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Project Title: Geopolitics and Geopieties in Twentieth Century Nagano

Institution: Stanford University

Project Director: Karen Wigen

Grant Program: Fellowships for Advanced Social Science Research on Japan

Native Places, Global Times: Geopolitics and Geopieties in Twentieth Century Nagano

Karen Wigen

Students of Japanese culture have long lavished attention on the folkways and dialects that differentiate one valley from another across the Japanese archipelago. Yet because modern Japanese regionalism has seldom spoken in a separatist idiom, the copious discourses spun about local difference have been largely ignored by social historians. In this project, I argue that such discourses matter more than we have suspected. Focusing on the mountainous prefecture of Nagano (formerly Shinano Province), whose identity has been the object of voluminous research and voluble debate since the 1890s, I show that Japanese regional rhetoric has in fact operated in a political as well as a cultural register throughout the twentieth century, changing over time in ways that clearly reflect both the expanding commercial entanglements of local elites and the evolving geopolitical ambitions of the Japanese state.

The book that I intend to complete during my fellowship year will map seven successive articulations of Nagano identity onto a comparable sequence of distinctive moments in the prefecture's national and global positioning. It opens in the 1890s, a period of patriotic fervor and industrial revolution, when Nagano silk played a pivotal role in underwriting the Sino-Japanese War. It was at this juncture that geographical songs and primers combined to create the first modern iteration of the region's identity.

These homely but potent genres conveyed a didactic message to local children: that their homeland's mountainous environment had fostered a heritage of industriousness and innovation, predisposing them to work hard and succeed in a modernizing Japan.

A strikingly different message was elaborated during the Taisho period (1912-1925), when a new genre (the tourist guidebook) appealed to a new audience (urban youth) for a new purpose (to promote recreational mountain climbing). Christening the area "the Japanese Alps," foreigners helped glamorize a growing leisure industry that turned remote villages into booming resort towns. The release of the first 1:50,000 topographic maps by the Japanese Geological Survey facilitated the transformation, marking a new stage in the appropriation of scientific geographical knowledge for commercial ends. By the mid 1920s, however, recreational imagery receded in the face of a deepening rural recession. In its place arose a more sober wave of native-place studies, documenting the know-how of local farmers both as a pragmatic and economic reconstruction and as a moral language in which to critique run-away capitalism. The second and third chapters will analyze these disparate interwar developments, exposing in the process a growing tension between the conservative native-studies establishment and mavericks who championed a more critical geographical pedagogy.

The coming of war eventually silenced progressive voices, recasting regional imagery—and local research—in the service of empire. Chapter four analyzes the chauvinistic worldview of the wartime geography classroom in Shinano. Teachers' manuals and textbooks reveal that native-place studies became central to elementary education in the 1930s, even as Asian geography received increasingly sophisticated coverage in the upper grades. What connected these two subjects was a consistent colonialist vision. At a time when continental conquest was upheld as Japan's destiny, the mountains of Shinano were glorified as the birthplace (and training ground) of the warlike Yamato spirit.

With Japan's defeat in 1945, this vision lay in ruins. Native-place scholars, discredited by their collaboration with the wartime regime, surrendered the field to practitioners of a putatively dispassionate provincial history (*chihoshi*). Rather than asking 'what makes our homeland unique,' professional scholars trained in the elite national universities now asked, 'how has this region borne out national trends?' Chapter five will examine the resultant disciplining of regionalism through the 1950s and '60s, when emotional expressions of geopiety were subordinated to rational geo-historical science. Yet by the early 1970s, as a series of economic shocks jolted Japanese into a new era of nationalism, the pendulum swung yet again. Affluent urbanites began turning to the hinterlands in search of authenticity, and local boosters—heralding an 'age of the provinces'—began marketing the charms of Shinano's landscape once again. The sixth chapter traces the remaking of regional identity during the ensuing native-studies revival, drawing on such sources as planning documents, travel guides, and the avalanche of local literature released by the region's small presses.

Since the 1980s, the age of the provinces has steadily given way to the slogan of 'internationalization.' Asian trade and geopolitics loom ever larger on the national horizon, just as Asian workers are increasingly visible in the domestic landscape. Yet far from eclipsing interest in the local, globalization has paradoxically infused regionalism with a new significance. In the present day, Shinano is being actively reinvented yet again, this time as a cosmopolitan crossroads: one that has purportedly been open to outside influences for centuries, immersed in world commerce since Meiji, and a natural leader for the internationalist era to come. A final chapter will examine this latest iteration of regional rhetoric, encoded both in the recent Nagano Olympics and in the lavish new Nagano Prefectural History Museum.

CONTRIBUTION

In broadest terms, *Native Places, Global Times* advances three arguments. First, and most fundamentally, I contend that chorographic works—i.e., studies of regions—comprise an archive worth investigating. From textbooks and tourguides to maps and museums, meso-level places have been profusely documented, dissected, and displayed in twentieth-century Japan. For a variety of reasons, in a host of contexts, regional discourse has clearly struck a chord with modern Japanese. The countryside has served imaginatively, as a site on which to project hopes and fears about the country's rapid modernization, but also instrumentally, as a platform from which to promote contending values and visions of social life. As a result, while Japanese regions have rarely aroused secessionist sentiments, they have attracted considerable emotional and intellectual investments of other kinds. This study argues above all that those investments merit our close attention.

Its second contention is that, while voluble and valuable, local discourse is also disparate and diffuse. One reason chorography as a category eludes scholarly scrutiny is that it does not constitute a unified field or object of study, amenable to apprehension from a single vantage point. On the contrary, conversations about Nagano have been conducted in different places, through different media, by people using different vocabularies to target different constituencies. Broadly speaking, I discern two dominant discursive communities concerned with Nagano. One group speaks from within, in the language of native place, or *kyodo*. The other approaches Nagano from without, through the trope of landscape, or *fukei*. Considerable bodies of writing have grown up around each of these key words; the former tends to focus on an emotionally resonant place, often deploying the older geographic term Shinano, while the latter focuses on a congeries of spectacular landscapes, known collectively as the Japanese Alps. In practice,

native-place and landscape are not mutually exclusive vocabularies. Rather, the two have overlapped and intersected, as well as competed. It is this intersection, I argue, that has given shape to modern Nagano, not only in the Japanese imaginary but in the global economy as well.

Finally, my third contention has to do with the profoundly pedagogical nature of the chorographic archive as a whole. What unites these otherwise disparate visions of Nagano, I argue, is the urge to edify. To be sure, the content of the message has varied enormously over time. But what Shel Garon calls “moral suasion” pervades this literature. Sometimes the pedagogic intent is obvious, as when geography textbooks boast of the military achievements of Nagano’s native sons to nurture pride in the homeland. But even where it is not so obvious, the urge to enlighten is rarely far from the surface; as I argue in a recent article, even alpine travel books manifest a subtle didactic streak. In a word, the language of chorography in twentieth-century Japan is one of edification and uplift, variously understood. What makes those messages especially poignant is the faithfulness with which they track shifts in the prevailing winds of Japan’s national and international projects.

As this brief prospectus suggests, *Native Places, Global Times* engages several ongoing conversations in the humanities. At one level, it contributes to an interdisciplinary effort to decenter national narratives of modernity. Where others have focused on border zones or minority populations, I point to Japan’s heartland itself—it ‘internal periphery’—as another site where the modern has been locally engaged and produced. Relatedly, this project underscores the importance of place as a locus of identity formation. By exposing the ways national and hemispheric histories reverberate in provincial polemics, it reveals the multiplicity of geographical frameworks in which people live out their lives—and furthers the search for correspondingly sophisticated spatial vocabularies in which to speak about those lives. Finally, in the domain of methodology, my research makes a case for integrating the insights of cultural analysis with the concerns of traditional social history. For only by carefully mapping geographies of the imagination onto geographies of power, I believe, can we accurately interpret their ideological charge: a charge that derives precisely from the slippages between the discursive spaces that circulate in regional texts and the social spaces through which those texts circulate on the ground.

OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS and PLAN OF WORK

Introduction: Pedagogies of Place

1. Imagining Shinano in the Age of Didactic Historical Geography
2. Discovering the Japanese Alps: Landscapes of Taisho Tourism
3. Privileging Local Knowledge: The Prewar Native-Studies Movement
4. In the Service of Empire: The Worldview of the Wartime Geography Classroom
5. Disciplining the Native: The Rise of Regional Science
6. Nostalgia in a New Key: The Native-Studies Revival
7. Epilogue: Cosmopolitan Shinano in a Global Age

Three of the seven chapters (1, 2, & 3) will be adapted from previously published articles; two others (4 & 5) have been sketched out in the form of talks, and will be fleshed out before the fellowship term begins. My intention is to use the grant period to draft the last two chapters (6 & 7), polish the remainder, and craft a new introduction for the book as a whole. All necessary sources have been acquired on previous research trips to Japan.

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