

Creating Tsugaru Studies: The Paradox of Area Studies at the Local Level

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There is, at present, an emerging body of academic research that is being called Tsugaru Studies. Taking place in the Tsugaru District of northern Japan, these efforts to create Tsugaru Studies have yielded numerous literary translations, two course textbooks, and a locally-produced periodical. This paper considers the content of this emerging Tsugaru Studies, assessing it on its academic characteristics and significance. While language is an important discriminating characteristic of the various genres of Tsugaru Studies, focus on the academic character of the works leads to the conclusion that a major portion of the English language published content can be viewed as limited to describing the characteristics of the place, whereas part of the Japanese language published content can be viewed as making contributions to more in-depth theorization. The implications reveal a paradox of Area Studies research: the work that is widely disseminated fails to advance Area Studies due to its focus on descriptive objectives whereas the work that is limited in exposure could make such contributions, but does not due to the language of publication.

Keywords: *Area Studies, Japan Studies, Tsugaru Studies*

1. INTRODUCTION

What is Tsugaru Studies and why is its current emergence meaningful? More precisely, what does Tsugaru Studies mean for the Tsugaru District itself, as well as in terms of a broader view of contemporary Japanese or Asian studies — or indeed, in terms of the broadest view of Area Studies in general? These questions are posed in response to the current efforts toward creation of Tsugaru Studies, predominantly in the form of the recently established semi-scholarly annual periodical *Tsugaru Gaku* (*Tsugaru Studies*, Volumes 1, 2, 3, 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.' As can be expected and will be outlined in detail herein, 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 and 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 in general 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 pinpoint the questions about Tsugaru Studies raised above: are these efforts and the assorted works they yield simply a cumulative attempt to put down on record the

specific characteristics of a heretofore relatively unexamined place — and if so, is this attempt justified on the basis of some legitimately unique characteristics and realized in a level of descriptive framing so as to be of value? Or rather do these efforts contribute in some substantive way to both a better understanding of Japan and Asia on a level beyond simply additional descriptions of additional places as well as providing for an advance, however slight, in the academic discipline of Area Studies?

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 Tohoku Studies (the broader area within Japan where the Tsugaru district is located) from simply place to something more, signaling a shift toward Tohoku Studies as Regional Studies (the choice of term ‘regional’ reflects the Japanese: *chiiki gaku*, where ‘*chiiki*’ is ‘regional’). The same argument can be made for Tsugaru Studies: if it is to be anything beyond local ‘navel-gazing,’ then it must produce content which extends outside its own sphere of influence and speaks to academic interests on a wide scale and in an engaged manner. While there is evidence of local researchers and writers producing highly informed descriptive work on Tsugaru, the case to be made herein with regard to the significance of this creation of Tsugaru Studies will rest primarily on the academic character of the content. However, in addition to academic character, there is the question of language, with implications for accessibility and dissemination of the research produced. While the content of this emerging Tsugaru Studies is for the most part produced from within the area for the Japan domestic academic market in the form of such locally produced periodicals as *Tsugaru Gaku*, in order to truly contribute to Area Studies, this content must be accessible for external consumption, using English as the language of transmission. Although she refers to literature, Sawada’s (2007) assertion in her Translator’s Introduction to *My Days, My Dreams*, a translation of literary works by Ishizaka Yōjirō, that “(O)f the rich tapestry of literature the region of Tsugaru in the extreme northeast corner of the main island of Japan has produced, only a fraction is available in English,” (Ishizaka 2007: 7) is particularly telling. What is true for literature is also true for most Tsugaru research undertaken in the social sciences as well.

This admission that little research is available about Tsugaru in English points to an inevitable tension that arises in the establishment of an area within area studies between facts and meaning. This is evidenced in Sawada and Kitahara’s (2008) stated purpose in editing *An Introduction to Tsugaru Studies*, which was to provide a highly accessible introduction to the area for international students, who come to Tsugaru with a highly varied mix of differing academic objectives with varying levels of both Japanese and English skills. A not-insignificant 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, then detract from the effort of aiming for more meaningful content and conclusions. This paper will attempt to contextualize these tensions and answer two questions: what is Tsugaru Studies and what is the meaning of Tsugaru Studies for Area Studies?

2. AREA STUDIES: DEFINED AND DEBATED

As one assertion of this paper is that the current effort to create Tsugaru Studies exposes a paradox in the field of Area Studies, this begs the question, what constitutes Area Studies?

The Wikipedia entry reads as follows:

In the humanities and social sciences, area studies are interdisciplinary fields of research and scholarship pertaining to a particular geographical, national/federal, or cultural region. The term exists primarily as a general description of what are, in the practice of scholarship, many heterogeneous fields of research. Area studies often involve the disciplines of history, political science, sociology, cultural studies, languages, geography, literature, and other fields. Interdisciplinary area studies became increasingly popular in the United States and Western scholarship after World War II. Fields are defined differently from university to university, and from department to department.

Wikipedia's definition duly noted, the fact is that a variety of voices have weighed in on what constitutes area studies, what constitutes the factors that qualify, and disqualify, area studies as an academic discipline, and the value and importance of areas studies regardless of its academic standing or lack thereof.

A 1992 *Journal of Business Administration* article which used the term regional studies and referenced this in terms of international business education asserted that the rapid expansion of foreign operations among large corporations was leading to increasing demand for area specialists. The article pointed to the opportunities to be created through regional studies increasing understanding in the business, cultural and political environments of particular regions, with success dependent on regional specialists who understand foreign environments. The article also outlined how regional studies provided an invaluable opportunity to reinforce lessons learned in general business coursework, as general principles that are difficult to operationalize in general terms become clear in the specific case studies that regional studies allow for.

This is quite a different view from what most see as constituting area studies, both in its origin and in its current form. While Miyoshi and Harootunian (2002) trace the idea of area studies in anthropology as originating in the idea of cultural studies, which led to a delineation of global differences into broad cultural zones for convenient categorization, most agree that area studies was most dominantly formulated in the United States the 1950s, within the context of the Cold War (Ludden 2000, Katzenstein 2001). While the overarching objective was to contribute to safeguarding American national interests in its confrontation with communism, these efforts also led to an extension of the relevance of the humanities, including study of foreign languages and establishment of a linkage of the humanities to the social sciences across a range of interdisciplinary endeavors. Katzenstein continued with this historical assessment, outlining how, by the 1960s, area studies had come to focus on detailed descriptions of events in a particular country or region while not aiming to generalize beyond the specific case at hand. By the 1980s and 1990s, study within area studies sought expansion beyond a specific country or region and adoption of a sophisticated use of the comparative method in order to build on contextual and historical knowledge, objectives quite apart from the application to business studies outlined above.

Campbell (1995), writing a synopsis of themes that emerged in the 1995 Japan-USA Area

Studies Conference, highlighted aspects of an interdisciplinary approach to fieldwork and theorization as it contributed to area studies. Area specialists are naturally drawn to the idea that an area must be understood in a holistic manner, as a complex system in which multiple elements are inter-related. There is a tension, however, in whether such interdisciplinary approaches are applied in a manner that reflects and builds on the well-developed theories originating in established disciplines or whether the characteristics of such interdisciplinary research are viewed as a means of testing the assumptions that support such theories through their application to unfamiliar cases. Taken to an extreme, for some researchers who orient research totally and completely in the theories of a particular discipline while giving little credit to ongoing fieldwork, area studies can appear decidedly non-disciplinary. Further complicating matters is the prevalence for certain attitudes to be dominant within certain geographical-based area studies. As Campbell points out, anthropologists are prominent among Japan area studies specialists, whereas American area specialists who study other areas of the world tend to be historians or political scientists. Finally, Campbell also outlined another, if not more important debate taking place within area studies. While most would see area studies as contributing to advancing knowledge in general, certainly within the academic community if not in societies at large, more debatable is the potential if not prioritization of area studies in advancing agendas important either to the area of interest, the global community at large, or both. As examples, themes and objectives such as local economic development, sustainable agricultural practices, resource consciousness and ecology have both highly local as well as global implications.

The most compelling critiques of contemporary area studies arise in response to the trend toward globalization in one view, and are based on the assertions of a lack of theoretical basis, reflective of the tension outlined by Campbell above, in another. Taking up the former, Katzenstein (2001) contends that area studies are now on the defensive as an academic discipline on the basis of globalization, which, as the dominant concept of the 1990s, has allowed for the contestable claim that homogenization and convergence have made detailed knowledge and understanding of different countries and regions, both in their historical trajectory and their contemporary circumstance, irrelevant. Regarding the latter, Ludden (2000) alludes to the overarching criticism that the body of knowledge that is called area studies is supported by little theory except that provided by the academic disciplines that compose it, citing Shea's (1997) headline: "Political scientists clash over value of area studies: theorists say that a focus on individual regions leads to work that is mushy." In this regard, Ludden outlines two divergent academic orientations toward area studies that lead to emerging characteristics of a third. 'Hard' social science disciplinarians found strengthened arguments against area studies in their increasing confidence in the universal utility of their theories and methods, whereas 'soft' social scientists continued to be more receptive to forms of knowledge gained from various world regions. These two views produced new intellectual space for the formation of global knowledge that combines universal theory with local substance — an approach dubbed 'context-sensitive social science.'

Connecting universal theory with local substance, Ludden (2000) asserts that such 'context-sensitive' social science highlights an arena in which area studies has meaning. Asserting that globalization is best defined as a multiplication of sites in which circulatory movements intersect and from which circulatory movements emanate, area studies can be seen as the research tool to articulate this territoriality of globalization. In this, area studies does not stand independent of global studies, but offers the academic counterpoint to globalization as a critical perspective on globalism. Slocum and Thomas (2003) outline a

similar contemporary significance and future trajectory for area studies, noting how the upsurge in the research paradigms of area studies allows for the tracing of global phenomena at the local level, illustrating the benefits of local area analysis for understanding global dynamics. Seeing the future of area studies in a more explicit shift from area and context to culture, Burgess (2004) argued that traditional area studies, as a colonial structure rooted in the Cold War, needs to be reconfigured and revitalized by incorporating cultural studies. Clark (2006) furthers this theme by exploring cultural studies as a part of Asian Studies, albeit in terms of breaking down the stereotypes that accompany place and rebuilding national narratives of identity at the local level.

Additional viewpoints outline a spectrum of objectives and outcomes for area studies, starting with Morris-Suzuki (2000), who argued that the key objectives of area studies are to provide knowledge of practical value about important world areas, to give students and scholars an awareness of cultural relativity, to produce an understanding of social and cultural wholes as they exist in areas, and to further the development of a universal social science. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) for higher education institutions in the United Kingdom reflects this view, defining Subject Benchmark Statements and Academic Standards for Area Studies which outline the educational implications of area studies in extensive detail. While the standards represent an extensive treatment that includes defining principles, the nature and extent of the field, the attainments and teaching characteristics, condensing the lengthy statement to key points, the QAA asserts that area studies offer students the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills parallel and complementary to other programmes, to acquire specialised regional knowledge, to foster critical awareness of diversity across societies, and to acquire transferable skills.

Macdonald (2004) asserted that area studies must, first and foremost, account for a somewhat straightforward accumulation of specific and local knowledge in the form of an area-specific information database, and then bring to the fore a reformulation of this knowledge within an academic structure as chosen by the researcher. This yields two distinct views as to the contribution of area studies to knowledge production. On the one hand, there is the notion that the facts of area studies are meaningless without the disciplinary framework provided by the more traditionally-defined academic disciplines by which to organize them—an assertion that the uniqueness of a group of human societies can not be the foundation of a science because there is no science but that of the generalized cases. On the other hand, there is the notion that area studies produces the kind of knowledge that ultimately influences the core concepts used by other, more traditionally-defined academic disciplines, conducive to, as Tachimoto (1995) asserted, reconstructing the edifices of disciplinary theory from the bottom up.

Taking up this tension within the area of Asian Studies, Svambaryt (2005) asserts that area studies has little methodology of itself and is supported mostly by the theories of the academic disciplines that compose it. While based on factual information about the geography, demographic trends, or economic and political institutions operating in another part of the world, when it does address theory, area studies-oriented inquiries are concerned with comparisons and with speculations on the reasons for differences among countries and peoples. As area-focused research is committed to the particularity of a specific world region, Japan Studies constitutes, by definition, a topic of area studies. In terms of what such Area Studies research can accomplish, Svambaryt outlines two approaches to Japan Studies in particular. The first supports the intensive study of the particular languages, cultures and histories of Japan and in this sense is devoted to the factual content of Japan Studies. The

second encourages innovative thinking and practices related to the specific study of Japan, and in this sense, uses the Japan Studies content to contribute to the development of the methodologies of area studies in general.

Summarizing, area studies can be seen as having emerged in Cold War pragmatism, which gradually gave way to humanistic idealism and business opportunism, which then yielded an interdisciplinary and ‘context-sensitive’ approach to examining and understanding places in a manner that both contributes to existing social theory while at the same time building its own body of knowledge, a body of knowledge that will come to focus on culture and identity. The paper now turns to how the creation and emergence of Tsugaru Studies reflects on the one hand and contributes on the other, to this current assessment of area studies.

3. THE CREATION OF TSUGARU STUDIES: THE TSUGARU DISTRICT

The Tsugaru District comprises the western half of Aomori Prefecture, 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 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 (1625 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 Tohoku Expressway, providing a high-speed ground link from Tokyo to Aomori City, not completed until 1986 and full-scale jet service capability to Aomori Airport not completed until 1987. The Shinkansen line to Hachinohe City, located on the Pacific Ocean side of the Prefecture, was completed in 2002, with the extension to the prefectural capital Aomori City scheduled for completion 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 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 *Nihon Shoki (Chronicle of Japan)*, Japan’s oldest official history, dating back to the early-eighth century (Guo, Johnson, Kitahara, Rausch 2005). Currently, the name is written with two *kanji*, 津輕, 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 10000 BC-ca 300 BC) 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, all dated from the early to middle 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. 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, Daijō, Rausch 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 a 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, Johnson, Kitahara, Rausch 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.

4. TSUGARU STUDIES: LANGUAGE, CONTENT AND SIGNIFICANCE

As will be outlined in detail below, what currently constitutes the now-emerging Tsugaru Studies is a mix of work in different languages reflecting different disciplines and focusing on highly specific local themes and published in different formats for different audiences. While the majority of what is being produced is in Japanese (a notable component of which is the study of the Tsugaru dialect, highly unique even among the many and highly diverse local dialects found in Japan), 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 and understandably, produced in Japanese. This body of social scientific research can also, at one level, be considered predominantly descriptive, which is to say consisting of descriptions of social phenomenon within established disciplines such as history, sociology, anthropology and ethnomusicology covering such specifically local themes as establishment of the area and origins of the early ruling families, histories of early educational institutions, the history and present-day circumstances of local crafts and performing arts, and contemporary social phenomenon such as media and urbanism, identity and community as they operate in Tsugaru. While this research reflects the universal characteristics of such research, and in that sense is similar to that which emerges in any other Area Studies area, there is also evidence of Tsugaru research that makes a theoretical contribution to currently emerging themes in the social sciences. These dimensions, which will guide the examination of the reality of Tsugaru Studies in a manner to address the research questions, are shown in Figure 1.

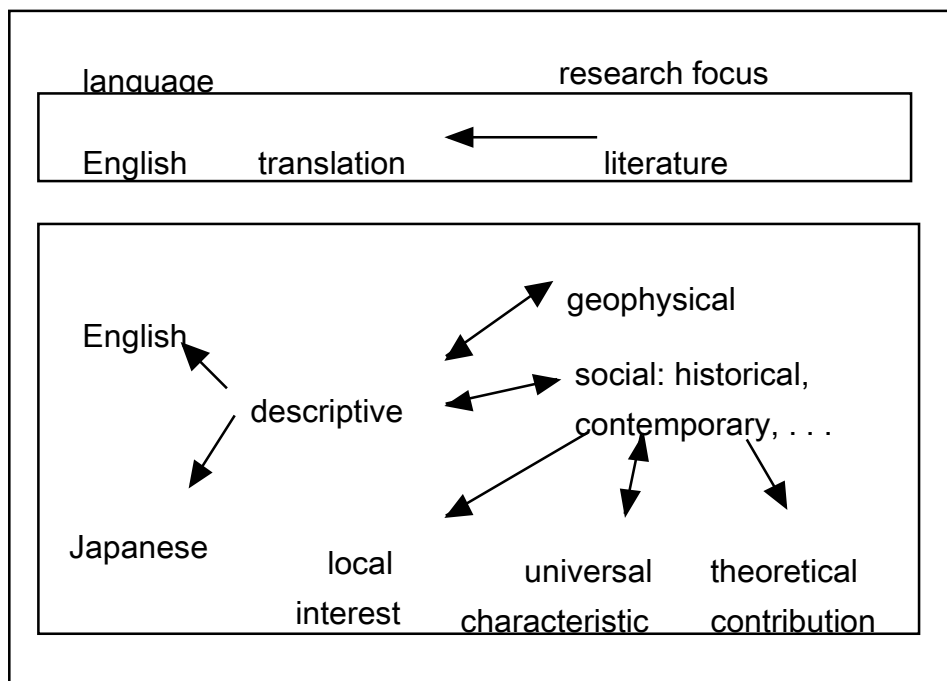


Figure 1. The Dimensions of Tsugaru Studies

4.1. Creating Tsugaru Studies: Local Academic Publications in Japanese

That the content of regional studies consists of local and often highly specific facts, as Macdonald (2004) pointed out, makes valid the form and content of the local publications

which may be forming a Japanese language basis of an emerging Tsugaru Studies. There is one main text that has emerged in Japanese, titled appropriately enough *Tsugaru Gaku* (Tsugaru Studies) and two main local periodical publications, *Tsugaru Gaku (as in the text; Tsugaru Studies)* 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 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 1 and 2), and the history of Hirosaki High School (all translations from Japanese to English are by 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 and 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 (Region Studies)*, 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 (Tsugaru Studies)*, clearly Tsugaru centered in name as well as content, was first published in 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 Tohoku Cultural Studies Center of Tohoku University of Art and Design and joining other northern Tohoku 'Studies' research periodicals — *Aizu Gaku*, *Sendai Gaku*, *Morioka Gaku* and *Murayama Gaku* — each volume is based on a theme constituting a Public Lecture for Tsugaru Studies, held in the summer at Hirosaki University, but also accepts contributions far ranging and both academic and essay-style 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*), what is evident when viewing the contributions on the basis of the three-part scheme of descriptive social scientific research proposed in Figure 1 is inclusion of all three types. Also noticeable is a shift in focus from highly locally specific work in the early volumes to more universal and, to a lesser degree, theoretical work being included in the content in later volumes. This is indicated in the article titles that follow, which can serve as volume content descriptions where L = local content, U = universal content and T = theoretical content. 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 and most notably, theoretical connections and contributions that can be seen specifically in such content connect to the theorization of place as a mental construct, illustrated by such article themes as *Art and Maps of the Past* (Vol. 3), *The Latent Power of Place: Tsugaru* (Vol. 3), *Memories from Place from the Power of Place* (Vol. 3), *Memories from Places: the Creativity of Space* (Vol. 3) and *The Power of Connecting to a Place* (Vol. 3).

Tsugaru Gaku, Volume 1

Theme: Mount Iwaki and the Iwaki River: the Fixed Points for Observing Tsugaru [L]	
Views of the Iwaki River — Gazing at Mt. Iwaki [L]	
Table Discussion: Mt. Iwaki and the Iwaki River as the Center of Tsugaru Life	
Lifestyles near the River [L]	The Jomon Era in Tsugaru [L]
Snow Patterns on Mt. Iwaki [L]	Cosmology and the Tsugaru Area [L]
Folktales of the Tsugaru Area [L-U]	Wildlife of Mt. Iwaki [L]
Mt. Iwaki and the Oyama Sankei [L]	The DNA of Tsugaru Festivals [L-U]
Origins of Religious Beliefs associated with Mt. Iwaki	[L-U]
Historical Perspectives on Tsugaru	[L-U]

Tsugaru Gaku, Volume 2

Theme: Life of the Tsugaru People: the Will to Escape and a Longing to Return [L]	
Tsugaru and Relations with the Frontline of Old Fukui Prefecture [L]	
Remembering the Jifubuki (Ground Blizzard) [L]	Apples of the Iwaki River Area [L]
Tsugaru People [L-U]	Photos of Tsugaru Life [L-U]
Background to Tsugaru Life [L-U]	Discussion of Tsugaru Life [L-U]
Hallowed Ground of Tsugaru [L-U]	The Humor of the Tsugaru People [L-U]
Archeology of Tsugaru Life [L-U]	Media and Tsugaru Life [L-U]
Building Tokyo — Living in Tsugaru [L]	
Population Decline in Tsugaru: the Succession of Generations	[L-U]
From Tohoku Studies to Regional Studies [T]	

Tsugaru Gaku, Volume 3

Theme: Memories of Place from the Power of Place		
Tsugaru-theme Artwork	[L]	The Komise (Small Store) Street [L]
The Leaders of the Tsugaru Paddy Area Development	[L]	Remembering Tsugaru [L]
Mt. Iwaki and the ‘Let’s Walk’ Oyama Sankei Event	[L]	
Praying at the Mountain Top	[L-U]	Hallowed Ground of Tsugaru [L-U]
The Power of a Life lived in a Cold Climate		[L-U]
Remembering Old Scenes: Art and Maps of the Past	[L-U-T]	
The Latent Power of Place: Tsugaru	[L-U-T]	
Memories of Place from the Power of Place	[U-T]	
Memories from Places: the Creativity of Space	[U-T]	
The Key to Opening the Future of Regional Culture	[U-T]	
The Power of Connecting to a Place	[U-T]	

Tsugaru Gaku, Volume 4

Theme: Tsugaru as a source of energy		
A Tsugaru Photo-essay [L]	Stories of Hirosaki Castle	[L]
Lecture Theme 1: Tsugaru as Modernistic Dynamism		
Peninsula as Tsugaru [L]	Modernism at the Edge	[U-T]
Seasonal Labor Migration and Culture		[L-U]
Lecture Theme 2: The Magnetism of Heartful Songs		
Tsugaru Melodies that Gush Forth [L]	A Genealogy of Tsugaru Heartful Songs	[L-U]
Prayers Accompanying the Nitta Area Development		[L-U]
Regional History based on the Flow of Water: Towns on Local Rivers		[L-U]
Fieldwork: Hirosaki University Sociology Research Group and Ikarigaseki Village		[L-U]
Composers from Tsugaru: Uehara Gentaro		[L]

4.2. Creating 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 which constitute the creation of Tsugaru Studies at an international level.

4.3. 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 (1995) *Tsugaru Shamisen no Tanjō: Minzoku Genō no Seisei to Ryūsei*, 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, Daijō and Rausch 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 everyday 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 on the one hand, and portray life — a year of life — in contemporary rural Japan on the other.

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 Japanese in 2004, with an English version titled *Tsugaru: Regional Identity on Japan's Northern Periphery* published with a Japan Foundation Grant a year later (Guo, Hasegawa, Johnson, Kawanishi, Kitahara, Rausch 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 into 15 English papers in a text titled *An Introduction to Tsugaru Studies* with the purpose of textbook "for international students studying regional culture at Hirosaki University" (Sawada and Kitahara 2008: 3). Almost an exact mirror of the textbook *Tsugaru Gaku*, but in English, the text covers history, culture — comprised of language, literature, music and crafts — and 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.

4.4. Tsugaru Literature in English

The first piece of literature that most readers interested in Tsugaru look to is aptly titled *Tsugaru*, Osamu Dazai's 1944 work, which was translated into English in 1985 as *Return to Tsugaru: Travels of a Purple Tramp* by Kodansha International Ltd 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 portray Tsugaru as a place where "the sky is blue, the clouds are white, the apples are red and the women are beautiful" (2007: 11). The six short stories of Ishizaka's are titled: *Manners and Customs* (first published 1933), *The Mural* (first published 1934), *The Mountain* (first published 1934), *Yanagi Theater* (first published 1940), *The Holy People* (first published 1935), and *Mountain Hot Springs* (first published 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 (2008), 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 and the like).

5. CONCLUSIONS: THE PARADOX OF TSUGARU STUDIES AS AREA STUDIES

As alluded to in Figure 1, there are two streams of research to consider with this emergence of Tsugaru Studies: that stream which is produced locally and in Japanese and another stream which is produced by a more diverse group of research and in English. That the former exists and has yielded a local Tsugaru periodical publication is laudable to both producer and consumer, but comes with the risk, so common in Japan, of turning inward and contracting to the status of a local hobby club, interested in the specific detail of local life without recognizing the broader meaning thereof. The latter, the work of academics for academics, obviously has potential for wide influence among a select population and thus, if it can escape the tendency to merely translate and report facts, represents the potential of making contributions to, at the least, Japan Studies, if not more broadly, to Area Studies.

Taking up first the social sciences descriptive work on Tsugaru that is published in Japanese, it is clear that this content, as in the *Tsugaru Gaku* course text and the *Tsugaru Gaku* periodical, covers a range of objectives and outcomes, thereby constituting a Japanese domestic base of the Tsugaru Studies phenomenon. These two forms, course book and local periodical, reveal a clearly educational contribution as well as a mechanism for local understanding of self and local identity building and confirmation for the people of the Tsugaru District. In terms of the academic character of this work, both of these forms include contributions which examine Tsugaru through the importation and application of universal characteristics of disciplinarian social science research, reflecting the bodies of thought in sociology and anthropology, archeology and religious studies. At the same time, the content of some of these contributions also contributes cases to these universal constructs, thereby potentially contributing to theoretical advances of such constructs, whether in a traditional disciplinary sector such as the archeology of the Jomon period or in a new intellectual and theoretical domain such as a contemporary understanding of power and place.

The work on Tsugaru in English presents research, part translated and part original, that largely resembles the educational base of Tsugaru Studies described above on the one hand, while also but to a vastly lesser degree and in a vastly more limited scope, attempts the more universal theorizing that can link area studies to disciplinarian social scientific theory on the other. The 'lecture note' book using the *Tsugaru Studies* title is representative of the social science-educationally descriptive form of English publication on Tsugaru, whereas *The Birth of Tsugaru Shamisen Music* and *Tsugaru: Regional Identity on Japan's Northern Periphery* represent the two faces of the potential Area Studies research taking place in Tsugaru: universal theories being applied to Tsugaru on the one hand and the potential of Tsugaru-based research contributing to Area Studies theorizing on the other.

Returning to the questions that opened this paper, what is Tsugaru Studies and how is it important and meaningful? Does it represent merely a recording of local facts for consumption, whether it be locally or on a broader scale? Or does Tsugaru Studies contribute to loftier goals, making contributions to Japan Studies on the one hand or a place-based or disciplinary contribution to Area Studies on the other? The paradox of Tsugaru Studies as Area Studies is that it does both. At one level, that done in Japanese and that done in English both function to record facts, and in some cases, seek to achieve nothing more. This is significant, however, for the audiences, and there are multiple audiences consuming these facts, that seek such levels of education and self-confirmation in some form and for some reason. However, Tsugaru Studies offers another, more meaningful contribution. What can be dubbed *Tsugaru Gaku*, the work done by local Japanese researchers in Japanese and published in the local periodical titled *Tsugaru Gaku*, seems increasingly to represent an importing of social theory to support research that can contribute to advances in Japan and Asian Studies theory building. This is contrasted by the work done by the English-writing researchers, what can be termed Tsugaru Studies, which largely seems to represent the export of descriptions of Tsugaru phenomena which are meaningful in framing the place on the basis of universal characteristics. An oversimplification no doubt, but Tsugaru Studies, for the most part educational, conforms to the universal pillars of existing social scientific knowledge in such a way as to confirm existing theory, advancing a case for Tsugaru Studies as a building block within Area Studies while missing its potential in advancing a more informed theorization of Area Studies itself. This paradox is shown in Figure 2.

Turning from a focus on the content of the research and publications to consideration of what constitutes Area Studies, while the *Tsugaru Gaku* and *Tsugaru Studies* texts, those used in the university courses for Japanese and foreign students at Hirosaki University, can be seen in their form and objective as satisfying such educational measures as the United Kingdom's Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education Statements and Standards and the academic publications of *Tsugaru Studies* address Morris-Suzuki's objectives and outcomes for Area Studies, more problematic is placing *Tsugaru Studies* in the 'context-sensitivity' of Ludden, the tension between disciplinarian frameworks and their reconstruction as outlined by Macdonald and Svambaryt's two approaches to Japan Studies. The reality is that, the themes and articles that make up *Tsugaru Studies* as an emerging Area Studies have largely sidestepped the globalization debate on the one hand, while, as above, addressing both Macdonald and Svambaryt through the paradox of *Tsugaru Gaku* and *Tsugaru Studies*.

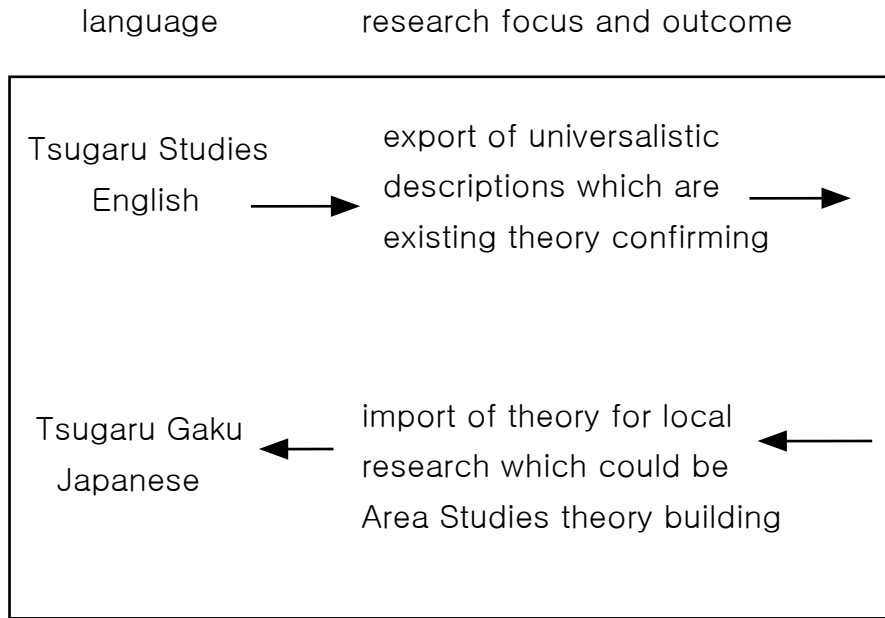


Figure 2. The Paradox of Tsugaru Studies

As a conclusion, that an easy resolution of this paradox can be found in ‘more pressure on Tsugaru-focused Japanese researchers to publish in English’ supported by ‘more Tsugaru-focused Japanese-to-English translators in specialized disciplines’ along with ‘more Tsugaru-focused non-Japanese researchers capable of bringing disciplinary theory, universal viewpoint and local language skills together to conduct and publish research’ seems obvious enough. Indeed, this is the paradox and these are the resolutions applicable to any geographic area focus within Area Studies. Ultimately however, given the reality of Tsugaru as a highly inaccessible research site, *Tsugaru Gaku* as an example of a medium representative of the objectives and/or the limits of local Tsugaru-focused Japanese social scientists, and Tsugaru Studies as a reflection of the reality of limited funding and personnel that can be brought to the task of forging the contribution Tsugaru Studies can make to Area Studies, the more telling conclusion may be that the paradox specific to Tsugaru Studies is that it is precisely these characteristics that make Tsugaru Studies such an appealing area of research work.

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