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Transnational Migration in East Asia: Japan in a Comparative Focus

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East Asia in Motion

In the book *Worlds in Motion*, Douglas Massey and his colleagues (1998: 5) noted that by the 1980s international migration had spread into Asia, not just to Japan but also to newly industrialized areas such as Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand. By 2000, it was estimated that approximately 15 million transnational migrants had spread out from East Asia, while the area including Southeast Asian countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines had received over four million guest workers. For instance, in the state of Sabah, Malaysia, where I have been doing field research since 1999, there are one million Indonesian and Filipino (oftentimes illegal) guest workers among the overall population of three million. Even in Japan, where migrant control is rather tight, by 2006 registered foreign residents numbered 2.08 million people including about 800,000 guest workers. East Asia is in motion.

According to Massey *et al.* (1998: 169), the Asia Pacific region is the world's newest major international migration system, and it has been less studied in comparison with North America and Europe. Yet there has been much more attention to the Asia Pacific region in migration studies in recent years, with an increasing literature on the impact of China's growth (Nonini and Ong 1997; Ong 2000; Cheng 2001; Yoshihara and Suzuki 2002), migrants in Japan (Komai 1999; Douglas and Roberts 2000; Befu and Guichard-Anguis 2001; Goodman, Peach, Takenaka and White 2003), and the international diaspora from the Philippines (Parreñas 2001). Stephen Castles (1998) provides a general view of such new migration in Southeast and East Asia in relation to ethnicity and nationalism.

However, there is still very little research conducted from a comparative perspective. It is against this background that we held the symposium, "Transnational Migration in East Asia: Japan in a Comparative Focus," at the National Museum of Ethnology (Minpaku) in Osaka. The symposium discussed the current status of transnational migration in East Asia, particularly focusing on Japan, in a comparative perspective. The current volume is the proceedings of the symposium.¹⁾

Japan in a Comparative Focus: An Overview of Transnational Human Flows

As Japan is the focus for this comparison, let me begin by giving a general picture of transnational human flows around Japan—both outbound and inbound—and examining the distinctive features of these flows in terms of the changing demographic and socio-economic-cultural patterns of contemporary Japanese society.²⁾

Outbound Flows

After Japan's defeat in the Pacific War in 1945 overseas travel was restricted for most Japanese, but in 1964, the year of the Tokyo Olympics, the restrictions were removed. In that year, 128,000 Japanese went abroad. Over the 40 years since then, the number of Japanese overseas visitors has been growing continually, although with ups and downs that reflect political, economic, and epidemiological conditions—and even natural disasters such as earthquakes and *tsunami*. In 2006, 17.5 million Japanese went overseas.³⁾ The main reason for this rapid development of international visits from Japan is no doubt Japan's economic growth and the increased power of the Japanese yen.⁴⁾

As for the countries to which visitors have gone, China became the number one destination in 2006 when 3.75 million Japanese visited China. In that same year, 3.67 million Japanese went to the USA (the number one destination until 2005), of whom 1.4 million went to Hawaii.⁵⁾ This destination shift from the USA to China may reflect Japan's recent economic shift in that same direction. In addition, 2.3 million visitors went to Korea, 1.3 million to Thailand, 1.3 million to Hong Kong, and 1.2 million to Taiwan. The Asian region constitutes about 70 percent of the total outbound destinations.

Japanese nationals residing overseas numbered 1.01 million in 2005.⁶⁾ They included approximately 310,000 *ejusha* (permanent residents) and 690,000 *chokitaizaisha* (residents staying longer than three months). Of both groups, 350,000 resided in the USA, 110,000 in China (reflecting the general trend of outbound flows from Japan), and 66,000 in Brazil (a country which was once one of the most popular emigration destinations for Japanese). In terms of regional proportions, 39 percent of the overseas Japanese resided in North America, while 26 percent resided in Asia. Japanese residents in Asia are increasing. In terms of occupations of "long-staying residents," 56 percent were employees at private enterprises, and 25 percent were students and researchers.

It is interesting to point out that the ratio of women (51.6 percent as of 2005) has been higher than men since 1999. This is particularly the case with students. According to the Study Abroad White Paper (ICS 1999), the proportion of students abroad who were female increased from 40 percent in 1988 to 70 percent in 1998. As far as *shakaijin* or adult students are concerned, the female ratio is as high as 80 percent. I was impressed by this *OL ryugaku* or "Japanese Office Lady Study Abroad" phenomenon

when I was a visiting scholar at UC Berkeley in the late 1990s. So I conducted research in the San Francisco Bay Area, through which I found that most of these women were frustrated by gender discrimination at work places in Japan, then decided on their *OL ryugaku* to seek more meaningful lives abroad (Yamashita 2003b; Yamashita in press). In this sense, *ryugaku* is a form of transnational migration as well.

Inbound Flows

Turning to inbound flows, about 7.3 million foreigners visited Japan in 2006. The figure has been increasing but remains small compared with the over 17 million Japanese outbound travelers. The imbalance of in- and outbound has been a problem in human flows involving contemporary Japan. In 2003, then Prime Minister Koizumi proposed a policy to increase the number of inbound visitors to Japan so that Japan could establish herself as *kanko rikkoku*, a “tourism state.” For this purpose, the Japanese Government launched the “Visit Japan Campaign” (*Yokoso Japan*) to attract more international visitors, intending to increase the inbound figure to 10 million by 2010.

Looking at the nationality of these international visitors to Japan, we notice that approximately 70 percent of them are from Asian countries, especially neighboring East Asian countries. In particular, Korean and Chinese (from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the mainland) visitors have increased sharply in recent years. The top five countries in 2006 were: Korea (2.12 million), Taiwan (1.31 million), USA (820,000), China (810,000), and Hong Kong (350,000).⁷⁾

Japanese Society in Motion:

Labor Migrants to Japan and Lifestyle Migrants from Japan

Labor Migrants to Japan

Japan was once a migrant sending country. However, after the economic growth of the 1960s, emigrants from Japan decreased and by the early 1990s the national emigration project had ended. Instead, Japan became a migrant receiving country. The result is that there are now about two million foreign residents in Japan. They account for 1.6 percent of Japan’s total population. Among them are approximately 800,000 guest workers, 100,000 university students, and 200,000 illegal “overstay” foreigners. This proportion of foreign residents is considerably lower than that of other developed countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and various European countries. However, the proportion of foreign residents in Japan has doubled in the last ten years, making foreigners a quite visible presence in Japanese society.

According to Stephen Castles (1998: 10), with the new 1990 immigration law, the Japanese government closed the “front door” to foreign workers but opened a number of legal “side doors” such as: free admission of *Nikkei* (Japanese descendants) from Brazil and Peru; trainees who are allowed to work in factories for the purpose of job

training; language students enrolled at Japanese language schools who are allowed to work for a certain number of hours; and entertainers—women recruited mainly from the Philippines and Thailand as dancers, hostesses, etc.

There are three major characteristics of current labor migrants in Japan. First, about 70 percent of them are from Asian countries, particularly Korea and China. Koreans, the largest group at approximately 600,000 in number (29 percent), include the Korean-origin minority, *zainichi kankoku-chosenjin* who are a result of colonial labor migration and number 450,000. Most of them are in the third or fourth generation. On the other hand, most of the Chinese, the second largest group at 560,000 in number (27 percent), are newcomers who are rapidly increasing in number. In the near future, they will be the largest group, exceeding Koreans. Chinese are a major group among the *ryugakusei* (university students, 69 percent of the total), *shugakusei* (language school students, 57 percent), and *kenshusei* (trainees, 75 percent).

Second, with the introduction of the new immigration law in 1990, *Nikkei* migrants, particularly those from Brazil, flowed into Japan with the result that the Brazilian population has become, at 310,000 persons (15 percent), the third largest group. They have come to work as factory workers in cities such as Hamamatsu (Aichi Prefecture) and Oizumi (Gunma Prefecture). In Oizumi they have a Brazilian Plaza with the now famous *Nikkei* Brazilian Samba Festival.

Third, in terms of gender, women, particularly from the Philippines, have had a special niche. Being called *japayuki* (“Japan goer”), they work especially in entertainment sectors such as karaoke bars and nightclubs. The journalist Megumi Hisada noted: “1979 was the first year of the *japayuki* or Filipino Japan goer and the Filipinas who came to work numbered over 10,000. Ten years later, in 1989, Filipinas staying in Japan, legally or illegally, numbered over 100,000, and Filipinas married to Japanese men numbered over 10,000” (Hisada 1992: 307–308). Currently, there are about 190,000 Filipino residents (9 percent of the total foreigner population) in Japan, of whom about 80 percent are female. However, since 2005 the issuing of “entertainer visas” has been increasingly restricted due to US government criticism of “human trafficking” in Japan. This has resulted in a large reduction in the entry of Filipinas with entertainer visas.

Furthermore, there is the phenomenon of the “import” of Asian brides. In Japan today, the first marriage age of women is the highest in the world (28.0 years on average in 2005, according to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan). Young Japanese women often do not seem to find many positive reasons to get married, and so they are reluctant to do so. In some villages where depopulation continues, the exodus of women to the cities has led to a dearth of younger women, and it is common knowledge that brides are being “imported” from places such as the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and China. Ashahi-cho (Yamagata Prefecture) in northeastern Japan became famous when the mayor of the town led a tour to the Philippines to arrange marriages

(Shukuya 1988). Masako Watanabe (2002) has discussed the socio-cultural changes caused by the dearth of young women and the “import” of foreign wives in rural Japan, especially in the Mogami district (Yamagata Prefecture).

These guest worker issues now deserve special attention in relation to the coming of a rapidly aging society with a low birth rate. Japanese society is likely to face more labor force problems as Japan’s population continues the decline that began in 2005. This will be the case especially for IT technicians and care workers. For the latter, the migration of Filipinas may begin to shift from the current entertainment sector to the nursing sector on the basis of the Japan-Philippines EPA (Economic Partnership Agreement) signed in 2006. The *kenshusei-seido* (“trainee” system) is also being considered for revision.

Lifestyle Migrants from Japan

Most of Japanese outbound travelers are not emigrants but tourists who will return to Japan after their trips. It is interesting to observe, however, that in recent Japanese international tourism the distinction between tourism and migration has become blurred. I noticed this phenomenon for the first time when I was doing research on Japanese tourists in Bali, Indonesia, in 1995. I came across more than 200 Japanese young women who had married Balinese men after repeated tourist visits. After their marriages, they stayed in Bali—as I have discussed in a chapter of my book on Balinese tourism (Yamashita 2003a: Ch.7). It is interesting to note that many of them have no idea of giving up their Japanese nationality and becoming Indonesian: they are not abandoning the country from which they have migrated. They should perhaps be seen not as migrants but rather as long-staying tourists searching for their own “real” selves. These travelers are what Machiko Sato (2001) has called “lifestyle migrants.”

This may also be the case with the young long-staying tourists in Bangkok with whom Mayumi Ono has conducted research. They moved from “gloomy” Japan to “lively” Bangkok to seek an alternative life (Ono 2005). Further, this is also the case with the “long-stay” tourism in which retired elderly people have been moving to foreign countries such as Hawaii, Australia, Thailand, and Malaysia, in search of meaningful lives after retirement. They are coming to the fore as part of the recent changing demographic and socio-economic patterns in Japan. Host countries in Southeast Asia have sometimes responded by providing a special kind of retirement visa, such as the “Malaysia my second home program” and *Lansia (Lanjutan Usia)* or “elderly visa” in Indonesia (Yamashita and Ono 2006; Yamashita 2007a).

Socio-Cultural Implications of Transnational Migration in Japan: The Formation of Transnational Communities⁸⁾

What, then, are the socio-cultural products of these transnational human flows? Socially,

one could point out the formation of transnational communities, communities that exist beyond the nation-state. James Clifford points out that for the people who spend their lives traveling back and forth between the Caribbean and Brooklyn, New York, the question which has to be asked is not so much “where are you from?” as “where are you between?” (Clifford 1997: 37). This kind of lifestyle cannot be understood in terms of the static categories of ethnic group and culture in conventional anthropology, in which it is assumed that a particular people living in a particular area necessarily share a particular culture. Rather than living within their culture, these people live betwixt and between cultures. Their lifestyle can be characterized as “living-in-between.”

International marriage also results in this kind of “living-in-between.” By 2000 the international marriage rate in Japan had risen to 5 percent on average and 10 percent in Tokyo.⁹⁾ Most of the spouses are Asians such as Chinese, Filipinas, and Koreans. Of interest is the difference in gender. In the case of marriages between Japanese men and foreign women in 2004, the largest group of wives was Chinese (39 percent), followed by Filipinas (27 percent), and Koreans (19 percent). However, in the case of marriages between foreign men and Japanese women, the largest group of husbands was Koreans (27 percent), followed by Americans (17 percent),¹⁰⁾ and Chinese (13 percent).¹¹⁾ This difference may be explained in terms of gender and power relations in the contemporary international order (Yamashita 2003b).

The next stage in the development of international marriage is a socio-cultural process of “hybridization.” Hisada described vividly such couples and suggested that “in the close relations between Japanese men and Filipinas through marriage, the Filipinas’ powerful Asian energy will change Japanese attitudes toward other Asians in Japanese society” (Hisada 1992: 308–309). When I interviewed her in 2000, Hisada told me, “It is changing much faster than I ever thought. Now the marriage of Japanese men, even elite businessmen, to women from the Philippines has become so common that it has come to be accepted without any great reluctance by Japanese society.” Further, Hisada observed that in “the PTA meetings at elementary schools which Filipina mothers attend, something happens which allows closed Japanese society to open to allow fresh air to come in. Some would say this could result in disorder in the society. But in my opinion it would be a creative chaos.”¹²⁾ Japanese society is thus changing its boundaries within the socio-cultural processes of contemporary transnational migration.

We can observe the hybridization process of Japanese society abroad as well. Japanese communities in many countries abroad are often very closed and unlikely to mix at all with the local society. In the case of Bali, however, what is remarkable is that the Japanese women who have married Balinese not only participate in the Japanese Association, but also are able to play a role in opening up the Association to Balinese society (Yamashita 2003a: 98). This was illustrated by an event, the *Bon* Dance (a dance related to Japanese Buddhism), held at the Nusa Dua Hilton Hotel during my 1995 research in Bali. The interesting thing about this was that, rather than being the usual

expression of Japanese community identity, it expressed the energy of the hybrid community in Bali. The children of mixed parentage danced, while their Balinese fathers took photographs. The Japanese women of the *Nyonya-kai* (the women's section of the Japanese Association in Bali) performed on the *jegog* (Balinese bamboo instruments) and danced the *joged bumbung* (a type of popular Balinese folk dance). In 2006 about 200 children of mixed parentage were studying Japanese at the *Nihongo Hoshuko* (Supplementary School of Japanese Language) run by the Japanese Association in Bali.

The Structure of This Volume

Following my introduction, David Haines gives another introduction that focuses on comparative issues. Part One then discusses the current status of transnational migration in Japan from an ethnographic perspective. These ethnographic sessions depict in detail various aspects of migrant societies in Japan according to the ethnicity of the migrants: Koreans examined by Hideki Harajiri, Chinese by Chen Tien-shi, *Nikkei* Brazilians by Koji Sasaki, Filipinas by Nobue Suzuki, Vietnamese by Ikuo Kawakami, and Nepali migrants by Makito Minami. As mentioned before, Korean, Chinese, *Nikkei* Brazilians, and Filipinos are the four largest groups of foreign residents in Japan, while Vietnamese and Nepali are smaller in numbers.

Part Two focuses on two crucial themes for contemporary Japanese society in relation to transnational mobility: "Multicultural Japan" on the one hand, and "An Aging Society and Transnational Migration" on the other. The first theme is related to a major consequence of current transnational migration. In this session, Hiroshi Shoji examines this issue from the point of view of language, Masako Kudo of religion, and John Mock of education. Their papers relate to the debate on how a "homogenous" Japan can change in relation to the worldwide contemporary process of globalization. As Harumi Befu (2006) has pointed out, the "habitus of homogeneity ideology" still prevails in the minds of most Japanese. Befu suggested four possible scenarios for a Japanese future that would represent a range of options from homogeneity to full multiculturalism: (1) continuation of the homogeneity ideology, leading to the exclusion of foreign residents; (2) keeping the present situation in which Japan accepts foreign residents in sectors peripheral to the dominant homogeneity ideology; (3) partial recognition of pluralism as an ideology, lending an "official citizenship" to multiculturalism in parallel with the homogeneity ideology; and (4) exclusion of the homogeneity ideology, leading to multiculturalism as the main stream in Japanese society. Of these scenarios, Befu suggested the third option as the one Japan is most likely to take. I also think that this is realistic, and that Japan will in this way head toward a multicultural society.

The second theme, the connection between an aging society and transnational migration, may become the most serious problem of contemporary Japanese society.

Japan is likely to experience increasing social problems due to age, regularly described as *shoshi koreika shakai* (a society with an aging population due to a low birthrate), especially after 2007 when the massive seven-million baby boomer generation, known as *dankai no sedai* (the “lump generation,” i.e. those who were born between 1947 and 1949) begins to retire. It is estimated that the percentage of the population over 65 years old will increase to 29 percent by 2025 and to 40 percent by 2055, compared with 20 percent in 2006.¹³⁾ Because of the falling birth rate and the demographic changes in the labor force, there is now a shortage of young workers to support the elderly people who depend on them. To solve this problem, it is argued that Japan may have to “import” much more foreign labor from neighboring Asian countries, especially for jobs in the medical care service sector for the elderly. The papers that address such issues include Koji Miyazaki on an aging society and migration to Asia and Oceania, Mayumi Ono on Japanese retirees in Malaysia, and Mika Toyota on the international migration of care workers. “Long-stay,” a Japanese version of international retirement migration, on which Ono has conducted research in Malaysia, is a quite interesting phenomenon if we recall that 6.2 million Japanese aged over 50 traveled overseas in 2006, and that the number will increase due to the progressively aging society in Japan. This type of tourism could therefore have a major effect on the international tourism market. This could be combined with the medical/health tourism that Toyota discusses.

Part Three examines migration issues in a more comparative East Asian perspective, including a general discussion in addition to comments from scholars invited from overseas.¹⁴⁾ In these comparative sessions, Xiang Biao considers labor transplantation and transnational encapsulation in East Asia from a Chinese perspective; Keiko Yamanaka examines Japan as a country of immigration given two decades of an influx of immigrant workers and spouses; and Shoichiro Takezawa discusses the nation-state and immigration from a European perspective. A final chapter provides some concluding thoughts from David Haines.¹⁵⁾

Conclusion: Learning to Live Together in One World

In 2004, the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka held a special exhibition called “Multiethnic Japan: Lives of Foreign Residents in Japan.” The key word was *kyosei* or “living together.” “Living together” is easy to say but difficult to practice. One might recall here that “learning to live together in one world” is an unrealized book title by the American anthropologist Margaret Mead. She planned to publish it during the Pacific war, but the US atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki prevented her from doing so (Beeman 2004). Her book title is still apt today. There may be no other hope than that we keep trying to learn how to live together within a shrinking world. As a student of anthropology, I hope that this volume on transnational migration in East Asia will contribute to this issue from the unfinished work of Margaret Mead, and help make

anthropology once again a discipline that contributes to contemporary issues in the public sphere.

Notes

- 1) The symposium was held on May 31–June 1, 2007, organized jointly by the “Transborder Anthropology” project of the National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, the Comparative Study of East Asian Migration project organized by David Haines (George Mason University in the United States), and the “Aging Society and International Migration in Asia and Oceania” project (JSPS Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research) led by Koji Miyazaki (ILCAA, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies). For organizing this symposium, I have to thank Professor David Haines for his efforts to promote the research project on East Asian migration which he has called “Wind over Water.”
- 2) For the Japanese version of this description, see Yamashita 2007b.
- 3) Japan National Tourism Organization website: <http://www.jnto.go.jp>.
- 4) One should point out, however, that the Japanese outbound rate of the total population (14 percent) is still low as compared with Taiwan (38 percent) and Korea (22 percent). The Japanese government has set a target to increase Japanese outbound tourists to 20 million by 2010 (The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport of Japan website: <http://www.mlit.go.jp>).
- 5) In 2006, Japanese visitors to China increased by 10.5 percent, while visitors to the USA, the number one destination in 2005, decreased by 5.4 percent as compared to the previous year. Visitors to China increased from 2.2 million in 1999 to 3.75 million in 2006, while the number of tourists to the United States decreased from 5 million in 1999 to 3.67 million in 2006 (Japan National Tourism Organization website: <http://www.jnto.go.jp>).
- 6) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan website: <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/toko/tokei/hojin/05/index.html>.
- 7) Japan National Tourism Organization website: <http://www.jnto.go.jp>.
- 8) I have discussed this elsewhere as well (Yamashita 2003a: Ch. 7, 2003b in press).
- 9) The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan website: <http://www.mhlw.go.jp>. As David Haines notes in the following chapter, the proportion of marriage with a foreign spouse in Japan (5 percent or 1 in 20) is still low as compared with Taiwan (1 in 3) and Korea (1 in 7).
- 10) Presumably, most of the American husbands in Japan are soldiers serving at US military bases.
- 11) The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan website: <http://www.mhlw.go.jp>.
- 12) Interview, October 2000, Tokyo.
- 13) Cabinet Office, Government of Japan. *Heisei 18 Nen Ban Korei Shakai Hakusho* [Annual Report on the Aging Society 2005], available on the internet at: <http://www8.cao.go.jp/kourei/whitepaper/w-2005/gaiyou/17indexg.html>.
- 14) In the symposium, Jeong Jong-Ho presented a paper from a Korean perspective. However, he did not contribute his paper to this volume.
- 15) The final discussants in the original symposium were Junji Koizumi, Jerry Eades, and David Haines.

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