



# Increasing the Impact of Asian Scholars in International Environmental Sociology

Riley E. Dunlap

Past-President, ISA Research Committee on  
Environment and Society (RC 24)

*Keynote address for the 5<sup>th</sup> International Symposium on  
Environmental Sociology in East Asia*


*Tohoku University*

*Sendai, Japan*

*Oct. 30. 2015*

# Rich Traditions of Env Soc in Asia

- We all know that environmental sociology has a long tradition in Japan, with Nobuko Iijima (the “mother” of our field) being one of the world’s earliest environmental sociologists, and she has been joined and followed by many others. South Korea, China, and Taiwan are all also developing strong efforts in our field, and a great deal of important knowledge is being developed by Asian environmental sociologists.


- 
- Yet, it is fair to say that with only a few exceptions (most notably Koichi Hasegawa, current President of ISA's RC 24), Asian scholars are not yet as visible as they *should be* in the international arena.
  - This leads to an unfortunate situation in which so much of what is seen as environmental sociology “knowledge” is based on studies from a limited and unrepresentative number of nations in North America and Europe.


# WEIRD people!

- Recently psychologists have pointed out that most of what we think we know about “human nature” is based on studies of WEIRD people--subjects overwhelmingly from “**W**estern **E**ducated **I**ndustrialized **R**ich **D**emocracies.” Yet, there are major differences between such people and others on key characteristics such as reasoning style, cooperation versus individualism, and much more.
- Thus, psychological “knowledge” is biased.
- J. Henrich, et al., *Nature*, Vol. 466 (July 1, 2010), p. 29.

# Environmental Sociology

- I worry that this problem also applies to Environmental Sociology to some degree.
- We need to have more studies from Asia in particular (but also South America and Africa) in the international literature to compare to those from North America and Europe.
- Sadly, language barriers prevent Americans and Europeans from learning about Asian environmental research.
- It is not fair that English has become the “international” language, but it is a fact of life.

- 
- I realize that many Asian scholars, especially Japanese, wish and need to publish in their national journals in their own language.
  - But I want to encourage more effort to publish in “international” journals as well, in order to help environmental sociology overcome the “WEIRD people” problem and broaden our knowledge so that it is relevant to the entire world.



So I will assume many of you can master English, and want to provide practical advice for publishing in international journals where you can reach a wide audience for your scholarship.

Much of what I know about Japanese work comes from articles in English published in the *International Journal of Japanese Sociology*.

But to really reach an international audience, you also need to publish in the journals that are widely read by scholars in our field.

# Learning international scholarship

- Before publishing in international journals one must have some familiarity with relevant work, which often comes from North America and Europe.
- I encourage you to try to visit these regions, perhaps during graduate school or as a visiting scholar.
- Many Chinese academics do this, and Hasegawa, Terada, Horikawa, Haraguchi and several other Japanese scholars have all spent time in the United States, for example.



# Attending non-Asian conferences

- I also encourage you to attend ISA conferences, where RC 24 is very active, and consider attending American Sociological Association or European Sociological Association conferences.
- It is not difficult to get a paper accepted for a Roundtable session organized by the Section on Environment & Technology (ETS) of ASA.
- If you come to ASA let me know and I will try to make sure you meet many environmental sociologists, and you will find the ETS to be friendly and welcoming.

# Follow international literature

- If you are going to participate at the international level, it is important to follow international literature in environmental sociology.
- If your library does not provide access to a good selection of international journals, there are several things you can do to compensate.

# Google Scholar

- First, use Google Scholar to search for key literature relevant to your research.
- You can search for publications by subject, such as “environmental sociology” or “environmental justice” or “environmental movements.”
- Or, you can search for publications by leading scholars who publish on the topic you are interested in.
- You can then request pdfs from the authors if your library doesn't have the journals.

# ResearchGate

- ResearchGate is growing in importance, and many scholars post pdfs of their publications there which you can freely download.
- I encourage you to set up your own ResearchGate page, and then you can post your publications and follow leading scholars and others who share your interests.
- ResearchGate seems widely available and I see, for example, many Chinese scholars downloading my publications.



# Connecting to International Work

- I have been talking about how you can readily follow international scholarship relevant to your research and interests.
- Now let's focus briefly on connecting your research to major themes and topics of international research in environmental sociology to increase your chances of getting published in international journals.

# Compare and contrast

- There are many interesting comparisons of environmental problems, issues and controversies to be made between Asian and Western nations.
- I see great opportunities to compare Japanese and American environmental sociology research in particular. A major example is comparing and contrasting the strong Japanese tradition of “victimology” and emphasis on “suffering” with US studies of “environmental justice” (EJ) and especially “injustice.”

# Sources of injustice

- “In most instances the victims of pollution problems and occupational disasters are people at the bottom of the social ladder.” Iijima, 1992.
- Similar patterns are found in the USA, but often in terms of racial/ethnic status as well as socioeconomic status.
- With less racial/ethnic cleavages in Japan, there seems more emphasis on “powerlessness” as leading to environmental injustice, and nice comparisons can be made with US work.

# Benefit and disadvantaged zones

- In a related fashion, Japanese emphasis on “benefit” versus “disadvantaged” sectors is very similar to US work on local resource communities that are economically dependent on mining, forestry and other extractive industries which are often owned by distant corporations that take the profits to urban areas (leading to “internal colonialism”). These rural areas often experience severe ecological and societal damage due to reliance on these extractive industries.



# Corrosive communities

- Iijima, Funabashi and others note that in communities like Minamata, the pollution not only does terrible harm to victims but leads to social conflict. Similarly, William Freudenburg and other Americans note that technological disasters (e.g., toxic wastes) produce conflictual or “corrosive” communities—in contrast to natural disasters (floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, etc.) that produce “therapeutic” communities where people come together to help the victims.

# Comparative studies needed

- These few examples suggest similarities between Japanese and American studies of environmental injustice, but also the need for careful comparisons to highlight different dynamics stemming from national differences.
- Articles that provide detailed comparisons, drawing upon both Japanese and American literature, would be extremely valuable and are likely to draw attention.
- The same is true for other Asian nations.

# Other comparisons

- Environmental movements – There is much work on environmental movements in Asia, often involving comparisons with US and European environmentalism, and this work receives international attention.
- Ecological modernization – European and US scholars tend to disagree strongly about the effectiveness of ecological modernization, and there is great need for studies in Japan and other Asian nations to help clarify eco-mod's applicability outside of Western Europe.

# Expanding our knowledge

- In sum, there are many opportunities for detailed analyses that compare and contrast societal-environmental dynamics between Western and Asian nations.
- Such analyses will help environmental sociology overcome the limitations of focusing on **WEIRD** people and nations and broaden our knowledge base.
- So I hope to see more work like this.

# Comparative contexts for results

- Of course, articles do not need to be devoted to detailed comparisons of Asian and US and/or European findings, as often you will want to present the results of your personal study.
- But when presenting results from your own study of environmental injustice, movements, risks, attitudes, etc., if you “frame” them in the context of established findings from Western as well as existing Asian studies it will make your paper more attractive to journals and readers in the West.

# Getting published

Having briefly noted the importance of engaging with international literature, let me turn to specific suggestions for how to get your studies published in international journals where it will become available to environmental sociologists worldwide.


# Background preparation

- You should read many articles like the one you hope to publish—theoretical, qualitative, quantitative or comparative.
- Then, before writing your own paper, you should *re-read* some of the *best* ones paying careful attention to their format and style. Learn from good examples and then try to follow them in your own paper.

# Preparing the manuscript

- Take the time to write a very good paper that is well-organized, reads easily and makes a good impression. Have others read your paper to help you polish it, and carefully edit the English. Reviewers do not like poorly written papers, even when the substance is very strong.



- 
- It is difficult to provide detailed guidelines for writing a good paper because of the differences between theoretical and empirical papers, between empirical papers reporting original qualitative vs. quantitative results, and between the above and papers summarizing and synthesizing existing studies for comparative purposes. But I think there are some common characteristics.

# Good introduction

- Begin with a strong Introduction, typically a paragraph that introduces the topic and indicates why it is important (perhaps practically as well as theoretically).
- Next, one or more paragraphs that clarify the goal of the paper (ending with the “basic purpose,” or “research question” or “hypotheses” for empirical papers).
- Then one that outlines the rest of the paper—telling readers what sections will follow. This prepares readers for the rest of the paper.

# Rest of the paper

- The rest of the paper should follow your outline. Papers reporting new empirical results typically have sections on each of the following:
- Literature review/theoretical perspective.
- If relevant, statement of hypothesis or specific research question.
- Methods - data collection techniques used, sampling if relevant, and measures employed.
- Results – Clear presentation of results.
- Summary and Conclusion – A good short summary is important, as is a strong conclusion stressing the significance of your findings.

# Choosing journals

- There is a huge number of international journals, and it is important to make wise decisions about where to submit.
- Decide on the audience you wish to reach—the general sociological community, environmental sociologists, or perhaps a more interdisciplinary audience of environmental social scientists.
- Then investigate the best journals for that purpose.

# General Sociology Journals

- Elite journals like *ASR*, *AJS*, *Social Forces* and *Social Problems* are publishing more environmental work, but their acceptance rate is about 10%.
- Many other general journals publish work by environmental sociologists. Four with strong records are *Rural Sociology*, *Social Science Quarterly*, *Sociological Inquiry* and *Sociological Spectrum*—not elite journals but respectable.
- Also, consider the two ISA journals, *Current Sociology* and *International Sociology*.

# Two comparative journals

- The *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* is another obvious possibility, and its Editor David Smith seems open to environmental research.
- The *International Journal of Sociology* is edited by Sandra Marquart-Pyatt, an environmental sociologist who specializes in comparative research.
- While neither is (yet) high in prestige, both are respectable journals.

# Environmental Journals

- There are many environmental sociology/social science journals.
- ISA's new RC 24 journal *Environmental Sociology* is an ideal choice. But there are many others.
- I suggest using the Web of Science journal reports to view “environmental studies” journals and their “impact” scores (based on how often their articles are cited).

# High to Fairly High Impact Journals

- *Global Environmental Change*
- *Environment & Behavior*
- *Population & Environment* (Lori Hunter, an environmental sociologist, is Editor)
- *Environment*
- *Environmental Politics* (Chris Rootes, an environmental sociologist, is Editor)



# Lower But Respectable Impacts

- *Society & Natural Resources* (David Sonnenfeld, an environmental sociologist, is Co-Editor)
- *Journal of Environmental Education*
- *Human Ecology Review*
- *Nature and Culture* (Matthias Gross, an environmental sociologist, is Co-Editor)
- *Environmental Values*

# Deciding where to submit


- First, look at the articles you are citing in your paper to see where they are published, and if you find some from the same journal that is a good clue to submit to it.
- It is good, but not necessary, if the journal has published similar work in the past that you can cite to “legitimate” the relevance of your paper for that journal.
- It’s even better if your study replicates, extends via comparison, or critiques an article published in the journal.

# Journal guidelines

- Follow the journal's guidelines on issues like maximum length, format, abstract, table construction and reference style—even though it is frustrating to have to change the paper for differing journals.
- Sometimes you can submit a paper with a slightly different reference format than what the journal uses, knowing that you will need to change it if the paper is accepted.

# Some strategic insights

- Realize that the Editor is very likely to choose individuals you cite as reviewers—especially if they are on the Editorial Board, but even if they are not.
- Similarly, Editors are more likely to choose scholars whose work you discuss early in the text as reviewers.
- If you are favorable toward someone's work, cite them 2-3 times or more *if* appropriate.
- If you are very critical of someone's work, it is legitimate to tell the editor and ask that s/he take this into consideration in the review process (nowadays, with online submissions, it may be necessary to do this in a separate email).


- 
- You must cite the most relevant literature and you should be careful and choose wisely. Good summaries of topics like *Annual Review of Sociology* articles can be helpful, and there are several on environmental sociology.
  - Don't adopt a scattergun approach that just picks almost random studies for each point you want to make—choose the best ones. Showing familiarity with relevant literature makes a good impression.
  - You can often save space with “see Smith 2013 and the references therein” if it's a recent article that does in fact provide a good summary of relevant literature.

# Things to consider when submitting

- Be prepared to be rejected, and have your first *three* journal choices set so that if your paper is rejected by the first choice you are psychologically ready to go to next one.
- Do *not* assume your paper is worthless even if it gets harsh reviews and a clear rejection.
- Do *not* act in haste. Try to improve the paper based on the reviews before sending it to the next journal. Get advice from a trusted source regarding which of the reviewers' criticisms and suggestions are most helpful in order to improve the paper.

# Revise and resubmits


- Learning to deal with revise and resubmits or “R&Rs” (a very common experience even for strong papers) is an art form — one that I was slow in learning.
- Do **not** be intimidated by requests for major revisions in an R&R.
- If you can deal effectively with at least half, but especially two thirds to three fourths, of the suggestions there is a very good possibility of acceptance.
- You need to choose which suggestions are most important, although good editors will tell you which they see as top priorities.


- 
- Often you can (and must) “play off” reviewers against one another, as when one asks you to expand your theoretical framework or the implications of your findings and another suggests that the paper should be shortened to a “research note.” Ask yourself which is easiest and best to do.
  - You can point out the competing advice, and then indicate which reviewer you followed--*but* indicate why you made that choice.





# Cover letter for resubmission


- Writing a detailed and very clear cover letter explaining carefully what you did *or* choose not to do for *each* suggestion made by the reviewers *and why* you made these decisions is absolutely crucial.
- Again, you don't have to follow all of the advice, as long as you give good rationales for what you do — length concerns, competing suggestions, reviewer failed to understand or misread your point, etc.
- Often you can deal with some suggestions quickly in footnotes, such as those asking for more information on your sample or measures for example.


- 
- Make the cover letter comprehensive *but* easily comprehensible.
  - While it is tempting to just list what you did for each reviewer in order, it is better to begin with the major suggestions/criticisms and especially similar ones made by two or three reviewers — and particularly those made by the editor — and then discuss the minor ones.
  - In other words, make the letter easy to follow for the reviewers and editor.

- 
- While it is legitimate to take issue with some suggestions and “argue” a bit with a reviewer, be very polite.
  - Begin the letter by noting that you found most (or at least many) of the criticisms and suggestions very helpful, and by taking them into account you believe your revision is a stronger paper.

- 
- Conclude by expressing appreciation for the insights offered by the reviewers, and end by saying that you hope the editor and reviewers will now find the revision suitable for publication.
  - Keep in mind that the reviewers (including a likely new one) will receive your cover letter along with the revised paper.

- 
- Finally, be prepared for another “R&R” or even a rejection.
  - It is common to have to go through two sets of reviews (especially when you get one or even two new reviewers on the revision) so be patient.

- 
- If your paper gets rejected 2-3 times, especially if you have revised it each time in response to reviews, do *not* give up without first getting advice from more experienced scholars.
  - Sometimes it is wise to give up on a paper, but don't do so without first seeking good advice.
  - You can have very bad luck sometimes, getting the wrong reviewers (they just don't like your kind of work, they are having "bad days," etc.).
  - Submitting a paper is a little like gambling, and the results may not be a reflection of your work.
  - Streaks of bad (and good) luck do occur.

- 
- Learn from your experiences, and you will find that it becomes easier and easier to publish after some failures from which you profit by learning, and then some successes.
  - Do not give up easily, and please help overcome the WEIRD people problem!
  - Good luck.