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Concluding Comments

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The papers in this volume provide an extraordinarily rich indication of the complex and changing dynamics of migration to and from Japan. They also highlight the great potential of the Japanese experience to contribute to the broader understanding of human migration in the contemporary world. That potential lies in two general areas. The first involves the benefits of having “on the record” the details of the Japanese experience with migration. That experience is important for many reasons, particularly because Japan is fully developed in an economic sense—that it is a first world country—but also represents a distinctive cultural tradition. It is thus a vital complement to research on North America and Europe. The second area of potential involves the more conceptual issues of how to understand contemporary migration. Here again, Japan provides an invaluable complement because its distinctive cultural tradition involves a distinctive intellectual tradition as well—including what has become the largest national anthropology association outside of the United States. To put it simply, the potential lies with both new data and new thinking.

New Data

There are many papers in this volume that illuminate both similarities and differences between Japan’s experience with transnational migration and that of North America and Europe. It is helpful, for example, to see how low-wage (and sometimes undocumented) labor migration has a similar kind of logic in Japan and in North America and Europe. Despite some unique features in the relative predominance of overstays and the presence of undocumented labor in the manufacturing sector in Japan, the general patterns of life in the shadows remain the same. It is, however, the differences that are probably more striking. As one example, the discussion of Vietnamese in Japan (by Ikuo Kawakami) shows many similarities to their situation in the United States. Yet one crucial feature is different. There is a relative lack of access by Vietnamese to higher education in Japan as compared to the very intensive and successful use of higher education by Vietnamese in the United States. Here is a lesson from Japan regarding unexamined assumptions in the United States about the “normal” connections between migrant adaptation and a society’s educational system.

As another example, the examination of Muslim conversion in Japan (by Masako Kudo) suggests a unique kind of balance between the social and religious aspects of conversion to Islam and how that conversion is simultaneously individualistic and also group-based. This may have something to do with scale. Japan has smaller numbers of

conversions and fewer established Muslim institutions, and therefore there may be a more fluid, ad hoc process of people adapting to each other. The Japanese case also suggests that conversion may be different in a society where conversion is not generally a religious conversion both to and from—as compared to North America where those converting to Islam are often converting away from Christianity.

As a third example, many of the papers suggest that for Japan migration is often not an issue of a final destination or a permanent move. Instead one migration decision leads to another; one move creates the opportunity for other moves, whether on to new places or back to a country of origin. This is clear in Japan both for those moving in (who may wish to move on to other places) and for those moving out (who may wish to return, if only for death and burial). The discussions of “life-style” migration in this volume are especially effective in showing a kind of migration that is neither simply temporary nor fully permanent.

New Thinking

There are thus many examples from Japan that provide a more complete record on what is actually happening in contemporary transnational migration. There are, however, also some more theoretical insights that begin to emerge from the Japanese material. One involves the incremental nature of migration and migration decisions—that one movement may be of uncertain duration and, instead of permanency, creates a new set of options for further movement. Migration is thus not necessarily a matter of moving from one place to another, from here to there (or there to here) as some sort of finalized process. Yet that notion of a finalized here-to-there process is quite common in a migration literature that emphasizes migrants as people who are out of place and thus must be incorporated into a new place. The discussions of the migrants then automatically jump to discussions of how their incorporation take place—or should take place. Here, instead of that finalized process of out-of-place and back-into-place, of uprooting and transplantation, migration instead emerges as a way to expand what “here” is. Human migration itself, then, requires little explanation. Instead, what requires explanation is how the range of territory within which movement takes place shifts in its contours. This is an appealing perspective for anthropologists since we know that, of the basic human environmental adaptations, only one—agriculture—is truly sedentary. Furthermore, even in agricultural societies, many of the most interesting kinds of people are not at all sedentary: traders, administrators, preachers, soldiers.

Transnational migration, however, is not just about movement, it is also about movement across borders. Those borders are physical to some extent, whether matching relatively natural boundaries (as in Japan’s case), matching what used to be relatively natural boundaries (as in marginal mountain or desert terrain that was once of little significance), or being more arbitrarily created (as in many of the boundaries created by

colonial powers). However, those borders also represent administrative categories. Thus, as an example, the number of foreigners legally “admitted” to the United States for permanent resident status does not just represent actual new arrivals. Instead, it includes many people already in the United States. In fact, the great majority of “admissions” are of those already in the country. The crossing of the physical border and the crossing of the administrative category are thus quite distinct issues. This is true in Japan as well.

Perhaps more challenging theoretically than physical and administrative borders are cultural borders. Here, again, the Japanese experience provides some conceptual challenges, particularly as the emerging emphasis on multiculturalism raises the question of what multiculturalism might actually mean. The emphasis on multiculturalism often begs the question of the relative balance to be maintained between the autonomy of different cultures and the beliefs and behavior necessary for a reasonably orderly society. Clearly, for example, multiculturalism should probably not include differing notions of crime and public order, but it probably should include some significant heritage activities (samba festivals, for example). Clearly, as well, multiculturalism should probably not include forcing people from different backgrounds to spend all their time together, but it probably should include some measures to avoid complete segregation.

Japan now seems to be in an intermediate position between places like the United States (where multiculturalism means blending in to a common standard) and Singapore and Malaysia (where multiculturalism involves *not* blending in culturally or sometimes even legally). Furthermore, as Shinji Yamashita noted in his introductory chapter, the relatively high degree of foreign marriages in Japan suggests that this issue of multiculturalism is often being addressed within households, rather than between them. Future generations will thus not be easily characterized as either “native” or “foreign” since they will be both by birthright. Given this kind of range and hybridity in multiculturalism, Japanese anthropologists are in a very good position not only to add case material to the migration literature but to begin to question the assumptions of the current immigration literature, including assumptions about cultural essences and perimeters. That kind of cultural questioning, which inevitably has a strong socio-linguistic basis, may help greatly in the effort to transcend the assumptions implicit in the English-language discourse of migration.

A Global Anthropology of Migration

These issues of the incremental nature of migration and the vicissitudes (practical and conceptual) of multiculturalism address two main currents in recent thinking about migration, one concerned with the issues of flow and the other concerned with the trajectories of those who have moved. Together the two provide some hope for an understanding of migration that is adequate to both the dynamics of human movement

and the lives of those who have migrated, and that is also adequate to both the permanency *and* impermanency of migration in its physical, administrative, and cultural aspects. The combination of new data on Japan and new thinking from Japanese anthropologists thus gives great hope for a truly global anthropology of migration.