National Development Policy and Regional–Community Studies in a Postwar Japanese Context

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Summary

Japan has often been referred to as a developmentalist country symbolized by government-led and consecutive national plans. Reacting to this reality, initial members of JARCS carried out research to investigate the side effects of huge development projects, guided by theories and methods referred to as "structural analysis." The first part of the present paper describes the main research results produced by several JARCS schools. As the Japanese economy entered into a mature phase at the end of the twentieth century, realities on communities became unclear and variegated. In attempting to tackle this difficulty, JARCS tried to set an annual theme to illustrate these rapidly changing realities, accompanied by hope for post-developmentalist philosophies and programs such as endogenous development (*machizukuri*). However, after the Great East Japan earthquake of 2011, another power, described by some JARCS members as "disaster capitalism," entered the localities. Many communities, especially those in the hinterlands, are currently struggling with this new reality, which needs to be revised and reorganized using JARCS theories and practice.

1. Introduction

"National development" or "regional development" sounds too general for community studies scholars, at least outside of Japan. However, in the context of post-WWII Japan, these terms carried a strong theoretical burden, both academically and politically. This policy was a secret key to the Liberal Democratic Party's long reign to nourish loyal voters in both urban and rural areas.

Japan has often been characterized as a "developmental," "developmentalist," or sometimes "construction-oriented" country heavily dependent on public works (Saito 2012; Williams 2014). This tendency can be easily understood from a comparative viewpoint when you look the amount of gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) in general government (see **Figure 1**). Japanese government investment in GFCF surpasses that of the private sector, which is in contrast to the other OECD countries, especially during the twentieth century.

Figure 1. Gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) of the general government, per total GFCF in five OECD countries
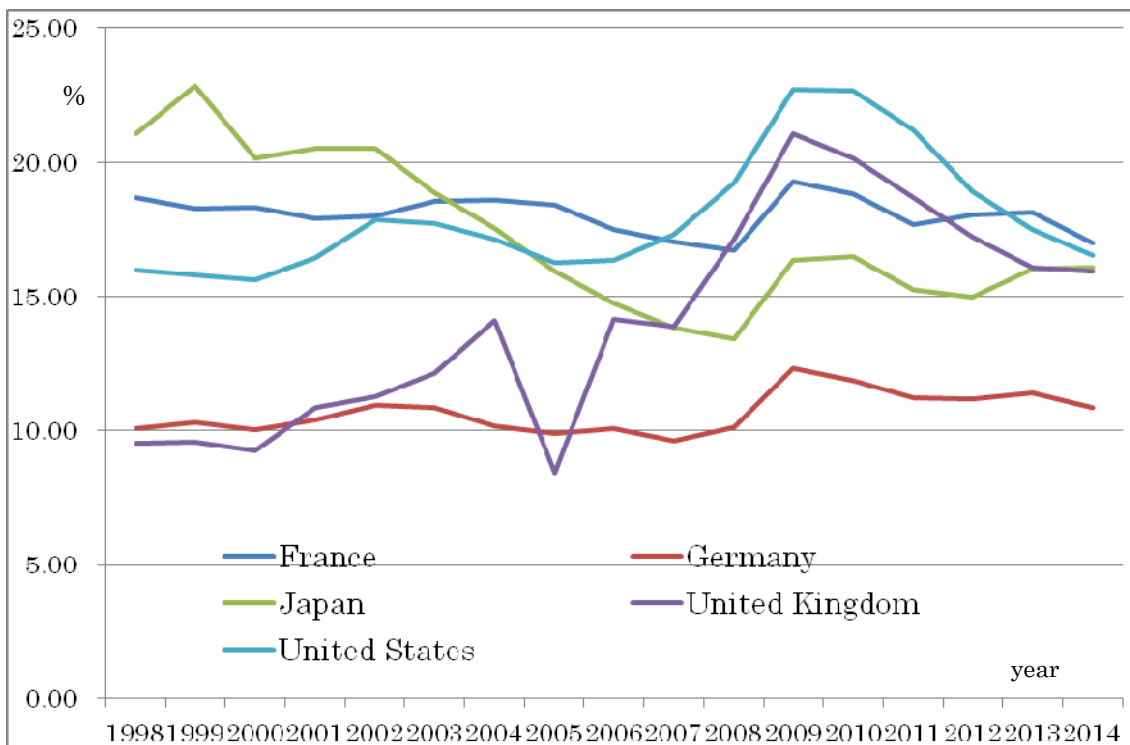
Source: OECD National Accounts website

(http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=SNA_TABLE1)

There has long been debate regarding whether Japan should be called a developmentalist state. Besides, if deemed to be developmentalist, other questions emerge, such as when was this structure built and what kind of effects has it brought about? To uncover the unique historical path of postwar Japan and entailing difficulties that Japanese community scholars had to face,

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let us examine these questions in the following sections, citing research conducted by JARCS members.

2. Comprehensive National Development Plans (CNDP) and Critical Analysis by JARCS Members

In postwar Japanese history, the year 1960 certainly marks an epoch when the central government launched consecutive investment strategies throughout the islands. These strategies were referred to as "Comprehensive National Development Plans" (CNDP), which brought fundamental change to every corner of the local landscape, including the political structures of the hinterlands and their villagers (see **Table 1**). Although CNDP were supported by voters in the hopes of catching up with the more prosperous cities in the nation (referred to as the "Tokaido Belt," which stretched from Tokyo to Kita-Kyushu), in reality, they acted as camouflage against the fact that the hinterlands will always lag behind under the ruthless logic of capitalism (Fukutake 1965). From our point of view, CNDP generated serious side effects, such as *kogai* (harm to the environment and human health), the destruction of local communal ties, and tacit increases in the divide between urban areas and the hinterlands.

Table 1. Comprehensive National Development Plans (CNDP)

Plan	Year	Prime Minister	Description
1st CNDP	1962	Hayato Ikeda	Concentrated on investment in coastal industrial cities, which are suitable locations for heavy and chemical industries and power plants.
New (2nd) CNDP	1969	Eisaku Sato	Hinterlands such as Tomakomai, Mutsu, Akita, Shibushi were slated for development as new industrial areas, but this was in vain; visions for bullet trains and expressway networks throughout Japan.
3rd CNDP	1977	Masayoshi	"Vision for residential areas" aimed for local core

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		Ohira	cities. Also, a "techno-polis" vision aimed at investment for advanced information networks was annexed later.
4th CNDP	1987	Yasuhiro Nakasone	Focused on Tokyo redevelopment with private investment. The "resort vision" that triggered the "bubble economy" in the 1980s was annexed later.
5th CNDP	1998	Ryutaro Hashimoto	Titled as "Grand Design for the 21st Century" without concrete investment plans.
"Grand Design 2050"	2014	Shinzo Abe	Abandoned conventional spatial Keynesianism. Concentrating on national investment in "mega-regions" of Tokyo, Nagoya, and Osaka. This is discussed in **Section 5**.

Continuing debate and research on this issue was a driving force behind the establishment of JARCS in 1975. Urban and rural sociologists, who gathered under the banner of this new academic society, have tried to describe an overall picture of these distorted regional developments. Many monographs have been published, many surveys performed, and several research teams forged, as I describe in **Section 3**. Certainly, an empirical research spirit has been the *reason d'être* of JARCS, following the tradition of prewar rural and community research by Kizaemon Ariga, Eitaro Suzuki, and other great founders of Japanese sociology (for more information on these founders, please refer to Hasumi 2013).

Regarding the main content of this paper, I introduce outstanding research findings by several teams of scholars who criticized the side effects of developmentalism and advocated the realities of community-dwelling individuals. Before summarizing these sociological works, I comment on the unique terminology of "structural analysis" (*kozo-bunseki*) in the beginning of **Section 3**.

3. "Structural Analysis" to Uncover Life Structures in Communities

Representative academic works of JARCS members in the 1970–80s are often referenced under the term "structural analysis," which might be confusing and even misleading; this means uncovering the life structures of ordinary people built in communities and in daily work patterns. The sudden advent of huge development plans in urban and regional communities, triggered by CNDP described in **Section 1**, caused malfunctions in peoples' life structures, including the destruction of community ties. "Structural analysis" unveiled the potential of people to protest against the power of policy and capitalism, to testify for their own life rhythms, and to persuade policymakers of the side effects of developmentalism that takes place without regard to the everyday things in which people find value.

Here I move on to summarize respected works by initial JARCS members.

3.1. University of Tokyo group led by Fukutake, Hasumi, and Nitagai

Tadashi Fukutake (1917–1989) was a star in the social sciences of post-WWII Japan, leading the modernization and democratization of not only academia, but also Japanese society as a whole. Through his research on land liberation in the aftermath of WWII, he showed interest in the democratization of rural Japanese communities through policy channels. Guided by this orientation, he enthusiastically carried out field work in rural communities in the 1950–60s along with students he was supervising (see **Table 2**). These postgraduate students became active scholars who would go on to lead JARCS in the subsequent 10–30 years.

Table 2. Major research led by Tadashi Fukutake after 1945

Year	Research Field
1946	Shimo-kawazoe Village, Akita; Shio Town, Ishikawa; Shimokura Village, Okayama; Kiyotaki Village, Miyagi; Niwase Town, Okayama

1947	Sakura Town, Chiba; Ujiie Town, Tochigi; Tajima Town, Fukushima; Ota Village, Iwate
1948	Ota Village; Sakura Town
1949	Kuga Village, Kyoto; Konan Village, Nagano
1950	Fuse City, Osaka; Komatsu Village, Ibaraki; Nishiyama Village, Okayama; Hikinai Village, Akita [Fukutake 1954a]
1951	Mio Village, Wakayama; Koise Village, Ibaraki
1953	Nishi-shioda Village, Nagano; Asagami Village, Yamanashi; Shimo-ani Village, Akita; Ukita Village, Okayama [Fukutake 1954b]
1954	Oizumi Village, Yamagata; Hitachi City and Annaka Town, Gunma; Konan Village, Nagano; Okamata Village, Yamanashi
1955	Okamata Village, Yamanashi; Masuho Village, Chiba
1956	Sakuma Dam [Nihon Jimbun Kagakukai 1958]; Okamata Village; Kosei Town, Shizuoka
1957	Kosei Town; Itoigawa City, Niigata [Sato 1961]
1958	Itoigawa City; Kizaki Village, Niigata
1959	Oizumi Village, Yamagata; Kizaki Village; Ujiie Town, Tochigi
1960	Sakata City, Yamagata; Fukuroi City, Shizuoka
1964	Tendo City, Yamagata; Shinminato City, Toyama; Hachinohe City, Aomori; Oi Town, Kanagawa [Fukutake 1967]
1965	Kasagake Village, Gunma; Oi Town
1966	Oi Town
1967	Kanaura Town, Akita; Kamido Town, Okayama

1968	Kanaura Town
1969	Ogasawara Islands, Tokyo

Fukutake's field research and outputs had a stable pattern. His chapters are titled as "Politics of ~town," "Community Organizations of ~town," "Economies of ~town," and so on, and the writers of each theme were relatively fixed. Most of the research outputs are based on municipal administrative documents, which Fukutake efficiently drew out from city hall archives, sometimes informally (no formal public information access system was in place at that time). According to Kamon Nitagai, who was also trained by this team, these research outputs were finalized immediately after all interviews had been conducted, in the weeks when members of the research team were still staying in rural inns. This unknown but key aspect of the Fukutake team enabled them to publish their findings prolifically, but at the same time, it underlined criticism that the research contained few theories and shallow observations (Shimazaki 1979), as if "baking bread every morning."

Following Fukutake's achievements and retirement, Otohiko Hasumi and Kamon Nitagai became professors at The University of Tokyo, and the focus of research shifted to more urbanized areas. Considering Japan as a whole experienced very rapid urbanization in the high-growth era, it was an appropriate strategy, but naturally, they needed a larger group of researchers (for example, in "Tokyo Research 1992–94", which is mentioned later, some 20 JARCS members participated on the team).

Table 3. Research led by Hasumi and Nitagai

Year	Field	Output
1976–80	Fukuyama City, Hiroshima (1st)	Hasumi 1983
1986–89	Kobe City, Hyogo	Hasumi and Nitagai 1990
1989–90	Fukuyama City, Hiroshima (2nd)	Nitagai and Hasumi 1993
1992–94	Chiyoda, Setagaya, and Ota wards in	Nitagai 1995

	Tokyo Metropolis	

In addition, they introduced a more systemic method for surveys and interviews. For example, they introduced an analysis method to re-categorize financial papers by object municipality in order to better comprehend the structure and dynamics of public and private bodies, social movements, and communities. The conclusion of "Kobe Research" (Hasumi and Nitagai 1990) stressed a subcontracting trend from public administration to private and civic bodies, while the conclusion of "2nd Fukuyama" (Hasumi and Nitagai 1993) pointed out failures of the city's governance and proved that the government had arbitrarily selected subsiding civic bodies that they found favorable. Nitagai argued that this was a typical strategy in the low-development age that saw financial crises among numerous municipalities after the 1980s.

Nitagai carried out research focusing on Tokyo in the 1990s, but hindered by the complexity of the world's largest agglomeration, abandoned these efforts after a few years. This fact underlined the limits of "structural analysis" after Japan's urbanization process has completed. Nitagai never organized another big research team after this unrealized project, but instead focused on conducting intensive interviews with volunteers and NPOs after the Hanshin-Awaji earthquake in 1995.

3.2. Hokkaido University group led by Tetsuji Fuse

Tetsuji Fuse (1930–1994) was a Professor in the Faculty of Education, Hokkaido University. As shown in **Table 4**, Fuse developed his research field based on an examination of farmer's villages in Hokkaido and industrial cities in and outside of Hokkaido. Fuse named his method "institutional and structural analysis" or "analysis of social production and work/life history". He believed that "changes in life structures of peasants and the working class will result in structural social changes and the permeation of changing values within social institutions" (Fuse, Iwaki, and Kobayashi 1974). In his Marxist view, it was historical fate that changes in the life structures of ordinary people resulted in changes in the social structure. Here his research agenda was to uncover the logical connection from micro-level life structural change to macro-level social structural change.

Table 4. Main research performed by the "Hokkaido Life Sociology Study Group," which was led by Tetsuji Fuse

Year	Research Field
1972	Shibecha Town, Hokkaido [Fuse 1975]
1973	Yubari City, Hokkaido (Hokutan Heiwa coal mine) [Fuse 1982]
1974	Yubari City (Mitsubishi Minami-Yubari coal mine and high schools); Omuta City, Fukuoka (Mitsui-Miike coal mine)
1975	Daiki Town, Hokkaido [Fuse et al., 1977; 1977–78]; Yubari City (coal mine white-collar workers and trade unions)
1976	Yubari city (coal mine white-collar workers and trade unions); Nemuro City, Hokkaido
1977	Horonobe Town, Hokkaido [Fuse and Onai, 1979]; Kikusui and Tonden districts of Sapporo City; Yubari City (dismissed miners)
1978	Yubari City; Sapporo City (youth and mass media); Kyowa Town, Hokkaido (junior high school); Kitago Village in Miyazaki
1979	Sapporo City (mass media); Yuzawa City and Igawa Town, Akita [Fuse ed., 1985]
1981	Bifuka Town, Hokkaido [Fuse et al. 1988]; Yubari City; Sapporo City (disabled schools)
1982	Bifuka Town; Sapporo City (elementary schools); Yuzawa City; Maki Town, Niigata [Fuse ed., 1985]; Kurashiki City, Okayama [Fuse ed., 1992]
1983	Yubari City; Bifuka Town; Hikawa Town, Shimane; Kurashiki City
1984	Sapporo City (elementary schools); Kurashiki City
1985	Sapporo City (high schools); Kurashiki City

1986	Chitose City, Hokkaido; Eniwa City, Hokkaido (high schools); Kurashiki City
1987	Obihiro City, Hokkaido; Sapporo City (family, youth, media, and working class research)
1988	Obihiro City; Sapporo City (family research)
1989	Sumida Ward, Tokyo Metropolis [Fuse et al. 1990]
1990	Sapporo City (Disabled Peoples' Association); Kurashiki Town, Okayama
1991	Shihoro Town, Hokkaido
1992	Ishikari City, Hokkaido

Source: Hajime Kobayashi (2004)

Similar to the Fukutake School, the quantity and frequency of Fuse's fieldwork are appalling. A JARCS member said, "After Fuse walked away from the field, nothing remained, not even small weeds". His representative works should be research on Yubari (Fuse ed. 1982) and Kurashiki-Mizushima (Fuse ed. 1992). The characteristics of these works can be described as tracing and cataloging individual life structures in detail. For example, in Yubari, he sampled over 300 families from various classes in the city and repeated half-structured interviews to describe the life cycles and rhythms of everyday life. This attempt also enabled him to spotlight the cruel aspects of Japanese capitalism in the phase marked by greater accumulation of industrial capital. At the same time, these surveys suggested that Fuse's initial hypothesis might be wrong. Following traditional Marxist theory, Fuse assumed that the labor class's defensive acts in everyday life could change existing social structures and even lead to revolution. However, researchers on his team discovered that the labor class in both cities had instead adapted themselves to the realities of capitalism (Asano 1996). Regardless of this inconsistency, Fuse never gave up; instead, he planned to carry out comprehensive analyses of the Honshu megalopolis. However, after retiring from Hokkaido University in 1993, he died while preparing his Tokyo research.

Therefore, I conclude that Fuse's sociology had the following pitfalls. First, admitting that his analyses deeply cataloged individual life cycles, readers cannot understand how working-class

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lives are connected to formal institutions and organizations to change society. Second, he does not make it clear how "classes" are defined. As I argue, his research revealed that working-class people tend to adapt themselves to capitalism rather than persuading themselves toward communist revolution. This finding could have led him to reexamine *a priori* his use of the traditional Marxist concept of "class," but this never occurred to him, partially because of his rigid political stance. Third, all members of his research group were former students of his, so it could be said to have been homogeneous, and mutual criticism within the group was likely not very active.

3.3. Ethnographies based on a Marxist framework by the Kamatas
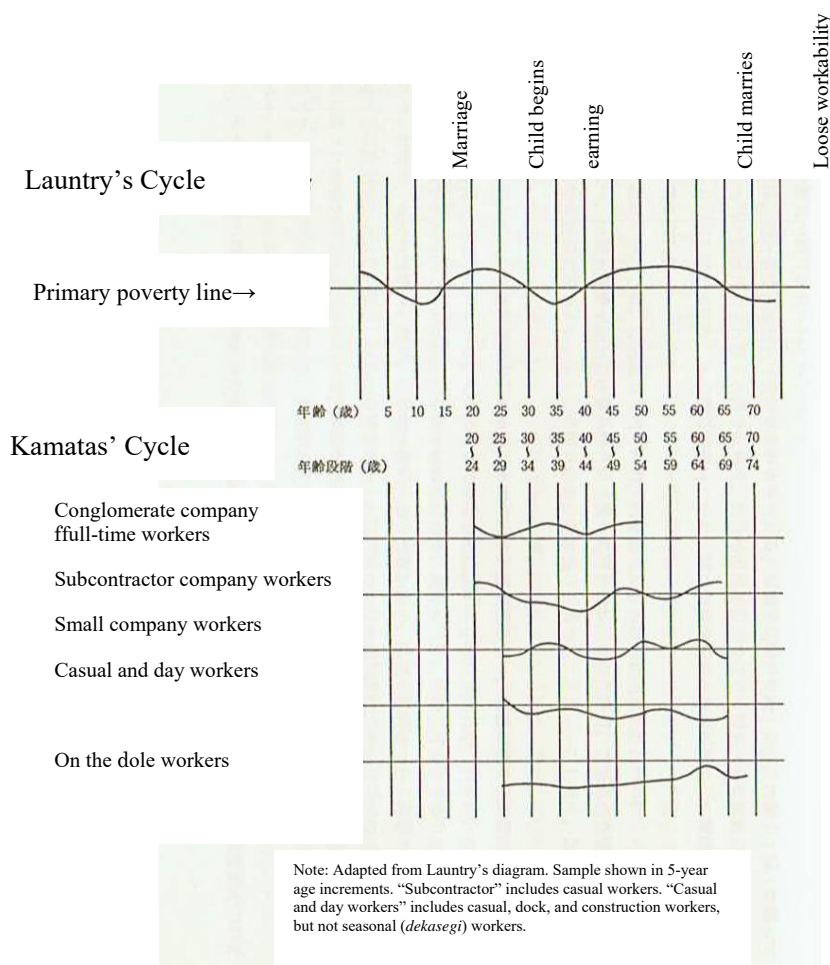
   Toshiko Kamata (wife) and Tetsuhiro Kamata (husband) are, so to say, the Japanese version of Erik Olin Wright. Their research unveiled the working-class world, which propped the well-known dual structure of the Japanese economy. Hokkaido was the perfect location to observe this exploited half of the Japanese workforce, because from the early twentieth century, modern capitals in the making—later conglomerates called *zaibatsu* by Mitsui, Mitsubishi, and Sumitomo—focused their eyes on primitive capital accumulation in the area. Big factories and sites for coal exploitation, shipbuilding, and iron manufacturing were installed, and workers were organized and segregated by status according to company hierarchy.

   "In Japan, the lifelong employment system is dominant. Then, job hopping beyond company borders is disabled and the labor market is divided into a two-story structure. No job analysis is carried out that allows the wage system to reflect skill order, which results in a wage divide according to company rank" (1983: 26). This rank is shown in a three-tier system: (A) conglomerate company full-time workers, (B) non-conglomerate company full-time workers, and (C) part-time and dayworkers. This three-tier system reflects residential area, life structure, household socioeconomic status, and family relationships. "As workers congregate into company-dwelling districts according to capital investment, the district becomes an extension of the working environment, and then even the private lives of workers can be controlled by the company. Accordingly, the company covers the cost of reproducing the workforce, which consists of housing construction, management fees, and annexed facilities fees…Although this

is the case, the residential areas for company-hired workers, subcontractors, dayworkers, and the unemployed, injured, and aged were abandoned; their workforce reproduction costs were covered by the municipality budget" (1983: 384). This divided ruling system can work as a countermeasure against trade union to prevent industrial action by workers. Although workers are united in contending with this reality, it is difficult to unite with other companies and classes. In addition, they want the next generation to ascend the class ladder by obtaining better education (Kamata and Kamata 1993).

The Kamatas wanted to preserve the possibility of workers' unity in spite of this divided ruling system. For this purpose, they observed the rhythm of life of working families with a sympathetic attitude, and this concept of life structure was strongly connected with the concept of class. Their view, which was inspired by Charles Launtry's historical poverty research, is clearly shown in **Figure 2**, which illustrates that when categorized according to class, most of the subcontracted and casual employees in Hokkaido remained under the poverty line.

Figure2. The Kamatas' Poverty Rise and Fall Cycle

Note: Adapted from Launtry's diagram. Sample shown in 5-year age increments. "Subcontractor" includes casual workers. "Casual and day workers" includes casual, dock, and construction workers, but not seasonal (*dekasegi*) workers.

Source: Kamata and Kamata 1983

3.4. Other analyses by initial JARCS members

Before moving on to the next section, I should mention the other JARCS members who forged research teams and performed comprehensive research in several fields, regardless of whether they were referred to as structural analysis. For example, Shoji and Motojima (1980) focused on Tomakomai City, Hokkaido, which was one of the key projects of the 2nd CNDP. Minoru Shimazaki, a vigorous Marxist, performed his research together with his wife in several big-project areas and criticized the brutal power exercised by capitalism and the state. He should be remembered for advocating on the side of villagers who lost a pollution lawsuit in Gunma Prefecture (*annaka kogai saiban*) (Shimazaki 1979). His contribution as having been the best

critic of the Fukutake School should also be remembered: "In his structural analysis, there was a tendency to recognize socioeconomic status (SES) and relationships among households with a feudal character…Also, his concept of SES lacks a concrete definition…With this view, village structures are only analyzed in relation to outside pressures." (Shimazaki 1979)

4. Variegated Reality of Regional Society and the Emerging Trend of *Machizukuri*

The collective research referred to as "structural analysis" ended with the death of Fuse (in 1994) and coincided with the disbanding of the Nitagai team (in 1995), when his "Tokyo research" faded out. The direct reason for this disruption can be seen as the loss of a leading researcher, but we need to pay attention to the secondary and structural reasons. As discussed earlier, areas uncovered by the concept of "structure" became more important for understanding regional society, with emerging voluntarism, social movements, and NPOs on one hand, and the declining coherency of community and class on the other. In addition, newly introduced policies and a financial market-oriented economy eroded the traditional order in communities and the integrity of regional societies, which made it more difficult to discuss Japanese regional societies as a whole.

After the bubble economy burst in the early 1990s, Japan struggles with a sluggish economy. Developmentalism does not necessarily work to bolster the economy or to assure happiness. Urban and regional communities slowly began to recognize swelling inequality both in terms of inter-region and intra-region. Realities in communities became more and more variegated, therefore JARCS scholars faced a new agenda in uncharted waters of the rapidly changing realities of regional society.

As these new realities emerged around the turn of the twenty-first century, JARCS began proposing a common theme at every annual meeting that tried to catch the contemporary realities of Japanese communities. **Table 5** shows the research themes chosen by the JARCS Research Committee since 2001. Some readers might think that I have gone too far considering the theme of this paper, "developmentalism;" however, this is not the case. Even a quick glance

at JARCS themes would illustrate how JARCS and Japanese communities had to rotate around the axis of developmentalism. Every year, the theme has something to do with developmentalism and the efforts of communities to metamorphose from its residue. New key words such as "endogenous development," or *machizukuri,* came to be regarded as symbols of the latter point of view.

Table 5. JARCS annual meeting research themes since 2000 (English translation by author)

Year	Annual Conference Research Theme
2016	"Grand Design 2050" and Regional Society: Crisis and Rediscovery of the "Life World"
2015	Considering "Revitalization" and "Extinction of Hinterlands" Policies from a Local Point of View
2014	The Great East Japan Earthquake: The Vision and the Reality of the "Revitalization"
2013	Visions and Realities of Disaster Reconstruction
2012	Visions and Realities of Reconstruction from Disasters Involving Nuclear Accidents and Tsunamis
2011	State Rescaling and Its Context in Japan
2010	State and Communities under Rescaling
2009	Vision for Community Regeneration and JARCS
2008	Realities of "Community Regeneration" from the Hinterland Point of View
2007	"Community Regeneration" under Restrictive Society
2006	Restrictive Society and Present Communities
2005	Inequality, Stratification, and the Local Community

2004	Inequality, Stratification, and the Local Community
2003	Reflections on Locality: Dynamism of Centrifugal and Centripetal Powers
2002	Locality in Diversity: Blurring Borders, Differentiation, and Seeking New Governance
2001	Local Transformations on Publicness
2000	Local Reorganization on Publicness

At the end of the twentieth century, the pitfalls of developmentalism were too clear for most educated Japanese. The burdens of governmental deficits and the intimate and cozy relationships between bureaucrats, politicians, and constructors led to corruption and a loss of entrepreneurial spirit. This led to the introduction of an approach called "endogenous development," led by Kazuko Tsurumi and Ken'ichi Miyamoto, neither of whom was affiliated with JARCS. Tsurumi sought an ideal community of endogenous development as "a potential place where residents, tramps, and temporal tramps could interact with each other to forge new common ties" (Tsurumi 1989). On the other hand, as a well-known economist, Miyamoto defined "four principles of endogenous development" as follows: (1) initiatives by residents, (2) amenities and environment, (3) creation of complex industrial relationships, and (4) increasing human rights and welfare for residents (Miyamoto 1989). Both views correspond with the international usage of endogenous development as follows: "development can be initiated and organized 'from inside'" (Sengenberger 1993: 310). The reason this concept is so important is that, according to a United Nations report, "monocentric reliance on traditional large-scale, market-driven, large-organization and central-government-initiated development processes has steadily weakened the capability of territorial communities to confront the challenges of worldwide economic restructuring by indigenous innovation and flexibility" (Stöhr 1990:2).

Subsequently, the Japanese term *machizukuri* became popular; this term entails the core meaning of "endogenous development," which stresses grassroots, human-oriented development without substantial investment by outside actors. Practitioners across numerous communities adopted this wording. Also, with the enactment of an NPO law in 1997, this type

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of activity swelled in twenty-first century Japan. The term *machizukuri* cannot be translated easily into English, as André Sorensen argues (Sorensen and Funck 2007: 1): "it refers to a diverse range of practices and has multiple and contested meanings." However, "Thousands of *machizukuri* processes have been established nationwide, in an enormous outpouring of local energy into attempts to achieve more bottom-up input into local place management in which local citizens play an active role in environmental improvement and management processes" (ibid.). Some exemplar municipalities followed this course, although in the 1990s, most of their activities were suppressed and rarely reported.

Although central government policymakers somehow recognized these *machizukuri* trends, the official reactions were limited and restrained, because *machizukuri* itself does not need to entail the big projects wanted by the national economic Ministry. The changes happened mainly in the community policies of each local municipality. Some good practices were created in hinterland municipalities and villages, but these were not truly applied to central government policies. An official law that supports this trend of *machizukuri* only emerged in the year 2014 as the "Regional Revitalization Law[1]," but this law is ambiguous because it was introduced apace with "Grand Design 2050," which I will describe in the latter half of **Section 5**.

5. Hinterlands under Siege: Municipal Mergers, the Great East Japan Earthquake, and "Grand Design 2050"

Let us rewind the clock a little. As Japan's high-growth period came to an end, the situation in the hinterlands worsened even more. Reacting to the desperate voices from hinterlands voters and mayors, the National Diet enacted temporal laws called the "Depopulated Area Emergency Measures Law" in 1970 and the "Depopulated Area Promotion Special Law" in 1980. These were changed into the "Depopulated Area Revitalization Special Law" in 1990, and eventually replaced by the "Act on Special Measures for Promotion for Independence for Underpopulated Areas" in 2000 (this law is still in operation). Under this Act, some measures were taken, such as the installation of officers called "*shuraku shienin*" (hamlet support officers) and a subsidy

system resembling decoupling policy in Europe; however, these measures cannot stop the trend of depopulation, except for in a few municipalities. Watching this inefficiency of consecutive laws, Koizumi administration (2000-2005) decided to accelerate "Heisei Municipal mergers" , a central government initiative to absorb hinterland towns and villages into nearby cities, which resulted in disappearance of half the number of municipalities (1,718 municipalities as of 2016), compared to that number of 3,232 in the year 1998.

After few years, JARCS was in the midst of examining the pros and cons of Heisei Municipal mergers—which took place intensively around the turn of the century—under academic concept of "State Rescaling". It was just this timing that the Great East Japan earthquake struck Tohoku, one of most vulnerable hinterlands in restrictive Japan. Needless to say, it was a tremendous shock for the nation and regional society. Every Japanese dweller recognized that this should be a turning point in Japan's postwar history.

Major members of JARCS reacted quickly to this catastrophe by organizing a special committee on the issue with other sociological societies. After a few years of research and practice with communities along the coast, our vision of the future is actually not very optimistic. Some members argue that we are witnessing "disaster capitalism", a term coined by Naomi Klein after the Hurricane Katrina disaster in the U.S. (Klein 2007).

Certainly, it was just about three years after the disaster when the "Grand Design of National Spatial Development towards 2050[2]" (henceforth, GD2050) was silently launched. During that summer, JARCS and Tohoku were still struggling to reconstruct broken communities, sluggish economies, and a malfunctioning social system. The launch of GD2050 was a low-profile event, issued on the authority of the minister of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transportation, not the prime minister, as the five preceding CNDP had been. After examining this plan under the JARCS 2015 annual theme, we concluded that "macho developmentalism" (Motani 2013) was being revived after 3/11, both in terms of betrayed revitalization from the Great East Japan earthquake and the megalopolis concentration philosophy reflected in "Grand Design 2050." Remote islands have now been re-identified as guardians of national interest, obviously reflecting the unstable East Asian diplomatic situation. In contrast, mountainous areas have been advised to "concentrate" on local cities, which this report calls "population dams." This policy change is clearly a declaration that "inefficient" hinterlands will be dumped.

Regional societies and communities, especially those located in the hinterlands, are under siege by these policy orientations. JARCS members are therefore currently trying to defend their life structure in different modes than in the high-growth era.

6. Conclusion

As I have discussed, the three decades from the end of the twentieth century marked an era that was changing far too rapidly and ruthlessly for hinterland communities. Postwar Japanese communities had never experienced such an unclear and variegated era. JARCS theories and practices obviously need to be revised and reorganized to tackle these difficulties.

To conclude this paper, I point out a few personal viewpoints on this necessity. First, the theoretical framework needs to be updated. For example, new Marxist theories that focus on spatial realities, for example, that of David Harvey or Edward Soja, should be incorporated more in JARCS, but accompanied by empirical proof. Second, field choices should be multiplied by each researcher to shed light on various aspects of variegated Japanese regions. This might seem like a high hurdle, but thanks to the advent of the new informational society and the development of a transportation infrastructure, one can keep good relationships with different informants in different fields more easily than before. Third, we should not limit our scope of expertise to narrow themes embellished by sociological jargon. Communities are facing difficulties as discussed in previous sections, and they need full-scale academic support.

This paper tried to limit its task to summarize initial JARCS member accomplishments, and in doing so, I hope reader understand the history and richness of community research in the Japanese language world. I also hope that these themes, problematic and methods will be discussed with the rest of the world, to understand complex realities and social structures which we face today.

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