



Contemporary Geographical Thought Essay

The Integration between Human and Physical Geography: Advantages, Disadvantages, and the Promising Future.

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Introduction

Several fundamental and contemplating questions have been evolving in my mind since I decided to devote my education and career path to the geography discipline. These questions are, “What is geography? What makes geography distinct from other disciplines? What can make us geographers survive in this inevitably changing world? And what will we geographers be in the future?”. These questions were not taken for granted; they are manifestations of my reflection of the time I spent as a geography teacher. It is obvious that geography’s existence as a subject in the curriculum system is not as popular as its counterpart in social science subjects such as economics and history. This is a consequence of the terms that Shore and Wright (2017:1, as cited in LahiriDutt, 2018) demonstrate as “academic capitalism” that places the concept of neoliberalisation as university policies. This context of capitalism in higher education led to a catastrophic impact for geography (Castree, 2006, as cited in Lahiri-Dutt, 2018).

Back again to the initial fundamental questions, what is geography? I believe there is no one standardized definition of geography. This is because Geography is a pluralistic and multidisciplinary field of study with no homogenized perspective or one primary philosophical approach because it is a confluent discipline (Colwell, 2004; Mitchell & Murphy, 1991). This plurality has been constructed over time from the beginning geography was declared as a discipline to the contemporary geography. The diversity of subdisciplines in geography was started at the beginning of the twentieth century, when it was divided into two divisions: “physical and culture geography, and regional and systematic geography” (Mitchell & Murphy, 1991, p.58). Similarly, Hanson (2008) demonstrated that during the twentieth century the concept of geography popularised by William Morris Davis: “the impact of the physical (“inorganic”) environment on the biological (“organic”) environment” (p.717), which become popular around geographer authors in the earliest Annals of Association of American Geographers (AAG) in the earliest twentieth century, had been challenged by the emergence of economic geography before the end of twentieth century because at this time, human beings was acknowledged as agent who contribute to the development of their physical surroundings. However, as geography knowledge expands, there is a possibility for us to become more specialized. Specialization in geography (physical and human geography) can have positive and negative impacts. Philips (2004) explained, on the one hand, by specialization, we have the opportunity to collaborate with different

scientists, which can contribute to the promising advantage. On the other hand, disintegration may lead to ineffective communication within and between specialist groups because there is no such a common thing that can become a core base knowledge.

The next question to answer is what makes geography unique and survive as a discipline? Should we “geographers” disintegrate or integrate? I believe what makes geography distinct to other knowledge is its plurality, however, what makes geography can survive as a plural and diverse subject is the inclusive and collaborative work between physical and human geography. Therefore, I argue that the synergy between physical and human geography is crucial in geography knowledge development. In this essay, I will first demonstrate the history of geography and the key characteristics of human and physical geography which may lead to the integration or disintegration between them. Then, I analyse on how to develop the integration between human and physical geography from a philosophical and institutional perspective.

History of Geography

First and foremost, I begin with one meaningful definition of geography, which was popular in the middle of the twentieth century: “Geography is the study of the earth as the home of people” (Tuan, 1991, p.99). This concept explicitly demonstrates the strong connection between physical and human geography. The term the earth here is valued in its physical elements and social dimensions, in this case, humans and their life attributes. However, to some extent, human and physical geography have become distant from each other over time. As I explained above, the diversity within geography, especially the separation between human and physical geography, is not naturally shaped, yet there is historical value underpinning this disengagement. Goudie (1986) insists that the history of geography is not a spontaneous and immediate transformation but a history of multiple threads and events over time. Therefore, the following paragraphs will demonstrate the history of geography based on the influential events in world history and gender issues and how this history led to the specialization in geography.

I start with the history of geography during the twentieth century when geography knowledge construction was influenced by World War events. In explaining that history, I refer to Mitchell & Murphy (1991) version because they implicitly demonstrate the integration between human and physical geography based on the methods and approaches, even though the events occurred in this period contributed to the shifted focus between human and physical geography. They explained while at the beginning of the twentieth century, geographers centered their focus on physical geography from a systematic perspective, during the interwar period, human-related activities started to be considered as the factor that influenced the physical environment; hence, the focus changed to the cultural environment. Then, in 1940, the emphasis shifted to cultural regions based on physical framework, but it was not too long. During World War II, the increasing interest in human geography using a quantitative-theoretical approach and the

disappointment with philosophical and empirical-inductive techniques of regional geography led to the shifted concern from regional to systematic geography. However, the most significant and fundamental change in contemporary geography started about two decades after World War II. In this period, a computer-based method in geography was introduced. The establishment of a geographic information system and the application of remote sensing methods in analyzing both physical and cultural phenomena was started and widely accepted in this period.

The history of geography is also related to the gender issue, especially the disproportion of female participation in geography. Although the number of women involvement in geography has been increasing over time, and there is an attempt to acknowledge women's participation in geography research by publishing *Geographers: Biobibliographical Studies (GBS)*, which is dedicated to women geographers, women have suffered in their effort to contribute to geography knowledge, especially in an academic setting (Ferretti, 2020; Hanson, 2008). In this case, I take the example of the history of female participation in the Association of American Geography (AAG) written by Hanson (2008). She asserts that although there is a growing number of women participating in AAG over time, women still find that it is difficult to contribute to the geography knowledge development especially in academic settings. She argues that the main reason for this disproportion is the consideration of women's ability or inability to cooperate with the achievement of the geography research agenda. Further, she explained that specific narrow questions in physical geography limit women geographers' ability to discover those questions which led to the domination of male geographers in this discipline. Consequently, women's participation in academic geography emphasizes the human-environment relationship by using qualitative research methods.

Based on the analysis of historical geography above, it is illustrated that while to some extent geography may be specialized, there is also the possibility to be synthesised. On the one hand, gender disproportion in academic geography may constitute the constraints of integration between human and physical geography. On the other hand, during the twentieth century, despite there is a clear separation between human and physical geography, the intersection between them was developed because of the same geographical perspective they applied in their research.

Physical and Human Geography: The Different Key Characteristics and The Reason for Disintegration

Having recognized the history of geography and its influence on the integration and disintegration between human and physical geography, in this section, I will emphasize the different key characteristics between human and physical geography that may lead to fragmentation. I divided the different characteristics of human and physical geography into three aspects: Area of study, research method, and position or authority in the science hierarchy.

First, in terms of area of study, Pattison (1964) insists that there are four traditions in geography: spatial tradition, area studies tradition, man-land tradition, and earth science tradition. He further argues that the first three traditions are related to human geography, and the fourth tradition, which is affected by traditions number one and two, construe physical geography. Specifically, on the one hand, physical geographers assume that they are more scientific than human geography, therefore, they presume human aspects as another part of their strict scientific work (Harrison et al., 2004; Massey, 1999). On the other hand, human geography is increasingly engaged with the knowledge of the connection between space and entities or objects (Massey, 1999).

Second, regarding research method and question, Johnston (1983) differentiates human and physical geography by their own authentic questions. He asserts that while in physical geography, the research focuses on “how” which refers to mechanisms, human geography does not only answer “how” but also the “why” question, which relates to the processes. Moreover, in terms of research method, on the one hand, Harrison et al. (2004) argue that philosophical, ontological, and epistemological analysis have been engaged in human geography for a long time. On the other hand, Philips (2004) insists that physical geography applied two fundamental research methods: the nomothetic approach, also known as the quantitative method, and the idiographic approach, which assists in the acceleration of the nomothetic approach.

The third factor that can separate human and physical geography is the authoritativeness of physics in the science hierarchy. Massey (1999) argues that there has been a popular tradition of a science hierarchy between disciplines and fields of study. He further asserts that this tradition has driven physics to higher authority and taken a position as a single discipline, which differs from other social sciences. For example, in geography, physical geography research is dominant in geography journals rather than human geography research (Harrison et al., 2004).

As has been demonstrated, physical geography emphasizes physical dimensions of the earth in their research by applying nomothetic or quantitative methods, whereas human geography narrows its focus on the relation between space and objects on earth, in this case, human and their social life, by implementing philosophical and theoretical-based analysis. These different characteristics between human and physical geography may constrain the synergy between both; however, there is also potential integration between them. Therefore, the next section will analyse the possibility of collaborative work between human and physical geography.

The Integration of human and physical geography

Although geography is recognized as a multiplicity discipline with no rigid technique and method of study, the “where” questions make geographers different from other disciplines. (Mitchell & Murphy, 1991). Accordingly, same with Mitchell & Murphy, I argue that there are several commonalities or at least the same objectives between human and physical geography, which can be promising

methods to unite them. In my attempt to analyse how human and physical geography can be connected to each other, I divide my analysis into two lenses:

philosophical and institutional perspectives. In each of these, I provide relevant study cases.

In terms of the philosophical lens, I argue that the concept of place can be the foundation of cooperation between human and physical geography. Place, one of three fundamental concepts in geography, emphasizes the connection between locations (a certain point of space) and meaning, which can be illustrated by physical, social, and historical action (Casey, 2001; Cresswell, 2008; Tuan, 1977). Furthermore, Cresswell (2008) insists that there are three characteristics of place: location, physical landscape, and sense of place which refer to the meaning associated with the place. Based on the concept and characteristics of the place, I conclude the place is the “rendezvous” for physical and human geography to open dialogue for integration. Places include space and social value. Space, on the one hand, is a physical geography product because space is more abstract which envelopes volumetric measurements of the position of certain things (Casey, 2001; Cresswell, 2004). On the other hand, social values refer to social interaction between people in which that interaction contributes to our environment and constitutes a place (Cresswell, 2008; Massey, 1999), making the social meaning of the place become the focus of human geography.

To put my analysis above into action, I point out a study of world heritage cultural landscape assessment and management. I am interested in the cultural landscape concept because, according to Strang (2008), cultural landscape “provides a useful bridge between anthropology and archaeology, bringing together social and material worlds and acknowledging the processual nature of both” (p.51). Moreover, Rössler’s (2006) definition of world heritage cultural landscape as “sites which are protected under the UNESCO World Heritage Convention for the outstanding value of the interaction between people and their environment” (p.335), strength the idea that the study of cultural landscape contributes to the attempt to integrate human and physical geography because it illustrates the interconnection between natural and social elements of a place. In this regard, I refer to Prangnell et al. (2010) research about community involvement in cultural heritage assessment and management in North Stradbroke Island, southeast Queensland, Australia. They investigate the power relation and collaborative work between archaeologists and Aboriginal people, which are based on archaeological and Indigenous people’s knowledge and practice. They find that Aboriginal law and knowledge are more relevant to the development of the cultural heritage site rather than merely based on archaeological findings and physical and site-based analysis.

Another method to synthesize physical and human geography is the integration through the institutional level. It does not mean that the lecturer and teacher implemented a particular teaching method in their own way because, if they work like that, it will be overwhelming to teach such extensive and diverse knowledge like geography. What I mean here, institutions enact a policy that can assist the

collaborative work between physical and human geographers. The inclusive syllabus and curriculum in geography discipline can be the means for intellectuals to reveal a variety of content material, especially for geographers, who can access a range of sources (Johnston, 1983). Despite being exposed to inclusive topic material, this way can stimulate the communication between human and physical geographers to discuss and share each other's knowledge and perspective as well as get the opportunity to attend each other's lectures (Iveson & Neave, 2010). The most important is how this different perspective can be integrated to analyze a broader topic. For example, Iveson & Neave (2010) demonstrate how they work collaboratively to design their course based on a crucial event that involves natural and social consideration and analysis. Specifically, they facilitate the discussion in the class by bringing a phenomenon case study that can be discussed from a physical and human geography perspective. In this case, they present human and physical geographical issues related to the Hurricane Katarina event and discuss it with their students in the class.

Conclusion

This essay argues that the integration between physical and human geography is crucial in sustaining the different characteristics of geography and its existence as a plural discipline. Integrating knowledge in Geography is not a seamless task because several major aspects should be considered, such as different study fields, research methods, and positions or authorities in the discipline. However, despite those constraints, I believe geography can only survive as knowledge and discipline when human and physical geography are synthesized and not specialized. The notion of place can be the foundation for collaborative work in geography and institutions as a facilitator to consolidate those different perspectives and knowledge.

In the end, analogizing geography knowledge to the concept of 'home' by Tuan (1991) is probably the best way to support my argument. He defined home as "a unit of space organised mentally and materially to satisfy a people's real and perceived basic biosocial needs and, beyond that, their higher aesthetic-political aspirations (p.102)". In the same way as this concept of home which consists of material and mental elements to persuade people of basic needs, geography also presents natural and social dimensions that contribute to solving a problem and phenomenon on the earth.

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