

Chapter 13

The Association of Japanese Geographers' Social Action Program and Geography Education

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Abstract The Association of Japanese Geographers (AJG) sponsors and supports activities for members as well as non-members. In this article, activities for non-members are referred to as the “social action program”. It comprises two categories: (1) activities for the general public and (2) geography education for school teachers, and students. The former, which typically takes the form of public symposia, are designed to promote the value of geography in society and the public arena, whereas the latter category includes public fora for teachers, Geography Olympiad for high school students, and Children’s Environmental Map Contest for elementary and junior high school students. Together, these outreach efforts aim to revitalize geography education in Japan. The AJG Commission on Geographical Education (AJG-CGE), established in 1998, plans many of these social action programs in collaboration with other academic societies and research groups.

Keywords Children’s Environmental Map Contest • Commission on Geographical Education • Teacher education • The Geography Olympiad

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13.1 The Context in Which the Association of Japanese Geographer's Social Action Program Is Needed

This chapter begins by explaining efforts undertaken by the Association of Japanese Geographers (AJG) to engage non-members, from the 1980s to the present. This is followed by a focused discussion of educational activities provided for school teachers, children, and students. Recent examples include the "Science and Geography Olympiad Japan Championship". This is a competition for high school students, jointly sponsored by the AJG, Japan International Geography Olympiad Committee, Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST), and other organizations. In another partnership, the AJG is working with the Society for Environmental Map Education (SEME) and other organizations to host the "Exhibition of Environment Maps of Our Immediate Surroundings," a project for all students. In-service training for teachers is provided by the AJG-CGE. A description of project implementation, results, and issues will provide further information on these projects.

The AJG directs and organizes social action program activities for non-members. In recent years, it has become customary to plan free public events for non-members. For example, at the general conferences, the association planned activities with a strong awareness of making a social contribution. This is not only true of the AJG, but also applies to the Human Geographical Society of Japan (HGSJ) and other geographic associations. Efforts to include the public in the social action program have been driven by two major issues. The first is that geography has become increasingly valued in society. Students who complete an undergraduate and graduate geography program in college are employed in diverse fields throughout society. Geography graduates demonstrate the usefulness of geography within their workplace and profession. Until recently, there has been little recognition, in an official or national way, for the skills and qualifications directly related to the study of geography. In essence, the application and value of geography is neither well known nor respected. To improve understanding of geography's contribution to society, the geographic associations should develop strategies to institutionalize qualifications related to geography to inform the general public.

The second issue is that geography enrollments in high schools are dwindling; a revitalization of geography education is badly needed. Enrollment levels began to drop in 1978 when the National Curriculum Standards for senior high schools chose Contemporary Society to be a compulsory subject and Geography was relegated to an elective course. In the 1989 revision of the National Curriculum Standards for senior high schools, the Social Studies curriculum was divided; a Geography and History curriculum was newly established, and World History A and B were made compulsory subjects. This had a major impact, causing high school enrollment levels in Geography to drop even further than before. This trend has continued to the present (Kohno 1996).

The AJG is active in lobbying the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) to support geography education. In the past, the AJG made frequent requests that the previous Ministry of Education address the decline in geography enrollment. Efforts to make educational content more attractive are needed to

revitalize geography education. Thus, support for geography teachers and direct impacts on students in the education system are equally important to improve the image of the geography field.

13.2 The Beginning of the AJG's Social Action Program and Its Course Up To the Present

13.2.1 Public Events

We describe here the background of how AJG's social action program began and its evolution to the present. Information was gathered from records of the board of directors and news articles published in the journal *Geographical Review of Japan*.

At a board of directors meeting during the autumn AJG general conference in November 1989, board members deliberated on holding an open public lecture at the 1990 general conference. The holding of open public lectures was approved and added to the association's bylaws. Since then, AJG's social action programs have often been held at the general conference. Table 13.1 summarizes AJG's public events during the 1990s.

The series of events in the 1990s laid the groundwork for AJG's involvement and plans to engage the public through its social action program. The social action program is the impetus to the implementation of geography education open public lecture series that began in 2001.

Thereafter, the open public lectures were presented during the general conferences in 2004 and 2005. Lectures were replaced with symposia from 2006 to 2012. Support for public engagement was seen at the autumn general conference at Nagoya University in 2010; as many as ten different symposia were advertised as "open to the public". Today, open public events are firmly established at AJG general conferences. However, the number of non-members who have participated in these symposia is unclear.

In addition to efforts by the AJG, other academic associations have provided free lectures to the public. For example, in November 1998, the Human Geographical Society of Japan HGSJ held a 50th anniversary commemorative celebration, and an open public lecture series was held at the Kyoto Conference Hall as part of the events.

Table 13.1 AJG's public events during the 1990s

Date	Theme	Location	Lecturer
September 1990	Geography Education: Looking Back and Looking Ahead—Based on practical examples	Joetsu University of Education's attached junior high school	Asakura Ryutaro
October 1991	The Problems of the Aging of Society and Depopulation, and Permanent Residency Measures: From the Standpoint of Geography	General Welfare Center, Matsue City	Fujita Yoshihisa, Shinohara Shigenori, and others
March 1997	Open Public Invitational Lecture	Tokyo Metropolitan University	

The general theme was “Internationalizing Social Space and Local Livelihood,” and featured speakers Narita Kozo, Takeuchi Keiichi, and Sasaki Komei. This event initiated substantial consideration for including open public events such as seminars. In December 2001, in an event separate from the society’s general conference, HGSJ held their first open public seminar, using the Osaka Prefectural Labor Center in Osaka’s Chuo Ward. The theme was “Frontiers of Human Geography”. Records of meeting announcements, printed in the *Japanese Journal of Human Geography*, show that the HGSJ has since held annual open public seminars separately from their general conferences, rotating venues through each of the prefectures of the Kinki District.

The series of open public events put on by the AJG and HGSJ have broadly targeted citizens. A preliminary conclusion is that the implementation of these events has encouraged investment in social action programs within the field of geography education.

13.2.2 Undertakings of the AJG-CGE

Since the AJG-CGE was established in 1998, it has actively implemented public events for school teachers and citizens. The AJG-CGE’s goal is to enlighten people about the value of geography and to revitalize geography education.

One of the pillars of the AJG-CGE’s social action program is the open public lecture series, held concurrently with the association’s general conferences. The spring general conference in 2013 marked the 23rd public lecture series, which has been held without interruption since the autumn general conference in 2001.

At the 2001 autumn conference, the public lecture theme was “A Professional Talk about His Fieldwork—Knowing about the world through geography, No. 1: Turkey”. These presentations were designed to be engaging for non-geographers and a general audience. Additionally, it was the intention to include an international aspect as a way to widely publicize the latest research findings in geography education. Lectures have been recorded for the following countries or regions, in order of presentation: Turkey, the United States, China, New Zealand, India, and South Korea. Not all themes were geographically focused. In the autumn conference in 2008, the theme was “Education for Sustainable Development and Geography Education”. Since then, themes have had a regional or non-geographic focus, but the goal of the open public lectures remains committed to the revitalization of geography education (Shimura 2007).

13.3 Examples of Outstanding Recent Social Action Programs: Events for Children and Students

13.3.1 Geography Olympiad Japanese Championship

The Geography Olympiad Japanese Championship (referred to below as ‘the championship’) is divided into a preliminary selection stage and a final selection stage. The preliminary competition is held every year in mid-January, and the second

stage is held annually in mid-March. As of 2013, the championship has been held seven times, and it has become firmly established as a geography education event every spring (Izumi 2013).

The Geography Olympiad Championship serves as a selection process for Japanese contestants to enter the International Geography Olympiad that is sponsored by the International Geographical Union's Task Force. Its purpose is intended to promote geography education in Japan by attracting high school students to compete in multiple geography skills and abilities, including areas of knowledge and concepts, thinking and judgment, and skills and expression. Simultaneously, students demonstrate their geographical knowledge while competing at an international scale, thereby highlighting the social value of geography. This is in contrast to the rote learning in Japan.

When Japan competed in its first international competition in 2007, there were only twelve Japanese participants. Thereafter, the number gradually rose to 867 in 2013, and those who actually took the exams reached 782. This increase may be attributed to numerous factors, including efforts at advertising the competition by the executive committee. With the cooperation of other sponsors and support organizations, the competition was designated by the JST as a Science Olympiad, similar to those for biology or earth sciences. It was also supported by MEXT, which together with JST support has dramatically increased the level of awareness about the Geography Olympiad. This has led people involved in geography and geography education from across the country to become members of the executive committee. They help set up exam centers and request local teachers to publicize the competition, as well as encourage their own students to take the exams.

Exam takers come from across Japan, from Hokkaido to Okinawa. The national attention given to the Geography Olympiad has contributed greatly to strengthening ties between geography education supporters across the country.

The exams used in the championship selection process consist of two parts, a multimedia test in the first round and written response test in the second round. Table 13.2 summarizes characteristics of the two parts.

After the championship competition, both parts are scored, data are aggregated, and a total score calculated. Prize winners are decided from the top scores for gold, silver, and bronze medals. From the gold medal winners, those with the highest total scores and within the top four places in the English part of the exam are chosen to represent Japan at the International Geography Olympiad. The awards ceremony is in late March at the spring AJG general conference, with many association members in attendance. Contestants are officially recognized as the representatives for Japan after award certificates and supplementary prizes have been presented by the director of the association.

The international competition comprises of the two exams mentioned earlier and a fieldwork exam. In the latter, teams of four students with mixed nationalities perform a field survey, then compile the results and present them orally. To prepare Japanese contestants for the fieldwork portion, geography education leaders gather the student representatives in mid-June for a 2-day workshop. There they receive practical guidance in field survey methods that include field observation and interviewing, collecting materials, and methods of analyzing results.

Table 13.2 Characteristics of the two exam parts

Type	First part	Second part
	Multimedia test	Written response test
Form	Fifty problems in a 50-minute timespan. Ten of the questions are in English.	Five major question problems during 120 min, and one of these appears in English.
Methods	Students are required to interpret geographical knowledge and concepts from photographs and charts that are projected onto a screen for a duration of 1 min.	Students are required to answer both the Japanese and English questions in written essay form.
	Students are required to match the given information against four possible answers for each question.	Students are required to use a variety of materials, such as maps and statistics, for a broad perspective of their abilities in thinking, making judgments, and expression, based on such knowledge and concepts as exploring the background context and causal factors, identifying social issues, and proposing solutions.

Also, experts and exchange students from the host country provide information on local geographic conditions, giving Japanese students deeper insight into the characteristics they will encounter.

Since 2011, the JST has taken on the role to administer the call for contestants in the Geography Olympiad, along with the other Science Olympiads in order to attract more exam takers for the Japanese championship. To ensure that administrative work proceeds efficiently, the Executive Committee was formed in 2012 to strengthen its business office system. Information about the competition is disseminated to all high schools in the country and teachers responsible for geography in their schools are notified, with attention paid to the Super Science High Schools (SSH) designated by MEXT. These strategies have resulted in a rapid increase in the number of exam takers, a contributing factor to the revitalization of geography education.

The exams are written at a high level of difficulty, and English ability is necessary for participation in the international competition. This restricts contestants in advanced schools (e.g., Super Science High Schools), as a way to prevent a concentration of competitors with elite geography opportunities. To broaden the pool of potential contestants and to foster equal opportunity for students in all schools settings, the Executive Committee has changed the questions so that 80 % are in Japanese. Additional mechanisms are needed to attract more contestants. Promotion of the Geography Olympiad is one way to revitalize geography education in Japan, and is an opportunity for the exam takers to significantly upgrade their geography skills.

13.3.2 Exhibition of Children's Environmental Maps

The Exhibition of Children's Environmental Maps ("Maps of Our Surrounding Environment") is an event put on by the SEME, and is based in Hokkaido. Many geography-related research organizations (e.g., AJG), research institutes (e.g., the Geospatial Information Authority of Japan (GSI) and National Institute for Environmental Studies (NIES)), local governments and education committees, and map-based enterprises (e.g., publishers and mass media) support or encourage this event. The children's maps are submitted from all over the country and even from overseas, reaching about 1,500 submissions annually. Similar exhibitions are also held in other areas of the country (Masuda 2008). However, in those cases, map entries are limited to the local area. There is no other exhibition that receives submissions from both all of Japan and abroad equally. The Children's Environmental Map Contest is the largest map exhibition of any kind in the country (Himiyama 2012).

Since it was first held in 1991, the Children's Environmental Map Contest has been held annually in late October, and will have been held for the 23rd time in 2013. The objective of the exhibition is to foster children's interest and concern for community problems through map making. At the same time, children have the chance to develop talents that can contribute to improving environmental harmony in the local region.

Submissions come primarily from individual schools, most of which include the map creation process as part of study units on the local area or study units on maps. All maps from both Japan and other countries are judged rigorously by the Executive Committee. The maps are to depict children's observations of their environment. The theme of 2013 was "Hazard prevention" but children could also choose to map a theme of their choice. Generally, many maps depict skillful creations that display geographical patterns and contemporary issues.

The competition rules stipulate to "Make a map of the environment close to you that shows the things you surveyed, observed, and thought about". Children's creativity is valued and left up to the map makers. Maps that do not fit a traditional map type but rather show a high degree of originality are usually highly evaluated.

The process of map making includes the following steps: (1) Decide on the map theme and the limits of the area to be surveyed; (2) conduct diligent surveys and observations in the field; (3) organize and map the survey data; (4) analyze and interpret patterns in the finished maps; and (5) communicate the conclusions. The goal of the Children's Environmental Map Exhibition is to nurture geography skills in area surveys.

The new National Curriculum Standards firmly implements the fundamentals of exploratory and language activities and emphasizes these as pillars of learning. This supports geography education's position to provide students with opportunities to learn mapping and area survey skills, which are practices related to problem-solving abilities. In the same way as the Geography Olympiad, the Exhibition Children's Environmental Map Contest reinforces scholastic abilities called for in the new National Curriculum Standards.

13.4 Examples of Recent Outstanding Social Action Programs: In-service Training of Teachers

13.4.1 *Efforts by AJG-CGE*

Although not regularly scheduled, the AJG-CGE has been holding training sessions for elementary and junior high school teachers since 2007. These in-service training sessions are organized along themes that use geography skills such as “Methods for Using Atlases with Literary Works” and “Constructing Thematic Maps and Distribution Maps with Mapping Software.” This service is necessary because many teachers licensed to teach geography lack these disciplinary skills (Akimoto et al. 2010). For example, teachers in elementary and junior high schools are not required to major in geography at university. Particularly in the case of elementary school teachers who instruct all subjects, there are many for whom Social Studies is outside their area of expertise, let alone Geography.

Students in third and fourth year elementary school are expected, in their Social Studies class, to about their region at the level of cities, towns, villages, and prefectures, and geography skills of map reading and map making. Junior high school students take a geography class that includes mandatory activities such as surveying nearby surroundings, an exercise that applies skills unique to geography (e.g., field observation, reading topographic maps, making thematic maps, and writing survey reports). However, as mentioned, most elementary and junior high school teachers have not majored in geography and have not necessarily systematically learned geography skills. For this reason, there are many cases in which instructors are unable to lead effective geographic lessons and field research of the local area.

In Japan, there is a tendency for curricula to emphasize knowledge of facts over knowledge of methods. As evidence, course content in geography skills is not systematically specified and, although the cognitive development of students is discussed at academic conferences and research meetings, it is rarely examined in the schools.

If during teachers’ training they learn about geography curricula that systematically outline how to instill geography skills, this could substitute for their gaps in geography knowledge. However, this is insufficient given the realities of students need to succeed in society. Teacher candidates are so poorly prepared in geography that it further complicates the situation. For example, elementary pre-service teachers need only take two required credits in “instruction methods for subjects that are related to Social Studies” to qualify as a teacher. For junior high school teachers specializing in Social Studies, credits in general geography and regional geography, which are considered “courses related to the subject,” are required. But the content of these is broad, covering everything from history and civics to geography education. Since Geography has become an elective subject at the senior high school level, most of the teachers did not themselves take Geography when they were in senior high school, thus many of them are standing at the teacher’s podium with only the knowledge of a junior high school level of knowledge (Iwamoto 2006).

In that light, teachers' acquisition of geography skills is important and the in-service training sessions implemented by AJG-CGE are thus extremely significant. Participating teachers are very appreciative and provide feedback such as "I can use this in tomorrow's class." Plans for the future to tie together these training sessions with the teacher's license renewal courses offered at universities and prefectural education committees would help revitalize geography instruction in the classroom, and create opportunities for many teachers to participate in the training.

13.4.2 In-service Training of Teachers Implemented by Other Associations

The HGSJ established a Geography Education Research Sub-group in 2005, and somewhat belatedly has become involved organizationally in the revitalization of geography education. Their Geography Education Summer Training Sessions have become one of the major cornerstones of the sub-group's activities. These have been held every year since 2005 during the schools' summer vacation and are designed for non-members of the association, such as elementary, junior high and senior high school teachers and university students who are planning to become teachers. The first training session was held in August 2005 in Kyoto's Tanabe City Community Hall and the surrounding area, with an overall theme of "Turning the Example of the Local Area into Teaching Material." During the morning, field trips were held, and in the afternoons lectures and reports on examples of practice in geography education were given (Kobashi 2007). Until 2011, the sessions were held at different venues across the prefectures but primarily in the Kinki District. The sessions each attracted about 50 participants annually (75 at maximum).

13.5 Conclusion and Remaining Issues

In this chapter, the authors have described a range of formal and informal geography education outreach activities. These include the education activities of the AJG, along with an overview of their social action programs since the 1980s, described synopsis of the Geography Olympiad Japan Championship, the Children's Environmental Map Contest, and in-service training sessions for teachers. These are outstanding recent examples of social action programs related to geography education, and their implementation process, results, and issues that have been discussed. A brief overview of geography education efforts from other academic associations such as the HGSJ is also presented for comparison purposes.

Some have considered geography education at the senior high school level to be in a precarious state. The reduction in geography enrollments, geography as an elective rather than compulsory course in senior high school, and the fact that it is no longer one of the university entrance examination subjects, have all contributed

to the decline of geography education. This situation has also been affected by political debates in the education committees of Kanagawa Prefecture, Yokohama City, and Tokyo Metropolitan district, who have pushed for a policy making Japanese History a compulsory subject in high school, to foster Japanese who can live as major actors within international society. As a result, high school students in these cities and prefectures have been robbed of the opportunity to take geography as an elective, owing to a lack of class hours. This results in student populations who will not have a balanced education, one that focuses more on history than geography.

Globalization makes geography an indispensable subject, especially the skills and perspectives to evaluate the past, focus on the present, and to envision the future. In order to instill these abilities, students need to be aware of the world in both its temporal and spatial dimensions (Terao 2008), the *raison d'être* of senior high school geography and history subjects. We believe that Geography is in a perilous position because it is equated with simply learning place names, and the field does not do more to educate the public of geography's connection to society. As long as geography education's social contributions are visible, the future of geography education seems slim.

From the viewpoint of forming an image of the world, responding to various contemporary issues, and contributing to active participation in society, the role of geography education in the new National Curriculum Standards clearly defines these goals. That is to say, as the various contemporary issues (e.g., of the environment and development, disasters and disaster prevention, ethnicity and religion, resources and energy, population and food supply, and others) continue to intensify across wide areas of the world from local to global scales, the educational world collectively demands policies of response and social contribution from geography education.

In what ways will students apply their geography skills and abilities to solve local, national, and global issues? How should they create a better society for the future, given the increasing complex world? What is now being asked of geography education is that it nurtures citizens who will have the competencies to participate in society as major actors.

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