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

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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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This series will be of great interest to a wide range of researchers in other countries confronting a post-demographic transition stage, demographers, population geographers, sociologists, economists, political scientists, health researchers, and practitioners across a broad spectrum of social sciences.


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Preface

It has been more than four decades since I became interested in the 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 world, or San Francisco and Los Angeles seem to represent the Janus-faced realities of California State. This realization of 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 US-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 up my extended stay overseas, I lived in rural Niigata for three years from 1984 to 1987 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 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, data being analyzed were based on prefecture. In other words, it was the discussion of *ken-min-sei* (prefectural stereotypes, or pre-conceived 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 and lifestyle 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 *Baku-Han Taisei* (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 Nara period (the years from 710 to 794). Because of these historical backgrounds, there are cases among the present prefectures where the history, ethos, climate, humanity, customs, lifestyle, dialect, and temperament are totally different. In addition, there are also 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 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 shrinking 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 I*.

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. It is interesting in the case of Japan highlighting historical factors as an explanation leading to distinct characters of different municipalities, and hence the 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 individual municipal level. It is remarkable to have access to such small area open data of Japan. Thus, the method has 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 population decline 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 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 acknowledgement 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 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. Yutaka Hirachi, Senior Editor of Springer Nature Japan was extraordinarily supportive by encouraging me to pursue writing this manuscript, and by providing me with valuable instructions all the way. Mr. Karthikeyan Durairaj, Project Coordinator-Book of Springer Nature, was very resourceful and meticulous during the entire production process of this project. 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 a 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 I

This book has studied the issue of shrinking Japan along the Hokurikudo and the Tosando based on the theoretical framework of the *Goki-Shichido* 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 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* (Five Home Provinces and Seven Circuits of Ancient Japan). 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 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 I is consisted of three chapters, namely, Chap. 1: Issues, Theoretical Framework, and Methodology; Chap. 2: Niigata Prefecture in the Hokurikudo; and Chap. 3: Ishikawa Prefecture in the Hokurikudo. The remaining three prefectures, i.e., Fukui in the Hokurikudo area, Nagano and Gifu both in the Tosando area will be discussed in the Volume II of this book. Now that we understand the structure of this book, let us grasp the summary of three chapters discussed in the current Volume I.

Chapter 1 presents a theoretical model for “From Shrinking Japan to Sustainable Japan” first by defining the municipal power, a central term for the determinant of the regional variations. The shrinking Japan literally means that the population of Japan is shrinking. It is widely believed that two essential factors for the population “shrinking” are declining fertility and population aging. This book, however, is *not* to examine causes of the shrinking nation. Instead, the book is a sociological study of the changing Japanese population through a regional perspective since it varies significantly among municipalities, even within the same prefecture, because of the “municipal power.” The municipal power (*Chiiki-ryoku*, literally meaning regional power or strength, includes both the pros and cons of regional characteristics) of Japan is based on historical, geographic, socioeconomic, and demographic features from a historical context. The theoretical framework of regional variations within the same prefecture is twofold: the *Goki-Shichido* (The Five Home Provinces and Seven Circuits) which lasted from the Nara period until the Meiji Restoration; and on which overlapped the *Baku-Han Taisei* of the Edo Period.

The socio-cultural impacts of the central government of the Edo Shogunate, and the *Han system*, representing the local feudal domain headed by the feudal lord, still exist in Japanese municipalities today. The current study uses various open small area data in the e-Stat compiled by the Statistics Bureau of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication. With these small area open data at hand, the highlighted regional variations are shown by GPS statistical software tools such as G-census and EvaCva within a historical perspective.

Chapter 2 discusses Niigata Prefecture in the ancient Hokurikudo of the *Goki-Shichido*, made up of the formerly named Echigo and Sado provinces, and is comprised of 30 municipalities today. The prefecture today is divided into four regions of Kaetsu, Chuetsu, Joetsu, and Sado, and municipal power indicators for each region will be investigated. In Niigata Prefecture’s 30 municipalities, Seiro-machi in the Kaetsu region has the highest projected population increase rate (−7.2%) for 2045, while Aga-machi in Kaetsu region has the lowest (−60.7%). Demographic characteristics of such municipalities as Seiro-machi, Awashimaura-mura, and Kariwa-mura present themselves quite unique. Thus, we will investigate