above. If *chihōgaku* and the specific case of Tsugaru Gaku are to be seen as contributing in some meaningful way to the places on which they are based, this contribution will be based on whether such place-based studies can be assessed as contributing to the emergence, stable existence and future evolution of that place, as outlined above.

Chihōgaku and Tsugaru Gaku

According to Kanemori (2000), writing in the publication titled *Zenkoku chiikigaku handobukku* (National Regional Studies Handbook), there was an increasing level of *chiikigaku* (Regional Studies) activity

throughout Japan in the late 1990s, yielding 76 local “regional studies” groups at the time of publication. Organized by prefecture and municipalities, universities and other educational institutions, as well as non-profit organizations and citizen groups, this *chiikigaku* consisted of “excavating the appeal and potential in local history and culture, production and nature of these places” (Kanemori 2000:1). The emergence of Tsugaru Studies can be identified, in the form of the recently established semi-scholarly annual periodical *Tsugaru Gaku* (*Tsugaru Studies*, vols. 1–4) and two recently-published books, one in Japanese and the other bilingual (Japanese–English), bearing the titles *Tsugaru Gaku* (as for the periodical) and its English counterpart, *Tsugaru Studies*. The *Tsugaru Gaku* volumes focus on broad Tsugaru themes, along with articles and essays that describe local regional and folk beliefs, archeological history and contemporary society. The two books are more constrained and focused, constituting a more educational approach to Tsugaru Studies through what can be seen as “lecture note” chapters, twelve in one and fifteen in the other, of themes covered in a Tsugaru Studies course delivered at Hirosaki University, the largest university of Aomori Prefecture that is located in the heart of the Tsugaru District. In this periodical and these books, it is clear there is a notable local effort and interest, both in this place called Tsugaru and in the major educational institution in the place called Tsugaru, to establish a body of literature dedicated to what is being called Tsugaru Studies.

To further contextualize Tsugaru Studies as being representative of the potential of *chihōgaku* as an emerging theme in Japanese Studies, the following questions are important. Are these efforts, the assorted works they yield, simply a cumulative attempt to record the specific characteristics of a relatively unexamined place – and if so, is this attempt justified on the basis of legitimately unique characteristics and realized in a level of descriptive framing of value? Or rather, do these efforts contribute, in some substantive way, to a better understanding of Japan, both on a level beyond simply additional descriptions of additional places as well as by providing an advance in Japanese Studies as a whole?

In the inaugural volume of *Tsugaru Gaku*, the editors included a transcript of their original brainstorming session, which included ample references to the value of focusing on the specific characteristics of Tsugaru as the basis of Tsugaru Studies. In the second volume, an essay by Akasaka Norio (2006) considered this inward gaze, taking as an example the importance of making a transition in the orientation of a place-based body of research and writing known as Tōhoku Studies (the broader area within

Japan where the Tsugaru district is located) from simply place to something more, signaling a shift toward Tōhoku Studies as something more, whether Japanese Studies or Area Studies. The same argument can be made for Tsugaru Studies: if it is to be anything beyond local “navel-gazing,” then it must produce content that extends outside its own sphere of influence and speaks to academic interests on a wide scale and in an engaged manner. Contextualizing a relatively descriptive orientation, Sawada and Kitahara’s (2008) stated purpose in editing *An Introduction to Tsugaru Studies* was to provide a highly accessible introduction to the area for international students, who come to Tsugaru with a mix of differing academic objectives with varying levels of both Japanese and English skills. A significant portion of the initial effort in undertaking the work of establishing Tsugaru Studies must be in providing a window on the world that is Tsugaru in English. It is inevitable that the work of translating facts is a first step; the danger is that this first step can come to, if not replace, and detract from the effort of aiming for more meaningful content and conclusions. On the other hand, there is also the question as to how this local body of research contributes to the place internally, in parts of Hamamatsu’s *chiikigaku* outline and in Knapp’s and Mang’s frameworks for understanding the nature of places.

The Tsugaru District

The Tsugaru District comprises the western half of Aomori, the northernmost prefecture of Honshu, Japan. Aomori is the eighth largest of Japan’s 47 prefectures with a population of about one-and-a-half-million, which equals the sixth-lowest population density (154 residents per square kilometer, versus 335 for Japan as a whole and 5,410 for Tokyo; all data is from Yano tsuneda kinenkai 2006). The prefecture has negative population growth and a highly aged population (more than 20 percent over 65 years of age overall and as high as 30 percent in some towns and villages). Hirosaki City (population approximately 180,000) and Mount Iwaki (1,625 meters) are the core features of the Tsugaru District.

Far from Tokyo and the major political and commercial centers to the south, Aomori Prefecture has been characterized by limited access throughout its history. A rail link with the south connected Aomori to Tokyo’s Ueno Station in 1889, with the northernmost extension of the Tōhoku Expressway, providing a high-speed ground link from Tokyo to Aomori City (completed in 1986) and full-scale jet service capability to Aomori Airport (completed in 1987). The Shinkansen line to Hachinohe

City, located on the Pacific Ocean side of the Prefecture (completed in 2002), with the extension to the prefectural capital Aomori City completed in 2011. Aomori ranks low on virtually every economic indicator: from employment and income, to industrial production and small business sales. Annual per capita income for the Aomori Prefecture ranks 45th nationally and half that of Tokyo, with monthly real income per working household ranked 37th nationally. Fourteen percent of the prefectural labor force works in the primary sector, with another 25 percent in the secondary and just under 60 percent in the service sector.

The name “Tsugaru,” originally written as 津刈, first appeared in the *Nihon Shoki (Chronicle of Japan)*, Japan’s oldest official history that dates back to the early-eighth century (Guo, et. al. 2005). Currently, the name is written with two *kanji*, 津軽, the first meaning “harbor” or “overflowing,” and the second, “light of weight.” Tsugaru can claim an ancient cultural heritage with the discovery of the Jōmon-Period (ca. 10,000 BCE–ca. 300 BCE) Sannai Maruyama archaeological site in the early 1990s. The site is one of the largest in Japan and has yielded a massive number of artifacts, including lacquerware, jade pendant heads, stone masks and pot shards that all dated from the early to mid-Jōmon period. Tsugaru Tamenobu (1550–1607) founded the castle town of Hirosaki in 1590, with the important task of defending the Tokugawa territories fell to the Tsugaru clan, providing the area its unofficial name. The Hirosaki Domain was reorganized into Aomori Prefecture in 1871, and although the political center was moved to Aomori City, the samurai of Hirosaki played an important role in the development of the new prefecture. In 1896, the Eighth Divisional Military Headquarters was established in Hirosaki, making it a Meiji “military capital.” Lacking the major industries that accompanied Japan’s imperialistic expansion of the period, this favor bestowed by the Meiji government was important economically as well as in terms of image.

Throughout the post-war period of national economic growth, poverty in Tsugaru has forced locals to seek work outside the area, in what is called *dekasegi*, a seasonal labor migration to the major metropolitan areas of Tokyo and Osaka. As outlined by Tanaka and Yamashita (1999), *dekasegi* peaked in the mid-1960s, during the height of the period of high economic growth in Japan, with numbers steadily declining since then. Most of the men worked as manual laborers in the construction industries, with the women working in the bar trade. *Dekasegi* continues today, with

some Tsugaru locals choosing it as a long-term lifestyle choice, with the availability of local seasonal agricultural work and the prospect of higher-than-local wages validating the *dekasegi* labor pattern as opposed to seeking long-term, stable local employment.

As part of the process of establishing the Tsugaru Domain, the Edo-period Tsugaru lords tapped into the symbolic power of religion, ordering construction of the Iwaki Shrine at the foot of Mount Iwaki and an area of temples in Hirosaki City itself. Belief in the Tsugaru *itako*, the blind female shaman believed to be able to communicate with the spirits of the dead, has long been prevalent and deeply rooted throughout the area and was an essential part of life in Tsugaru in times when many were dying of illness and poverty (Suda, et al. 1998). Tsugaru is also famous for its festivals, many of which are music and dance accompaniments to Shintō and Buddhist practice and which can be traced pre-modern times. The *Neputa* and *Nebuta* festivals of Tsugaru also speak to beliefs and practices of the past; however, these festivals are in fact more agricultural and community-oriented in origin than religious, an important indicator of the importance of the agricultural vis-à-vis the spiritual in the history of Tsugaru. As a cultural center through the Edo period, a variety of cultural figures emerged in the Tsugaru district beginning at the end of the Meiji period, among them novelists, poets and social critics respected for their contributions to modern Japanese intellectualism and literature (Guo, et. al. 2005). *Tsugaru-shamisen* and other local performing arts as well as Tsugaru lacquerware and the work of woodblock artist Munakata Shikō (1903–1975) have become highly regarded representative forms of Tsugaru's cultural base.

Tsugaru Studies

As will be outlined in detail below, what currently constitutes the now-emerging Tsugaru Studies is a mix of work that focuses on highly specific local themes, which reflect diverse disciplines and are published in various formats for different audiences in several languages. While the majority of what is being produced is in Japanese, there are now attempts on the part of numerous researchers to produce work related to Tsugaru in English. There are translations of Tsugaru-originating literary works into English, constituting a Tsugaru Literature component of Tsugaru Studies. There are also works in the social sciences as broadly considered, primarily in Japanese, but with translations into English in some cases and original work in English in others. There is a broad category of this work that is

targeted toward general local interest, and thus, produced in Japanese. This body of social scientific research can also be considered predominantly descriptive and consisting of descriptions of social phenomenon within established disciplines such as history, sociology, anthropology and ethnomusicology covering such specifically local themes as the establishment of the area and origins of the early ruling families, histories of early educational institutions, the history and current circumstances of local crafts and performing arts, and contemporary social phenomenon such as media and urbanism, identity and community as they operate in Tsugaru.

Tsugaru Studies: Local Academic Publications in Japanese

The content of regional studies consists of a local and often highly specific facts validates the form and content of the local publications, which may form a Japanese language basis of an emerging Tsugaru Studies. There is one main text that has emerged in Japanese, titled *Tsugaru Gaku* (Tsugaru Studies) and two main local periodical publications, *Tsugaru Gaku* and *Chiiki Gaku* (Region Studies), that constitute an ongoing basis of this creation of Tsugaru Studies, each with a distinctive profile in terms of academic standards and general accessibility at a local and national level.

The text *Tsugaru Gaku*, edited by Tsuchimochi (2009) and based on lectures provided to Japanese students in a general education course on Tsugaru conducted at Hirosaki University, is comprised of twelve chapters covering: Hirosaki Neputa Art, the history of Tsugaru shamisen, the culture and history of Tsugaru *nuri* lacquerware, local author Ishizaka Yōjirō, Dazai Osamu's history at Hirosaki High School, Tsugaru dialect in poetry, the world of Terashima Shuji, contemporary Tsugaru literature, the history of the Hirosaki clan, the introduction of Western ideas to Tsugaru (parts I and II), and the history of Hirosaki High School (all translations from Japanese to English are by the current author). Functional as a course text, *Tsugaru Gaku* offers much in the way of establishing a knowledge base for Tsugaru Studies in Japanese.

Contrasting the text *Tsugaru Gaku* are the periodicals, for which the range of topics that constitute the content as well as the range of research, literary approaches, and objectives represented is nothing short of inspiring. These are primarily for local, and to a lesser degree, regional and national consumption, with the caveat that local consumption represents the widest range of readers, with regional and national readership comprised more of specialists dedicated to area studies as an academic discipline. *Chiiki Gaku*, with the subtitle "Toward Understanding (the) Region," was

first published in 2002 by the Hirosaki Gakuin University Regional Comprehensive Cultural Research Center and now includes seven volumes (as of 2009). Published in Hirosaki, the content is predominantly Tsugaru-centered, but also includes regional themes originating in other areas and is highly academic in its appearance and approach.

The periodical *Tsugaru Gaku*, clearly Tsugaru centered in name as well as content, was first published in the fall of 2005, with volumes 2, 3 and 4 coming semi-regularly thereafter. Published by the *Tsugaru ni manabu kai* (The Tsugaru Studies Group), in cooperation with the Tōhoku Cultural Studies Center of Tōhoku University of Art and Design, and joining other northern Tōhoku Studies research periodicals – *Aizu Gaku*, *Sendai Gaku*, *Morioka Gaku*, and *Murayama Gaku* – each volume is based on a theme that constitutes a public lecture for Tsugaru Studies, held in the summer at Hirosaki University, but also accepts contributions from other institutions and accepts both academic- and essay-style articles in objective and form.

The four themes have been the central mountain and river of the area (Mount Iwaki and the Iwaki River), the life of the people of the Tsugaru area (*Tsugaru-jin no jinsei*), the power of Tsugaru as a place realized in memory (*ba no chikara chi no kioku*) and Tsugaru as a source of energy (*jawameku Tsugaru*). In addition to being organized to appeal to general readers through content of local interest, use of abundant photographs and a highly attractive layout with varying text fonts (a significant contrast to *Chiiki Gaku*), is a shift in focus from highly locally specific work in the early volumes to more universal and theoretical work being included in the content in later volumes. Whereas Volume 1 includes a majority of articles that could be considered as focusing explicitly on local content, Volume 2 saw an increase in the number of “universalistic” articles and Volume 3 saw the inclusion of “theoretical” content.

Examples of explicitly local content can be seen in such titles as *Snow Patterns on Mt. Iwaki* (Vol. 1), *Remembering the Ground Blizzards* (Vol. 2), and *Tsugaru-theme Artwork* (Vol. 3), whereas articles that connect to universalistic academic themes can be seen in *Origins of Religious Beliefs Associated with Mt. Iwaki* (Vol. 1), *Media and Tsugaru Life* (Vol. 2) and *Praying at the Mountaintop* (Vol. 3), for example. Finally, theoretical connections and contributions can be seen in such content as *Memories from Places: the Creativity of Space* (Vol. 3) and *The Latent Power of Place: Tsugaru* (Vol. 3).

Tsugaru Gaku, Volume 1

Theme: Mount Iwaki and the Iwaki River: the Fixed Points for Observing Tsugaru

Views of the Iwaki River: Gazing at Mt. Iwaki

Table Discussion: Mt. Iwaki and the Iwaki River as the Center of Tsugaru Life

Lifestyles near the River

The Jōmon Era in Tsugaru

Snow Patterns on Mt. Iwaki

Cosmology and the Tsugaru Area

Folktales of the Tsugaru Area

Wildlife of Mt. Iwaki

Mt. Iwaki and the Oyama Sankei

The DNA of Tsugaru Festivals

Origins of Religious Beliefs Associated with Mt. Iwaki

Historical Perspectives on Tsugaru

Tsugaru Gaku, Volume 2

Theme: Life of the Tsugaru People: the Will to Escape and a Longing to Return

Tsugaru and Relations with the Frontline of Old Fukui Prefecture

Remembering the Jifubuki (Ground Blizzard)

Apples of the Iwaki River Area

Tsugaru People

Photos of Tsugaru Life

Background to Tsugaru Life

Discussion of Tsugaru Life

Hallowed Ground of Tsugaru

The Humor of the Tsugaru People

Archeology of Tsugaru Life

Media and Tsugaru Life

Building Tokyo: Living in Tsugaru

Population Decline in Tsugaru: the Succession of Generations

From Tōhoku Studies to Regional Studies

Tsugaru Gaku, Volume 3

Theme: Memories of Place from the Power of Place

Tsugaru-themed Artwork

The Komise (Small Store) Street

The Leaders of the Tsugaru Paddy Area Development
 Remembering Tsugaru
 Mt. Iwaki and the “Let’s Walk” Oyama Sankei Event
 Praying at the Mountain Top
 Hallowed Ground of Tsugaru
 The Power of a Life Lived in a Cold Climate
 Remembering Old Scenes: Art and Maps of the Past
 The Latent Power of Place: Tsugaru
 Memories of Place from the Power of Place
 Memories from Places: the Creativity of Space
 The Key to the Future of Regional Culture
 The Power of Connecting to a Place

Tsugaru Gaku, Volume 4

Theme: Tsugaru as a Source of Energy

A Tsugaru Photo-essay

Stories of Hirosaki Castle

Lecture Theme 1: Tsugaru as Modernistic Dynamism

Peninsula as Tsugaru

Modernism at the Edge

Seasonal Labor Migration and Care Culture

Lecture Theme 2: The Magnetism of Heartful Songs

Tsugaru Melodies that Gush Forth

A Genealogy of Tsugaru Heartful Songs

Prayers Accompanying the Nitta Area Development

Regional History based on the Flow of Water: Towns on Local Rivers

Fieldwork: Hirosaki University Sociology Research Group and Ikarigaseki Village

Composers from Tsugaru: Uehara Gentaro

Tsugaru Studies: Research and Literary Works in English

The academic and literature-based works that are connected in some way with Tsugaru and have been published in English contrast drastically with the wide-ranging character of the content of the periodicals *Chiiki Gaku* and *Tsugaru Gaku*. This section outlines the academic and literature-based work that exists on Tsugaru in English, efforts that helps to create Tsugaru Studies at an international level.

Academic-oriented Tsugaru Research in English

In the mid-1990s, two researchers at Aomori University attended a lecture on the origins of Tsugaru *shamisen* music given by Daijō Kazuo, an independent Tsugaru shamisen historian and player. The content inspired the two to take up translation of Daijō's *Tsugaru shamisen no tanjō: minzoku genō no seisei to ryūsei* (1995), producing in 1998 *The Birth of Tsugaru Shamisen Music: the Origin and Development of a Japanese Folk Performing Art*, which was published with support from the Aomori Regional Social Research Center and by Aomori University Press (Suda, et. al. 1998). The primary theme of the book is historical, but the content references such universal social scientific themes as creative marginality and the characteristics of creativity in traditional music production. Interest in and further research and publication on Tsugaru shamisen can be seen to also have created with Groemer's *The Spirit of Tsugaru* (1999), to where numerous academic papers have now been published on the subject (see Peluse 2005, Johnson 2006).

The efforts of one Tsugaru-based academic to read a local newspaper every day for one year yielded *A Year with the Local Newspaper: Understanding the Times in Aomori Japan, 1999* (Rausch 2001). While a personal endeavor in its origin, the contents of *A Year with the Local Newspaper*, predominantly being a selection of newspaper articles translated into English and contextualized with necessary background information, link to universal sociological themes that include peripherality and revitalization and portray a year of life in contemporary rural Japan.

A group research effort in early 2000 produced a multi-disciplinary and multi-perspective view of Tsugaru, resulting in *Tsugaru no rekishi to bunka wo shiru (Knowing Tsugaru's History and Culture)* in 2004, with an English version titled *Tsugaru: Regional Identity on Japan's Northern Periphery* and published with a Japan Foundation Grant a year later (Guo, et. al. 2005). Reflecting the disciplinary background of the contributors, the themes taken up include the establishment of Tsugaru identity and the transformation of this identity in the 20th century, Christianity in Tsugaru, the "Tsugaru" literature of Dazai Osamu and Osabe Hideo, and Tsugaru shamisen music and Tsugaru nuri lacquerware. According to one review, the work "not only improves our understanding of the Tsugaru region of northern Japan, but also highlights the importance of regional studies and suggests a variety of ways in which regional identity can be assessed and used to improve overall understanding of Japan's past

and present” (Penny 2005: 216). However, the book ultimately makes only a limited contribution to Area Studies, as it lacks both any reference to Area Studies as a research objective as well as any attempt to integrate the separate pieces into a holistic whole.

In 2008, two Tsugaru-based researchers collected and translated 15 papers in a text titled *An Introduction to Tsugaru Studies*, with the purpose of creating a textbook “for international students studying regional culture at Hirosaki University” (Sawada and Kitahara 2008: 3). Almost an exact mirror of the textbook *Tsugaru Gaku*, the text covers history, culture – comprised of language, literature, music and crafts, folklore, and nature. Complete as a textbook that serves as an introduction to the place, the book offers a further contribution in this regard in its inclusion of chapters on the Ainu of Honshu, the characteristics of Tsugaru dialect, three highly local crafts (lacquerware, indigo dying and kogin stitching), the local spirit mediums called *itako* and the Shirakami-sanchi (Shirakami Mountain Area) World Heritage Site.

Tsugaru Literature in English

The first piece of literature that most readers interested in Tsugaru look to is Osamu Dazai’s 1944 work aptly titled *Tsugaru*, which was translated into English in 1985 as *Return to Tsugaru: Travels of a Purple Tramp* (by Kodansha International) by James Westerhoven and revised and republished in 1998 as *Tsugaru* by Access 21 Publishing Company of Aomori City, Aomori Prefecture, Japan. Known for its dark and pessimistic portrayal of Tsugaru, the notoriety of the work in Japanese has brought the attention of many literary and Japan Studies scholars alike.

However, more indicative of the emergence of Tsugaru Literature as Tsugaru Studies are two translation efforts undertaken after 2000. In 2007, Sawada translated the works of Ishizaka Yōjirō’s autobiographical *Wagahi wagayume* into *My Days, My Dreams*, subtitled with *Stories from a Boyhood in Northern Japan* (Ishizaka 2007). It is interesting to note Ishizaka’s rejection of Dazai’s use of his own sense of inferiority, presumably based on his place of birth, to provide the despair that comprises much of his work, opting instead to portray Tsugaru as a place where “the sky is blue, the clouds are white, the apples are red and the women are beautiful” (Ishizaka 2007: 11). The six short stories of Ishizaka’s are titled: *Manners and Customs* (1933), *The Mural* (1934), *The Mountain* (1934), *Yanagi Theater* (1940), *The Holy People* (1935), and *Mountain Hot Springs* (1941).

A similar work, but one more extensive in scope in that it includes several authors and a variety of genres, and with contextualization of the place that provided the backdrop for the literature, is *Voices from the Snow: Tsugaru in Legend, Literature, and Fact*, edited by James Westerhoven (2009), of Dazai's *Tsugaru* fame. The work includes two stories by Kyōzō Takagi, translated as "Grannies' Lodge" and "Yasaburō's House," three by Osabe Hideo, translated as "Tsugaru Jonkarabushi," "Tsugaru Yosarebushi," and "A Voice in the Snow." The work also includes a descriptive chapter on Tsugaru songs and ballads, a chapter that presents two Tsugaru legends, and five "academic essays" that contextualize the place, the culture, Tsugaru shamisen music, Tsugaru folk religion, and Tsugaru beliefs regarding *oni* (demons).

Conclusion: The Contribution of Tsugaru Studies

The objective of this article was to identify what the current *chihōgaku* trend can contribute to Japanese Studies overall and to identify what this *chihōgaku* activity in its highly localized form can contribute to the places. The paper opened by introducing outlines and assertions by several researchers that can guide in such an assessment and followed by detailing the trend of Tsugaru Gaku, as Tsugaru Studies of the Tsugaru District of Aomori Prefecture, as an example of *chihōgaku* that presently developing.

Taking up first what Tsugaru Gaku can offer to Japanese Studies, Hamamatsu's (2003) systematic approach to understanding *chihōgaku* yielded four outcome areas: identity confirmation, comprehensive understanding, specific problem resolution and cooperative comprehensive outlooks. The *Tsugaru Gaku* periodical can be viewed as addressing local "identity confirmation," essentially putting down the foundation of local identity in a print form for local consumption. The research work that has been translated into English along with that that has been originally published in English contributes to a "comprehensive understanding and outlooks" outcome, as it organizes and disseminates this local knowledge for external consumption, presumably by an informed audience. While no "specific problem" consciousness has been identified in Tsugaru, some of the themes taken up do relate to such broader national (if not international) issues such as a rural aging population and the dynamics, economic and social, of decentralization within a nation-state.

Tsugaru is clearly fulfilling Svambaryt's (2005) focus on language, culture and history as contributing to a factual expansion of

Japanese Studies, in both the Japanese research as well as the research produced in English. Success in adopting common terminology and effecting a pluralizing of Japanese intellectual history as espoused by Schafer (2009) rest more on the attention of translators and English-based researchers in regard to the former point and more with the acceptance of Tsugaru Gaku as legitimate within the broader Japanese intellectual community than with the Tsugaru Gaku researchers themselves in regard to the latter.

As for what Tsugaru Gaku can offer to Tsugaru itself in terms of Knapp's (2003) four stages, the assumption of a territorial shape is impossible for Tsugaru, as is the development of institutions since the historical trajectory of the area saw a dramatic post-Edo period shift from being a Tsugaru clan-controlled frontier domain to becoming a part of a prefecture stretching from the west to east coast in 1871. That notwithstanding, the conceptual and symbolic shape of Tsugaru has remained tremendously powerful, not just in the local agricultural and cultural commodities of the area, but in language, practice, and custom; for example, in *Tsugaru ben* (Tsugaru dialect), in the literature of Tsugaru, and in the notion of *Tsugaru jikan* (Tsugaru time), the practice of being just a bit late to everything, together with being patient of others also being just a bit late to everything. This has yielded a contemporary symbolic presence and a place consciousness for Tsugaru, which includes place awareness outside of Tsugaru, irrespective of the institutional structures component that Knapp prioritizes.

Taking Mang's (2007) thematic dyads to understanding place, the first holds that place has identity and is interconnected. As above, Tsugaru clearly produces an identity (despite it not having definitional boundaries) and is nested as part of Aomori Prefecture, the Tōhoku District and as well, as part of the *chihōgaku* trend that has produced the northern Tōhoku Studies research periodicals – *Aizu Gaku*, *Sendai Gaku*, *Morioka Gaku* and *Murayama Gaku*. On the other hand, its interconnectedness is ultimately limited for no other reason than by virtue of Tsugaru's geography. Tsugaru is at the end of the road on the northern-most and western-most tip of Honshu Island. As for the second and third dyads, the assessment becomes more complex. The second dyad is comprised of place as enriching and value-adding, with the third dyad comprised of place as dynamic but with order. The degree to which Tsugaru Gaku contributes to the dynamism and enrichment of Tsugaru life is fairly limited, if for no other reason than, first and foremost, the efforts to "produce" Tsugaru Gaku are less about creating

local culture than cataloguing, describing and interpreting local culture. However, these efforts can be seen as bringing order to an otherwise confused and little understood expanse of local knowledge by locals and creating a value-added component to this culture, simply through its dissemination within and outside the area.

As a concluding statement, it would appear that the social science work of *Tsugaru Gaku*, produced in Japanese and as well in English as *Tsugaru Studies*, can make a contribution to Japanese Studies. However, one could also say that this depends less on the efforts of the local researchers than on the attention to and willingness to engage with this body of work on the part of the Japanese *chihōgaku* academic community and the Japanese Studies international community. It would also appear that the dissemination of *Tsugaru Gaku* within Tsugaru, through the local publications can make a contribution to the place that is Tsugaru, through identity confirmation as well as bringing order out of chaos and creating value in image – all despite a lack of distinct boundary and accordant institutional structures. While this can be said based on the social science-based work of the periodicals and research, the role of *Tsugaru* literature, while lending to this conclusion, also begs for further analysis. Indeed, the *chihōgaku* phenomenon in general, and *Tsugaru Gaku* and *Tsugaru Studies* specifically, provide for the perfect case study for untangling the complex, yet combinative contributions of social science research and local literature published in Japanese for local consumption in the sustenance of place and the same social science-oriented research, along with the translated literature of *Tsugaru* published in English for external consumption in the advancement of Japanese Studies.

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