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IGU Thematic Conference on “Islands in Relations: Conflicts, Sustainability, and Peace”

Takashi Yamazaki

Chief Organizer, Osaka Metropolitan University

The IGU Thematic Conference on “Islands in Relations: Conflicts, Sustainability, and Peace” was held at the University Media Center of Osaka Metropolitan University (OMU, Osaka, Japan) on April 4-6, 2023, followed by the post-conference field trip to Okinawa Island on April 7-9, 2023 (see <https://polgeog.jp/igu-tc2023/>).

The Conference’s Chief Organizer was Takashi Yamazaki, a Geography Professor at OMU. The Japan National Committee for the IGU supported his conference proposal to the IGU. The Local Organizing Committee, consisting mainly of early career scholars and students, organized the Conference, and the Graduate School of Literature and Human Sciences and the Department of Geography at OMU acted as co-organizers. Co-sponsors included IGU Commissions on Geography of Tourism, Leisure, and Global Change, Islands, Latin American and Caribbean Studies, Political Geography, and Toponymy and other Japanese organizations such as the Research Institute for Islands and Sustainability at the University of the Ryukyus, Japan Society of Island Studies, and the Institute of Ryukyuan Culture at Okinawa International University. The Conference closely collaborated with the IGU Thematic Conference on “The Ocean and Seas in Geographical Thoughts,” held at the University of Milan-Bicocca, Italy, on June 6-9, 2023. The Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, the Tokyo Geographical Society, the Association of Japanese Geographers, the Human Geographical Society of Japan, and the Osaka Convention & Tourism Bureau provided generous financial support for the Conference.

The total number of registered participants was 121 (86 in-person and 35 virtual) from twenty-eight countries and regions. Among them, twenty-eight participants were from Japan, twenty-five from the U.S., including Guam, thirteen from Taiwan, five from China and Switzerland, and four from Italy, the U.K., and Canada. Field trip participants numbered twenty-five.

As the Conference title indicates, the Conference focused on islands by re-situating the world’s island regions in their historical, geographical, cultural, economic, and political relationships with the surrounding areas (other islands, mainland, oceans, or continents),

understanding their past and present, and looking to the future. As the Conference subtitle signifies (Conflict, Sustainability, and Peace), the Conference reflected on the history of the islands, which have often been under hegemonic domination by major powers and military confrontations among them, and discussed ways to achieve political and economic autonomy and environmental and cultural sustainability of the islands, seeking the future of their peace and security. The three-day post-conference field trip to Okinawa Island, a U.S. military outpost in the West Pacific, illuminated how these Conference themes unfolded on the island.

Six invited scholars gave the keynote lectures shown below. IGU President Michael Meadows and the Chair of the IGU Commission of the History of Geography, Marcella Muller di Friedberg, virtually gave a speech at the opening and closing ceremonies, respectively. These lectures and speeches were broadcast simultaneously via webinar and YouTube worldwide (available at <https://polgeog.jp/igu-tc2023/keynotes/>). In addition to the keynotes, there were 86 general paper presentations in 27 themed sessions with lively discussions.

- Island Ports: Insights into the ‘Betweenness’ of Island Spaces (Godfrey Baldacchino, University of Malta, Malta)
- The Ryukyu Islands in East Asian Relations (Hiroko Matsuda, Kobe Gakuin University, Japan)
- Island Detention and Asylum’s Afterlives (Alison Mountz, Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada)
- Changes and Future Prospects of OKINAWA Economy: Development Strategy of Island Economy (Moritake Tomikawa, Okinawa International University, Emeritus, Japan)
- The Changing World after Russia’s Invasion in Ukraine: As seen in Border Studies & Geo-Politics (Akihiro Iwashita, Hokkaido University, Japan)
- The Disappearing Island: Land, Liquid, and the Liminal in the Ocean Environment (Philip Steinberg, Durham University, U.K.)

The Conference themes were further developed as a webinar workshop titled “Framing Islands and Oceans: Perspectives from Osaka and Milan” on May 19, 2023, co-hosted by the IGU Thematic Conference on “Oceans and Seas in Geographical Thought.”

Approximately thirty papers presented at the Osaka Conference have been collected for an international journal special issue and a book on the Conference themes. These publication projects will effectively disseminate the achievements of the Conference internationally from multiple perspectives.



Keynote lecturers and participants at the University Media Center, OMU (April 6, 2023).
Credit: H-M Tsai



Field trip participants in front of the fence of U.S. Camp Schwab at Henoko Port, Okinawa (April 8, 2023). Credit: Kyle Kajihira