



AGST Newsletter



Spring/Summer 2024

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This November, I am delighted to reconnect with Mr. Edward Clarence-Smith and feel honored to assist and attend his lectures. As last year, Mr. Edward Clarence-Smith, who is a distinguished senior advisor in circular economy and green industry, provided insightful lectures to the Sustainable Industry Development course coordinated by Professor Wanxue Lu. As opposed to the virtual meetings of the previous year, we were able to engage in face-to-face discussions with Mr. Edward Clarence-Smith and gain valuable insights directly from him.



We welcomed twelve new students this year from a variety of countries and academic fields, all eager to learn and discuss issues related to circular economy. The course schedule was similar to last year's but remained engaging and thought-provoking for all who attended. Even for someone like me, studying these concepts for the second time, I found myself developing numerous new ideas and perspectives thanks to the lecture, which I am grateful for as they lead to promising research questions. Using the Ellen McArthur Foundation's framework, Mr. Edward Clarence-Smith led us from consumer decisions in circular economies to how economic actors could facilitate this transition using strategies that were available to them. He also encouraged us to consider policies that governments could implement to support these strategies, which made our discussions more grounded and practical. Additionally, Mr. Edward Clarence-Smith explained the role of industry and addressed broader issues to enhance our understanding and encourage deeper thinking.

In addition to lectures and discussions, Mr. Edward Clarence-Smith set up group work exercises that allowed students to evaluate how three general circular economy strategies—'narrowing', 'slowing', and 'closing' material flows—could be applied to products they care about. Besides presenting their findings, they also analyzed the likelihood of challenges involved in implementing their business models, and recommended policies that would assist governments in overcoming them.

This series of lectures was memorable to me because Mr. Edward Clarence-Smith was able to create a relaxed atmosphere that allowed open expression. In addition to providing an invaluable insight into circular economy and our own reflections on it, his passion and interest in the subject matter significantly enhanced our understanding of it. I am eagerly anticipating next year's conference in Kyoto and hope to have another enriching experience.

Tang Xiwen

Doctoral student, Graduate School of Economics

Dr. Grace Wong, of Stockholm University and RIHN, delivered lectures on plantation landscapes and their political, social, economic, and environmental impacts in the first module of the intensive course. Discussions revolved around the salience of the plantationocene as a theoretical heuristic to understand the ways in which humans and powerful, capital-backed interests have shaped the political economic contours of the present-day world system.



As a result of short presentations and student-led discussions, the module exposed the students to important issues concerning state and capitalist enclosures, forest degradation, and forest clearing, as well as sustainability and greenwashing. Central to the class's understanding of these concerns is the realization that the dominant discourses at play are, by and large, a result of compromise and co-optation by powerful interests. Ultimately, it is the differences in power—which are often neglected but highly influential—that determine the extent by which oppressive and extractive plantation economies are legitimized.

In the first module of the course, the class was also fortunate to have input from both visiting fellows at RIHN, Dr. Maria Brockhaus and Dr. Niak Sian Koh, as well as research assistant Ayami Kan.

Rafael Noel

Master's student, Graduate School of Economics

(Module #2)

by Prof. Raymond Jussaume Jr.
Michigan State University

sustainable Development and explored critical perspectives in contemporary discourse.

During the course, each student was required to read course materials and share with the class one publication, either a journal article or a book chapter, on sustainability that has influenced their research. The students demonstrated diverse research interests, including transforming food systems, ecofeminism, and sustainable futures. Their participation in this exercise allowed them to explore connections, demonstrating the multidisciplinary nature of sustainability research and its complex interplay of factors.

The second session was facilitated by Professor Raymond Jussaume from Michigan State University, specializing in Development Sociology. During his segment, he provided a comprehensive overview of the theoretical advances in Development Studies over the past several decades. Furthermore, it examined the evolution of Sustainable Development and explored critical perspectives in contemporary discourse.



Renee Grace Salditos Tila

Doctoral Student, Graduate School of Economics

The five-day workshop organized by Kyoto University, Heidelberg University, and Strasbourg University was not only an academic gathering but a profound journey into the heart of research and cultural understanding. It allowed me to delve into the complexities of my research interests and gain valuable insights from the diverse perspectives of fellow participants and professors. My presentation, titled "The Hidden Politics and Narrative in Rural Art Festivals in Japan: A Case Study on the Visible and Invisible Light," aimed to shed light on the appropriation of rural spaces in local revitalization projects in Japan, particularly as expressed through artistic events. The workshop emerged as an intellectual crucible where ideas met, clashed, and ultimately, combined to form more nuanced understandings, especially regarding the intricate concept of "diversity."

Heidelberg University and Strasbourg University Workshop Report

Firstly, the interactions with fellow students during structured workshop sessions and at informal dinner gatherings proved to be invaluable. As we exchanged ideas about our research interests, which ranged from the curation of museums in the U.S. to the organization of cultural festivals in Kyoto, I encountered new methodological approaches to cultural space creation and event analysis. These discussions elevated my consciousness of inclusiveness and its critical role in such processes, aligning with the overarching theme of "diversity" that the workshop sought to explore. I came to appreciate diversity as a complex and layered concept, one that extends beyond the obvious differences in cultural and ethnic backgrounds to include a rich tapestry of intellectual diversity, disciplinary variety, and the plurality of artistic voices.



Secondly, the dialogue with professors from the participating universities was instrumental in refining my approach and broadening my research scope. Before my session in Heidelberg, a conversation with Prof. Fuess inspired me to explore Japan's history of art presentations before the advent of rural art festivals. He underlined the importance of understanding the "public exhibition system" in Japan, with institutions like the "Nitten (日展)" national exhibition system, which set benchmarks for art, and the established practice of hosting art exhibitions and tours in major department stores, showcasing contemporary and pop art. Post-presentation, Dr. Ericson provided critical feedback, leading

to significant enhancements in my slide presentation's clarity and accessibility for the subsequent audience in Strasbourg.

Thirdly, the workshop provided a holistic experience that extended beyond the confines of the classroom. My first visit to Strasbourg, orchestrated alongside the workshop, enriched my understanding of "diversity" in a tangible and memorable way. The group's exploration of the city's landmarks, including the majestic cathedral, the quaint Petit France area, and an array of museums, each served as a testament to Strasbourg's layered history and cultural significance. The Museum of Decorative Art was particularly noteworthy, offering a window into the cultural interplay and influences that have shaped the region over centuries. It highlighted how diversity and exchange are instrumental in the evolution of artistic and cultural landscapes.

Moreover, the visit to the European Parliament crystallized the concept of "diversity" in a political and social context. Observing the multilingual booths and the seamless translation process at the European Parliament was inspiring. It embodied the concerted effort to maintain a dialogue that is inclusive and representative of the European Union's diverse member states, encapsulating the EU's motto "United in Diversity." This experience underscored the importance of creating spaces where different voices, languages, and perspectives can coexist and contribute to a richer, more inclusive whole.



In conclusion, the five-day workshop was an expansive learning experience that not only enriched my understanding of my research topic but also provided broader insights into the principles of diversity, inclusivity, and the dynamic interplay of cultural spaces and events. The deep and insightful discussions, the constructive feedback from academics, and the immersive cultural experiences within the historically rich city of Strasbourg have left an indelible mark on my academic growth. These experiences have equipped me with a reinforced theoretical framework and a renewed motivation to contribute meaningfully to my field, furthering my research with a heightened awareness of the diversity that shapes our world.

Tianyi WANG
Master's Student, Graduate School of Letters

AGST Top Global Course

It is a pleasure to announce that four students completed the AGST Top Global Course on March 25, 2024. They come from the Graduate School of Letters. This brings the total number of students that have completed the programme to 74 since it was launched in March 2017. More information about this programme can be found [here](#).



In February, Dr. Witsanu Attavanich, an Associate Professor in the Department of Economics at Kasetsart University, taught a fascinating course on Climate Change, Environment, Agriculture, and Rural Development. This course had eight face-to-face classes and six students from Japan, China, Taiwan, and Germany joined. Dr. Witsanu provided students with an overview of his previous research and encouraged students to discuss their countries' situation on the topic.

The purpose of the course was to improve students' understanding of the impact of climate change on agriculture and the environment and to provide solutions for food waste reduction, non-market valuation for natural resources, and the evaluation of programs and policies. Dr. Witsanu completed the purpose by using detailed explanations of experimental methods for environmental evaluation, and case studies in Thailand and the United States.

The former part of this course covered the impact of climate change and food waste. Dr. Witsanu explained the current situation on climate change and introduced the methodology to measure the impact on agriculture. The latter part of this course was about the valuation of ecosystem service, the impact of air pollution and income diagnosis in Thailand, and program evaluation. He showed not only the methodologies but also applications to make it easier for students. Also, he pointed out the challenges of his research and prospects. His lecture helped the students grasp the current situation and consider their own research questions.

Personally, the course was excellent for two reasons. First, Dr. Witsanu let the students think about the reason for their opinion. He kindly asked the students about their intentions and gave tips for logical thinking. Thanks to his advice, the students could consider their opinions more logically. Second, Dr. Witsanu provided students with the opportunity to ask questions and share their learning experiences. The students actively exchanged their views and discussed whether the policy brought positive effects on the problem or not. This conversation was helpful because the students could find out the differences between countries by comparing their countries.

Through this course, I could understand the experimental method and overview of Thailand. I would like to thank Dr. Witsanu for giving this course.

Climate Change, Food Security, Environment Valuation, and Rural Development: Theory and Application

by Dr. Witsanu Attavanich
Kasetsart University



Rika Ozaki

Master's Student, Graduate School of Agriculture

Rural Sociology: Future Land—Rural Areas between Break-up and Left-behind

by Prof. Claudia Neu
University of Göttingen

In February, Professor Claudia Neu from the University of Göttingen, Germany, facilitated a wonderful weeklong intensive course on rural sociology, which attracted a diverse mix of international students, including one Japanese student.

Reflecting on my experience, I realize how this course deepened my comprehension of rural life, immersed in the core principles of sociology, particularly within rural contexts. The course began with a thorough exploration of the historical roots of rurality, revealing its dynamic evolution alongside society.

What distinguished this course was its interactive approach of lively discussions, engaging activities, and presentations. Through sharing images of food and places from our respective origins, we gained insights into the diverse tapestry of rural life.

Delving into five key sociology concepts—culture, social structure, social action, power, and functional integration—we applied these frameworks to rural settings, unraveling the complexities inherent in rural society.

A standout aspect of the course was our examination of “rurbanity”, illuminating the intersection of rural and urban characteristics and the resultant dynamic nature of rural areas. And exploring the role of food in shaping rural identity underscored its significance as more than sustenance but as a cultural emblem and communal bond.

The course also delved into the power of imagery in shaping perceptions of rural areas, acknowledging its potential to romanticize or stigmatize rural life, influencing societal views.

Our study did not treat rural areas as a homogenous entity; rather, we explored the diverse types of rurality, from remote villages to peri-urban fringes, each presenting unique challenges and opportunities.

Further, we examined the concept of space and place in rural sociology, understanding how geographical and social dimensions intersect to shape rural environments and communities.

Towards the end of the course, discussions on demographic changes in rural areas underscored the importance of understanding evolving social dynamics as populations shift and communities evolve.

In retrospect, this course equipped me with a profound understanding of rural communities and provided me with invaluable tools to navigate their complexities within the ever-changing landscape of society.

Shane Yagabo

Master's Student, Graduate School of Agriculture

AGST Spotlight Interview

Dr. Chizu Sato

Lecturer, Wageningen University & Research

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Q1: You have had a relationship with faculties/students at Kyoto University for several years, but it was your first time teaching students at Kyoto University. Please let us know your impression about your intensive course at Kyoto University.

Dr. Sato: My impression was quite positive. I was already very pleased to be invited to take part in the intensive course at Kyoto University after getting to know some faculty members and students and having a project for the first time in rural Japan with a PhD. When I was planning the module entitled Inclusive Rural Development, I wanted to focus on approaches that enable students to shed light on things that are excluded in the existing studies on rural development which would be different from what students already know, easy to grasp and relevant to their research. They are: the deconstruction of economic and gender essentialisms in rural development; historical and decolonial perspectives; more-than-human rural commoning; and embodied rural development scholarship. These were introduced drawing on poststructuralist, postcapitalist and feminist theories. I was not sure whether students would accept the critique I offered of capitalist-centered thinking prevalent within the discipline of economics. I found that the students were quite open and studious. They prepared themselves well, they followed instructions and they actively engaged in class and in post-session activities with an open mind. Students did not turn away from what I offered. Quite the opposite. They made strong connections to their own research. Since I received students' reflections right after each session as part of the assignments, I was constantly motivated to do better for the following session. The whole experience was pleasant and rewarding as a teacher.

Q2: Please let us know your association, Cultural Geography, and your current research activities there.

Dr. Sato: Since July 2021, I moved from the Consumption and Healthy Lifestyle group in the Social Sciences Department to the Cultural Geography group (GEO) in the Environmental Sciences Department. GEO is committed to social theory in all its spatial articulations. The group advances creative, critical-constructive scholarship through the exploration of the ecological and social challenges facing all life on earth. Researching space, place and culture, engaging with current, historic and future dynamics of societies globally, the group pays special attention to questions of inequality, exclusion, mobility, and plurality along with deploying critical tourism studies to all aspects of social and environmental sciences, unravelling relational complexities in wilderness to urban settings. The group translates knowledge into practical action in four closely related fields of application. These

are: health & care, tourism, nature and landscape (visit our group [website](#)). Building on my lifetime focus on the articulation of women, empowerment and development, my current research activities focus on how women, particularly older women, together with diverse human and more-than-human actors, exercise agency to survive well together collectively engaging in ecological livelihood production in ageing and depopulating rural areas transnationally. For this, I continuously elaborate my transnational feminist perspective drawing on poststructuralist Marxism, community economies, feminist political and queer ecology and more-than-human approaches. I pay attention to multispecies efforts of commoning – the collective production of a community through commoning a knowledge, a practice and/or a property – to make visible the interdependent care (not) performed by humans and more-than-human actors. Thus far, I looked at one case study in rural Shizuoka, Japan (with Nanako Nakamura at Wageningen University) and three case studies in rural Mexico (with Joselin María Soto Alarcón at Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo, Mexico). I am currently enthusiastically learning creative methodologies, involving different artistic methods, to capture diverse ways of knowing and multispecies interdependence through diverse senses, with artists and activists. With these new creative methodological skills, while deepening my knowledge of these socio-ecological contexts, I am always looking for opportunities to extend my research to the countryside of the Netherlands and elsewhere, like Kyoto, with new collaborators.

Q3: Is there any suggestion(s) for improvement of the collaboration between Wageningen University and Kyoto University?

Dr. Sato: Since I have not been heavily involved in the collaboration, I do not have much to say. The kind of collaboration I am willing to be involved in would be joint PhD training. If a joint degree is too complicated to attain, a few months of secondment might be a good start, followed by co-authoring a research article. Another collaboration could be carrying out comparative research projects on collectively decided topics, such as care, ecological livelihoods and art-science collaboration.

Q4: Do you have any messages to Kyoto University students?

Dr. Sato: In one's lifetime, the years spent at graduate school are rather short. But, it is a good time to focus on the development of knowledges, skills and attitudes necessary to identify issues, come up with strategies and be accountable with the actions taken in a safer learning community. I would like to repeat what I said at the beginning of all four sessions: Put on your most colorful curiosity glasses and dare to ask! I would also like to add: focus on progress, not perfection, take good care of your embodied self, and respect your own timing. Best of luck with your researcher journey. I hope our path crosses again in the future! Till then.

Fumi Iwashima
Senior Lecturer, Graduate School of Economics