### ISHIKAWA Yoshitaka ed. *International Migrants in Japan: Contributions in an Era of Population Decline.*


Relationships between population, migration, politics and environment are notoriously complex and, for many nations, fraught. The geographies, histories, politics and sociologies of difference, mobility and migration are core concerns of social sciences, but present different challenges for society and government in different national settings.

Providing thoughtful commentary on the nature and experience of migration, therefore, is an important responsibility for academic observers. As policy shifts in the USA following the 2016 Presidential election reveal, debate about these issues can be poorly informed, inflammatory and both reflect and inflame deep social divisions.

In this edited volume, Professor Ishikawa and his colleagues offer careful and nuanced commentary on key aspects of population dynamics in Japan, focusing on the experience and impact of international migrants, with particular attention to labour and marriage migrants. They make a significant contribution to building a strong evidence-based foundation for policy thinking, not just about broad migration issues, but future service provision, economic and community development and social and institutional responses to Japan's place in a rapidly changing world.

Any research in Japan on this broad topic faces significant data challenges, and these are discussed by many of the researchers, who recognise that some aspects of their studies are restricted by data limitations. Indeed, the United Nations special rapporteur on minority issues, Rita Izsak, argues Japan should establish an independent human rights institution to collect demographic data on minority groups, including religious affiliations and ethnic backgrounds, in order to weigh strategies to help them (Murai 2016). The research delivered in this volume goes a long way to explaining what is needed and why.

This volume reports on a major research project and presents the work of geographers and sociologists to offer important insights into the challenges facing Japan as it mobilises immigration as one of the key strategies for addressing the “challenges caused by low fertility, such as ageing and … a decreasing working-age population” (Korekawa, this volume, p. 3) and what detailed data, and particularly small area data is available for researchers investigating demographic, economic and cultural change in Japan. Ishikawa makes the point that in the context of economic change, transformation of the nation's demographic structure, and a very uneven pattern of rural decline and urban growth, Japan needs to reconsider the roles played by international migrants in Japan's future.

*International Migrants in Japan: Contributions in an Era of Population Decline* reports the work of more than a dozen researchers in an interdisciplinary project working with the best available small area data to establish the geographic facts of immigration in Japan and to explore regional differences in immigrant and host society experiences of immigration in Japan. Ishikawa notes that very few studies have taken this geographical perspective on the Japanese experience of international migration. The volume's inclusion of some detailed and diverse studies on related topics (for example, four papers on Brazilian immigrants and three papers focused on Hamamatsu City in Shizuoka), illustrates the value of the range of perspectives and methodologies brought to bear on the issues. It is unfortunate indeed that there is not similar in-depth treatment of Chinese and Korean immigrants, but that should not detract significantly from the value of this book, because the depth of understanding it builds in the specific cases examined is both significant and exemplary.

The conventional characterisation of Japan as a simply homogenous society, or in Weiner's memorable phrase “an immutable and homogenous Japanese identity” (1997) has long been destabilised by the existence of minority and immigrant populations. Deeply embedded discrimination, however, remains reinforced by national legislation, policies and practices, which favour foreign residents of Japanese descent with privileged access to ‘long term resident’ status (Yamuchi, this volume, p. 24), sees ethnic and cultural identity rather than education and length of residency as key predictors of success in labour markets (Korekawa this volume, p. 21). Thus, despite an expectation that migration, particularly of younger women, might be important in addressing fer-
tility patterns in Japan, existing patterns of labour market discrimination and uncertainty seem to mitigate against migrant women and cross border marriages having any meaningful impact (Yamauchi, this volume; Hanaoka and Takeshita, this volume).

The detailed case studies presented are strengthened by the researchers’ analysis of microdata from the 2010 National Census, which allows small area analysis of a range of characteristics of migrant communities. This is well-supplemented by local investigation in interviews and the detailed examination of the experiences of Brazilian migrants in Hamamatsu reveals that the interplay of labour market conditions and public policy sees migrant families clustered in lower socio-economic conditions, relying on public housing and deeply dependent on community volunteer contributions to maintain identify and build opportunity. The analyses reveal the value of both the microdata and the qualitative engagement with people’s lived experience. The research project reported in the volume faced significant difficulties in identifying data that addressed its specific research questions, but was innovative and effective in pursuing alternative sources, methods and resources to build up a policy relevant analysis that recognizes the policy significance of small scale geographical variation in settlement patterns, labour market and family outcomes, host community responses and migrant experience. The common narrative of the importance of community volunteering and geographically uneven outcomes is reinforced in the final chapters which explicitly address policy issues. Chiba and Yamamoto review changes in labour migration policies since the 1980s and challenge representation of Japanese policy settings as exclusive and restrictive. They identify Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications guidance in March 2006 as marking a significant shift towards multiculturalism (this volume, pp. 222–224), and development of specific policies addressing unskilled foreign labour and highly skilled technical and professional labour and note that while the government seeks to encourage movement of workers, it is human beings that arrive as migrants, and this represents a set of challenges that governments (and the societies they represent) are commonly unprepared for. In many cases, it will be local governments that manage these challenges, support migrants and address the social and economic issues associated with changing demography and diversity in Japan.

This volume is a welcome addition to the scholarship on demographic change and its economic and cultural implications for Japan and should be widely consulted by scholars and policy makers.

References


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