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Fumie Kumagai

Shrinking Japan and Regional Variations: Along the Hokurikudo and the Tosando II

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The world population is expected to expand by 39.4% to 9.6 billion in 2060 (UN World Population Prospects, revised 2010). Meanwhile, Japan is expected to see its population contract by nearly one third to 86.7 million, and its proportion of the elderly (65 years of age and over) will account for no less than 39.9% (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research in Japan, Population Projections for Japan 2012). Japan has entered the post-demographic transitional phase and will be the fastest-shrinking country in the world, followed by former Eastern bloc nations, leading other Asian countries that are experiencing drastic changes.

A declining population that is rapidly aging impacts a country's economic growth, labor market, pensions, taxation, health care, and housing. The social structure and geographical distribution in the country will drastically change, and short-term as well as long-term solutions for economic and social consequences of this trend will be required.

This series aims to draw attention to Japan's entering the post-demographic transition phase and to present cutting-edge research in Japanese population studies. It will include compact monographs under the editorial supervision of the Population Association of Japan (PAJ).

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Preface

More than four decades have passed since I became interested in regional variations of my native country, Japan. In fact, my academic search for regional variations of Japan seems to have derived from an extended stay of 15 years in the United States, living in nine different states as a graduate student, college professor, and sociology researcher. I realized that the United States is truly diverse in her population and socio-cultural outlook, even within the same state. For example, Upstate New York and Downstate New York present themselves as if they are totally different worlds, or San Francisco and Los Angeles seem to represent the Janus-faced realities of California State. This realization of the diverse nature of the United States made me aware of viewing my own country with the objectivity gained from valuable comparative insight.

Growing up in the suburbs of Tokyo, I knew only about Tokyo, and whenever I was asked things about Japan, I started to wonder if my knowledge of Japan was appropriate or not. Soon after looking at Japan from the outside, I realized that Japan is in fact diverse in her characteristics. A tiny island nation, much smaller than the State of California, is a long-stretched country, extending from the northern tip of the city of Wakkanai, located at about the same latitude as that of the United States–Canada border, to the islands of Okinawa, roughly equal to the southern tip of Florida. That realization made me notice how little knowledge I possessed about my own country.

Following my extended stay overseas, I lived in rural Niigata for three years from 1984-87 in the town of Yamato in Minami-Uonuma County, Niigata Prefecture (the municipality now known as the city of Minami-Uonuma). I was a Professor of sociology at the Graduate School of International Relations, International University of Japan. It was the first time I lived outside Tokyo, and Yamato-machi displayed totally different scenes from what I knew about Japan. It was truly the snow country, “Coming out of the long tunnel I saw snow country” as Yasunari Kawabata wrote at the beginning of his novel, *Yukiguni* (The Snow Country). Kawabata was the first Japanese writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. My experiences in Yamato strengthened the knowledge of diversity in Japan. Niigata Prefecture is divided not only by the ancient Echigo Province and Sado Province, but also by Jyoetsu, Chuetsu,

and Kaetsu within Echigo Province, and there exist clear regional variations from one area to the other even within the same Niigata Prefecture.

By that time, I strongly believed that the Japanese population should not be discussed by “average” figures, but should highlight regional variations. For this reason, I started to discuss families and demography in Japan in such areas as fertility decline and population aging, household structures, marriage, and divorce with special attention to regional variations. However, obtaining the open small area data by the municipal level was hardly heard of about the time I lived in Yamato-machi, Niigata Prefecture. Thus, my academic research on the regional variations of Japanese demography and the family was mostly confined to the prefectural level of analyses.

Up to the point stated above, the data being analyzed were based on the prefecture. In other words, it was the discussion of *ken-min-sei* (prefectural stereotypes, or preconceived notions about prefectures) without paying attention to regional variations within the same prefecture. In many parts of Japan, however, there are cases where the temperament, lifestyle, and customs vary greatly within the same prefecture, from east to west, north, and south. This recognition of diverse variations within a single prefecture prompted me to realize the need for a municipal level of analyses. This is derived from the fact that the current 47 prefectures in Japan are essentially based on the *Bakuhantaisei* (feudal system of the shogunate and domains of the Edo period) comprised of 302 Han dynasties. Furthermore, it comes from the ancient system of Japanese *Goki-Shichido* (Five Home Provinces and Seven Circuits of Ancient Japan) under the *Ritsuryo* system that dates back to the era of the decree of 710. For this reason, there are cases where the history, ethos, climate, humanity, customs, lifestyle, dialect, and temperament of the same prefecture are all different. As a result, there are many cases where characteristics vary among regions within the same prefecture.

Therefore, I developed a strong desire to carry out analyses on population decline based on data by the municipality. Fortunately, I was allowed to use statistical software such as G-Census and EvaCva, and was able to analyze the small area statistical open data compiled by the Statistics Bureau of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. With these small area open data at hand, my intention to analyze Japan’s depopulating society from the standpoint of the regional power of municipalities has been progressing. Regrettably, however, discussion on the *Goki-Shichido* and Provinces with relation to regional variations within the same prefecture has been somewhat premature, and it is hoped to become a central issue in this volume of *Shrinking Japan and Regional Variations: Along the Hokurikudo and the Tosando II*.

The current book is truly unique in three aspects. First, the theoretical framework shows originality. In other words, it has been attempted to incorporate cultural and municipal characteristics into demographic analysis is interesting in the case of Japan highlighting historical factors as an explanation leading to distinct characters of different municipalities, and hence different “municipal power.” Second, the methodology is relatively creative, especially using small area data, i.e., various socio-demographic data of municipal level, to capture information at the individual municipal level. It is remarkable to have access to such small area open data of Japan.

Thus, the method has the potential to attract more interest among scholars to utilize open data in their research. Third, the case of Japan provides a good lesson for other nations facing the same problem of shrinking population, and will encourage these nations to look into regional characteristics that may be utilized for revitalization. South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and later in China, for example, will be facing the same problems of population aging and regional shrinkage.

Thus, I am certain that Japan's experience as discussed in this book will be useful and provides comparative knowledge. Nevertheless, there are many other prefectures in Japan not discussed in the present and the previous studies of the current author where regional variations within the same prefectures are outstanding. Studying them, i.e., not explored in the current and the previous studies, would be the next agenda of my study. At the same time, I feel the level of understanding of the true state of shrinking Japan among people overseas remains somewhat distorted. I feel, however, that we cannot blame people abroad for this problem. Instead, it is due in part to the reluctance of the Japanese people to reveal their true identity, and also, in part, to the lack of realization among the Japanese themselves that the Japanese population does indeed exhibit regional variations. My hope, therefore, is to take part in letting the world know the true state of shrinking Japan from the municipal power perspective.

Sincere acknowledgment is extended to various individuals and institutions. Without their cooperation and support, this project could not have been accomplished. It is next to impossible to name them all, but let me list a few. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Prof. Toshihiko Hara, a renowned scholar of demography, and the Editor-in-Chief of the Springer Briefs in Population Studies: Population Studies of Japan, who guided and encouraged me to pursue this project by providing me with various references, advice, and critical reviewed comments on the earlier version of this manuscript. At first, critical comments were difficult to accept, but they were truly constructive and professional which lead to the completion of this project. Mr. Karthikeyan Durairaj, Project Coordinator-Book of Springer Nature, was very resourceful and meticulous during the entire production process of this project by providing me with the most conscientious assistances beyond his responsibilities. Last but not least, I would like to express my hearty appreciation to Ms. Maryann Gorman for her copy-editing work of this manuscript. To a non-native speaker of English writing an academic book manuscript in English requires total dedication and many sacrifices. I am fortunate, however, that Maryann Gorman has agreed to assist me in editing and rewriting to bring the manuscript into the publishable form. All of these support and encouragements lead to the completion of this project.

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Prologue-Introducing This Volume II

This book has studied the issue of shrinking Japan along the Hokurikudo and the Tosando based on the theoretical framework of the *Goki-Shichido* (Five Home Provinces and Seven Circuits of Ancient Japan) and the *Baku-Han* system. This book provides an insightful and sociological study of shrinking Japanese population through a regional variation perspective as it varies significantly by the municipality, even within the same prefecture. Using demographic data on municipal levels, the book identifies the municipal power unique to each municipality which mobilizes shrinking to sustainable Japan. The study identifies the principal explanatory factors based on the small area data of e-Stat through GPS statistical software tools such as G-census and EvaCva, within a historical perspective. The theoretical framework of this study, i.e., the reason for regional variations in Japan is the *Goki-Shichido*. This historical knowledge helps in understanding the significance of the regional cultural heritage which remains in each municipality today. This book pays special attention to municipal variations within the same prefecture, presenting a completely unique approach from what have been pursued by other researchers. The present study analyzed shrinking Japan through a regional variation perspective on small municipal levels, with demographic variables, social indicators, and historical identities. It is hoped, therefore, that this book will offer suggestions for effective regional policies to revitalize a shrinking Japan to a sustainable one.

This book studies five present-day prefectures for detailed analyses based on the *Goki-Shichido* framework for impacts of regional variations of population decline in Japan. They are Niigata Prefecture, made up of the formerly named Echigo and Sado provinces. Ishikawa Prefecture, formed by the ancient Kaga and Noto provinces, Fukui Prefecture, based on the previous Wakasa and Echizen provinces of the Hokurikudo, Nagano Prefecture, still called Shinano Province today and commonly divided into four Areas and 10 Regions, and Gifu Prefecture, composed of ancient Mino and Hida provinces of the Tosando as examples for impacts of municipal power on regional variations of shrinking Japan. By presenting unique analyses of regional variations on small municipal levels, with demographic variables, social indicators, and historical identities this book offers suggestions for effective regional policy for revitalizes shrinking Japan to a sustainable one.

However, due to the limitation of the number of pages set forth for Springer Briefs in Population Studies: Population Studies of Japan, for which the current publication is a part, it has become necessary to divide the book into two volumes, namely Volume I and Volume II. Because of this limitation, the current Volume II consists of four chapters. They are Chap. 1: Fukui Prefecture in the Hokurikudo; Chap. 2: Nagano Prefecture in the Tosando; Chap. 3: Gifu Prefecture in the Tosando, and Chap. 4: Epilogue: The Future of Shrinking Japan. The remaining two prefectures, i.e., Niigata and Ishikawa prefectures in the Hokurikudo area have been discussed in the Volume I of this book. Now that we understand the structure of this book, let us grasp the summary of four chapters dealt in the current Volume II.

Chapter 1 observes Fukui Prefecture today which is based on the earlier Wakasa and Echizen provinces of the Hokurikudo. In it there are 17 municipalities today, divided into two regions. They are the northern part of the Reihoku region with 11 municipalities, equivalent to the ancient Echizen Province, and the southern part of the Reinan region, with six municipalities, roughly equivalent to Wakasa Province of earlier times. We will examine differences in the municipal power in these two regions. Moreover, two municipalities will be studied extensively. They are Sabae-shi and Ikeda-cho both located in the same region of Reihoku. According to the projected population increase rate for 2045 Sabae-shi (-6.4%) is the highest, while Ikeda-cho (-56.9%) is the lowest in Fukui Prefecture. Ikeda-cho may likely learn from the municipal power of Sabae-shi and turn into a sustainable municipality.

Chapter 2 analyzes Nagano Prefecture of the former Shinano Province along the Tosando of the *Goki-Shichido*. Nagano Prefecture, being composed of 77 municipalities is still called Shinano even today. The prefecture is commonly divided into four areas-Hokushin, Toshin, Chushin, and Nanshin. The sociocultural characteristics of each municipality vary significantly from one municipality to the other. The average rate for the projected population increase of Nagano Prefecture in 2045 is -23.1% , with the highest of Miyota-machi (-0.6%) of the Toshin area, and the lowest, Tenryu-mura (-72.2%) of the Nanshin area. Tenryu-mura is on the verge of extinction, and may learn from the municipal power of Miyota-machi for its revitalization.

Chapter 3 considers Gifu Prefecture, composed of the ancient Mino and Hida provinces of the Tosando. Today, Gifu Prefecture has 42 municipalities in five regions: Gifu (9 municipalities), Seino (11 municipalities), Chuno (13 municipalities), Tono (5 municipalities), and Hida (4 municipalities). The average rate for the projected population increases for 2045 in Gifu Prefecture is -23.4% , with the highest being Mizuho-shi ($+2.3\%$) of the Gifu region, and the lowest, Shirakawa-cho (-59.0%) of the Chuno region. We will examine provincial differences in the municipal power and population increase rates in Gifu Prefecture.

Chapter 4, the last chapter, acts as the epilogue of this book. In the era of the coronavirus pandemic, three issues relating to the shrinking Japan will be discussed. First in discussing “shrinking Japan in the era of coronavirus pandemic,” we will elaborate three issues, namely the accelerated decline in the number of births, shrinking the child population under the age of 15, and the issue of the 2025 problem in demography. The second issue we will discuss is the “new normal lifestyle,” followed by the third issue on “from shrinking to sustainable Japan.” In the wake of the COVID-19,

we are obliged to practice the new normal lifestyle, and consequently there emerged a growing interest in rural remote communities. Now is the time to ask how to confront the shrinking Japan with the “municipal power” to “revitalize” disappearing municipalities to create sustainable Japan. Our suggestion to create exchange and related populations would hopefully be the answer to this difficult task. Such efforts will alter Japan from a shrinking to a sustainable society.

With a brief description on of the structure of this book, it is hoped that the central theme of the book has become clear now. That is, by identifying both the positive and the negative municipal power it is possible to revitalize a shrinking Japan into a sustainable one. Having said that let us now begin our journey of *Shrinking Japan and Regional Variations: Along the Hokurikudo and the Tosando II*.

Fumie Kumagai

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