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Japan's direction in an age of dramatic depopulation: a view on immigration policy

- Summary-

The government of Japan had hoped to solve the problem of declining population, one major effect of Japan's aging society and declining birth rate, by raising the retirement age and incorporating more women into its workforce, but this approach is currently being seriously questioned, and in fact the government has released no substantive statement addressing the workable systems of care for the increasing proportion of senior citizens in its population.

Problems with foreign worker OJT programs

Faced with a tightening labor market, the government has decided to expand its foreign guest workers program, but this system presents several major difficulties. Sourcing cheap labor while labeling it an act of international cooperation can be criticized as hypocrisy by other countries, while problems such as overwork and low or unpaid wages have already been identified.

Provincial cities becoming ghost towns

Some analysts calculate that 60% of Japan's land area will be abandoned by 2050. Provincial towns and cities are disintegrating, and the entire country, with the exception of its large metropolitan areas, is facing a crisis of wholesale desolation. Instead of discussing whether or not to accept immigrants, it is time for Japan to decide how to maximize its benefits while minimizing its risks on the assumption of acceptance.

Will the crime rate increase?

Many citizens express their concern about a rise in crime that could accompany expanded immigration policies. However, while the number of foreigners working in Japan has been increasing, the number of crimes committed by foreigners has in fact almost halved since its peak in 2005. While there have been some failures of immigration policy in other parts of the world, all advanced countries are now accepting the challenge, as they cannot maintain their economic advantage without the employment of imported labor, and none of them is attempting to proscribe immigration.

Vision after expanded immigration: a society powered by multiple cultures

Japan should strive to establish a dynamic multicultural society, creating a win-win relationship

between newcomers and Japanese. Many of the foreigners living in Japan today have successfully fit in with local communities and are contributing positively to Japanese society in unique ways. In a country fated to experience accelerating depopulation, developing a practicable immigration policy and establishing this win-win relationship is key to Japan's future.

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After working for the Hyogo Prefectural Government for ten years, Toshihiro Menju joined JCIE in 1988. He has managed a variety of programs in his two decades at JCIE, and he is nationally known as an expert on grassroots international exchange and cooperation activities. In 2003, he organized the first National Conference for Practitioners of International Exchange and Cooperation, serving as its chairman. He is currently a selection committee member for the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication's Best Sister City Program Award as well as for the Japan International Cooperation Agency's Grassroots Partnership Program.

He has also been a lecturer at Keio University, Shizuoka University of Art and Culture, and Keisen University. He graduated from Keio University with a degree in political science and obtained an MPA from Evergreen State College in Washington State, USA.

Select Publications

- *Jinko Gekigen: Imin ha Nihon ni hituyo de aru* [The Dramatic Population Decline: Immigration is needed for Japan], Shincho Publishing (2011)
- *Exploring Kyushu's External Relations and its Asian Strategy* [pdf 348kb] (2007)
- *Tabunka pawa shakai* [A 'Multicultural Power' Society] (2007)
- "The Development of Grassroots International Exchange in Japan and the Impact of American Philanthropy," *Philanthropy and Reconciliation: Rebuilding Postwar U.S.-Japan Relations* (2006)
- *Japan's Road to Pluralism: Transforming Local Communities in the Global Era* (2003)
- "Japan and the Other: Re-conceiving Japanese Citizenship in the Era of Globalization," *Asian Perspective* (Vol. 29, No.1), co-authored with Catherine Lu and Melissa Williams (2005)
- *Ibunka Taiken Nyumon* [Introduction of multicultural experiences] (2003)
- *Kusa no ne no kokusai koryu to kokusai kyoryoku* [Grassroots international exchange and cooperation] (2003)
- "A New Paradigm of North-South Relations: Implications of International Cooperation by Local Authorities in Japan," *Cities and the Environment: New Approaches for Eco-societies*, United Nations University Press (1999)
- *Chikyu shimin nettowaku* [Network of global citizens] (1997)