

# On Commemorating the History of the Department of Geography

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## Abstract

In February of 2005, the Department of Geography at Komazawa University held a ceremony and published a book in commemoration of its seventy-fifth anniversary. This paper regards this project as an example of the “commemoration” of the geographical organization, and observes it with special reference to the money and persons concerned. It is pointed out that the financial support from the University was of much help for the success of the project, and the participation rate of the graduates who are at present in their sixties and seventies was much higher. By comparing these cases, differences among universities and their characteristics can be clarified.

## I. Introduction

The Department of Geography at Komazawa University was established in April of 1929, and 2004 was the seventy-fifth anniversary year. In order to celebrate it, the Department held a commemorative ceremony and published a commemorative book in February of 2005. The author was also involved in this project as one of the present teachers. Based on this experience, this paper gives some consideration to the “commemoration” of the history of the department of geography.

## II. Study of “commemoration” in geography

It is well known that “commemoration” and “memory” have popularly been discussed in geography as well as other disciplines such as history. What kind of discussion about “commemoration” and “memory” is geographical? In the author’s opinion, firstly, what is commemorated and what is memorized are events and history in specific places and areas, that is, the discussion sticks to specific places and areas. We can say this is a geographical argument. Secondly, what was built to commemorate something and to embody some memory appears as a concrete landscape like a monument, commemorative facilities and commemorative tree-planting. This is also geographi-

cal. The discussion about “commemoration” and “memory” can be regarded as geographical, if it is related to at least one of these two points.

Meanwhile, in case the discussion has nothing to do with specific places and areas nor a concrete landscape, it is in general not geographical. For example, to commemorate the history of a company, an association and a school or the history of an individual person is not to commemorate the history of the place where the organization has been located nor the person has lived. Commemoration of such things as a legal system is not much related to specific places and areas. There are also various non-geographical ways of celebration besides building a landscape, like publishing a commemorative book, making a memento (coin, stamp, ticket, card, etc.), and holding a commemorative event.

However, to commemorate a geographical organization such as a department and an association, an individual person engaged in geography like a researcher, and a legal system related to geography is expected to be a study subject of geography, whatever the way of celebration is.

In fact, there have been quite a few commemorative events in Japanese geographical circles. Since many of the current geographical societies were established after the Second World War, they celebrated their fiftieth anniversary in recent years. For example, The Human Geographical Society of Japan published a book on its history in 1998 in commemoration of the fiftieth anniver-

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sary. The Association of Historical Geographers in Japan, which was established in 1958, also plans an event and a book to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary.

In addition to the commemoration of a geographical society, we often see a commemorative event and book when a geography professor retires from the university and when a geography department celebrates its anniversary. The case picked up in this paper, that is, the commemoration project of the Department of Geography at Komazawa University, can be situated in this way in the discussion about “commemoration” and “memory.”

### III. Commemoration project of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Department of Geography at Komazawa University

Commemoration project of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Department of Geography at Komazawa University has two main contents; one is the publication of the commemorative book, and the other is a series of commemorative events composed of a commemorative ceremony, a commemorative lecture and a celebration party. The commemorative book (Fig. 1) consists of four chapters on general history of the Department, detailed discussion about the history, materials concerning the Department and many short essays on memories of university days by retired

teachers and graduates. A CD-ROM containing old pictures and titles of graduation essays is attached. Since the graduates from the Department number more than six thousand, it is impossible to publish in a paper book all of the titles of their graduation essays in the light of cost. The book has 304 pages in all and is a little bulky. In addition to the book, we produced a bag with the name “Komazawa Geography, 2004, 75th Anniversary” (Fig. 2).

Commemorative events were held on Saturday, February 19, 2005. At Komazawa University the commemorative ceremony started at two o'clock in the afternoon, followed by the commemorative lecture by a senior Professor Nakamura entitled “Ideas from maps,” which was also his last lecture at Komazawa University before retirement in March. On an upper floor of the ceremony hall, photos of past classes and teachers were exhibited. The celebration party was held in the evening in a hotel a little away from the University. More than 300 graduates and past teachers were supposed to participate in the ceremony or the party, besides the present teachers and the invited University authorities.

Commemorative books and bags were distributed at the reception desk at the ceremony hall. Later they were also sent to the persons who had wanted the book and paid for it, but could not attend the events. In fact, the number of those persons was not small. Since the commemorative

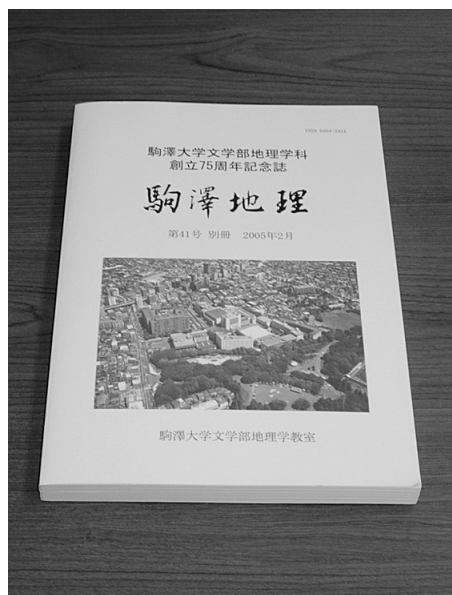


Fig. 1. The commemorative book



Fig. 2. The commemorative bag

book appeared as a supplement of the journal of our Department, "Komazawa Journal of Geography," they were sent to many universities and research institutions, too.

However, the author wonders which subdiscipline these studies belong to. They may be historical geography or history of geography or some other new realms, although he does not stick to a specific division.

#### IV. Discussion

This paper should not come to the conclusion that the commemoration project was contributed to the solidification of the Department, or it created the "history" by publishing the commemorative book, as is often the case with these studies. Instead, it gives consideration to practical aspects of the project. In other words, it is focused upon the money and persons concerned. It firstly examines who funded and on what the funds were spent, and secondly who carried out the commemoration project.

According to the report on final accounts, about half of the income was from the participants who paid for the celebration party and the commemorative book, and about half was a subsidy from the University. On the other hand, nearly half of the expenditure was occupied by the costs for holding the celebration party and secondly by the costs for printing of the commemorative book. With only the income from the participants, it was impossible to cover all the expenses, and it can be pointed out that the financial support from the University was of much help for the accomplishment of the project. Without the support, we would have been forced to collect more money, or to reduce the scale of the party and the book. However, it is because we had so far no commemoration project that we could get such much financial support from the University. We will not be able to expect a similar support, when the next commemorative events are planned in the near future. Concerning the concrete amount of money, we are obliged to stop referring to more details than the total sum of the income and expenditure, about 60 thousand dollars.

Secondly, persons who carried out the commemorative project are to be observed. It was the current full-time faculty members at the Department of Geography especially who graduated from Komazawa University that were more active. The Committee for the Commemoration

Project was organized and composed of seven members designated among the thirteen faculty members. Almost all of the Committee members were graduates from Komazawa University, except for the chairperson, Professor Koike who had been in office for the longest time. Decisions in the Committee were reported and approved in the faculty meeting.

The preparation for the commemorative events was made mainly by the members of the Committee, but the task of writing the manuscript for the commemorative book was shared by all of the faculty members. We also asked graduate students and undergraduate students for help. In the meantime, graduates did not directly participate in the planning and preparation, except for many photos and short essays on memories of university days which we asked them for. One reason is that there is now no alumni association of the Department, which can speak for the graduates, although there exists the University alumni association.

Which generations of the graduates participated more? When we count the number of the participants in the commemorative events by graduation year, we find graduates of the 1960s participated more than any other and secondly of the 1970s (Fig. 3). However, since the number of the graduates rapidly increased after the second half of the 1960s, and over 100 students have graduated from the Department every year until now, the share of the participants in all the graduates also needs to be observed. Whereas the average participation rate of all the generations is 4.6%, graduates of the 1950s and 1960s, in other words, graduates who are at present in their sixties and seventies amount to about 15%, by far the highest rate (Fig. 4).

One reason why these generations participated much more is that they have sufficient time after retirement. Other possible explanations are as follows:

1. Many graduates in these years had been engaged in jobs related to geography, like schoolteacher, after graduation, so that they may have been concerned about the events in the Department of Geography.
2. When the ratio of students who go on to a university was low, those generations might have identified themselves strongly with their university.
3. When the student quota of a department was small, those generations might have been more conscious of the events in the department.

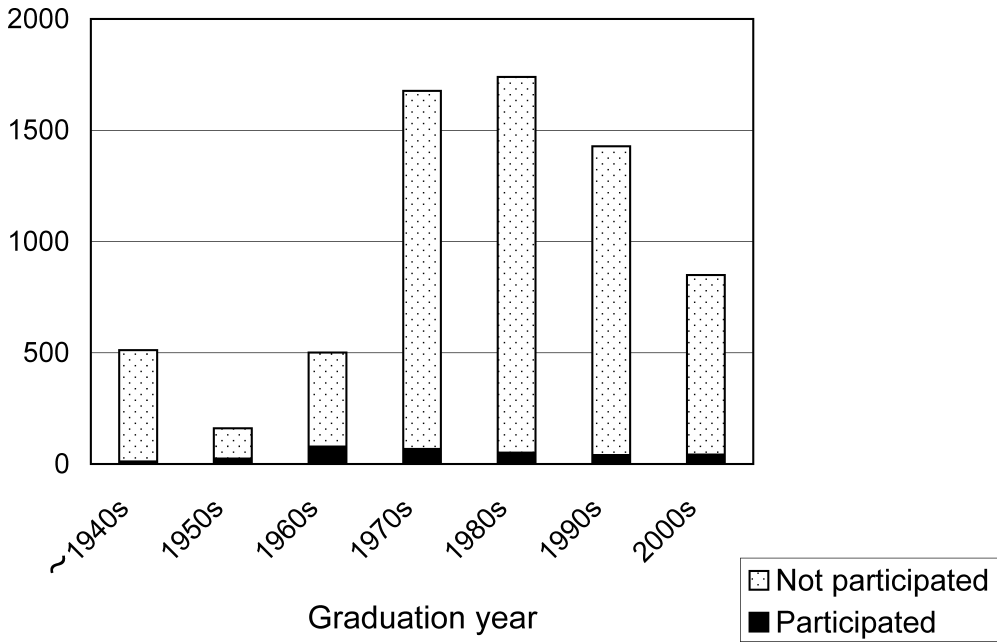


Fig. 3. Participation in the commemorative events

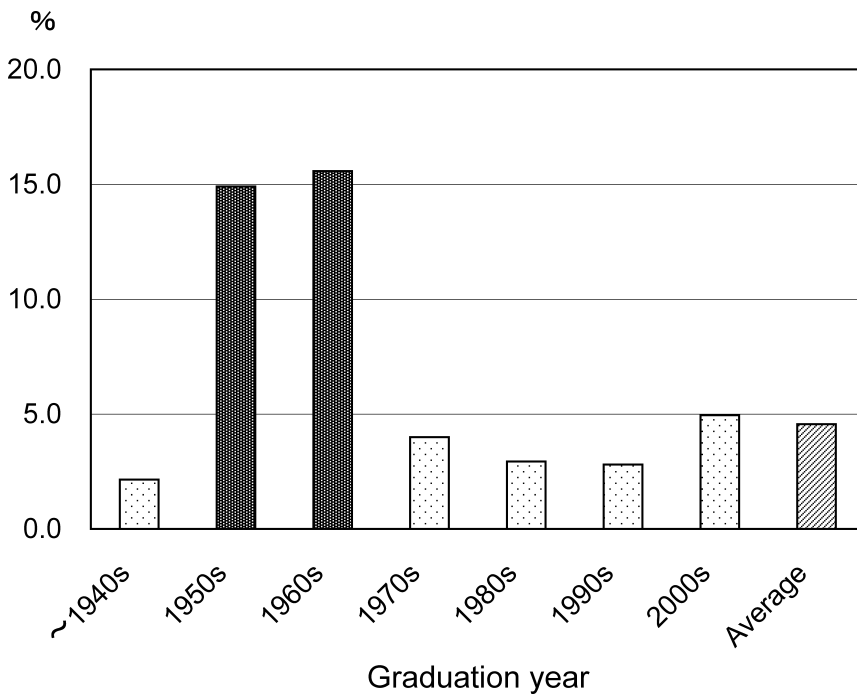


Fig. 4. Participation rates in the commemorative events

If these latter reasons happen to be true, we cannot expect so many participants when we hold a similar event in the future, since in recent years there have been very many students in the Geography Department but very few graduates who become teachers.

## V. Concluding remarks

This paper situated the commemoration project of the Department of Geography at Komazawa University as an example of the “commemoration” of the geographical organization, and discussed it with special reference to the money and persons concerned. It is pointed out that the financial support from the University was of much help and the participation rate of the graduates who are at present in their sixties and seventies was much higher.

The cases similar to the project picked up in this paper have been and will be found, besides Komazawa University. Although it may be difficult for outsiders to study them, because the

materials on money and the participants are in general not published, there must be some difference among universities. By accumulating these case studies, some characteristics can be clarified. The author wishes this article would contribute to the development of the discussion of “commemoration” in geography.

## Note

This paper was read at the 13th International Conference of Historical Geographers held in Hamburg in August of 2006. The Japanese version was published as Oda (2006).

## Reference

- Oda, M. 2006. Chirigakka no rekishi o kinen suru koto [On Commemorating the History of the Department of Geography]. *Komazawa chiri* [Komazawa Journal of Geography], 42: 5–10. (in Japanese)