

Japan's Shrinking Regions in the 21st Century

By Peter C. D. Matanle, Anthony Rausch, Shrinking Regions Research Group

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Japan's population is shrinking. Based on current trends, it will decline by an average of half a million people per year for the next forty years. The country is also getting older and the ratio of dependants to active workers is expected to approach 1:1 by around 2030. These two interdependent processes will bring great changes to Japan in the coming decades. In the twenty-first century, a historic turnaround in global demographic trends will occur. Europe and East Asia are especially vulnerable to demographic shrinkage. Germany is already shrinking, as is Russia. South Korea will begin to shrink soon and, importantly, so will China from around 2035. Overall, this is good news, but it brings with it worldwide changes to ways of living and working. Japan's rural areas have been shrinking for decades. Entire villages have vanished; some have even been "sold." Thousands of municipalities have been judged "non-viable" and merged. Thousands more private and public enterprises have collapsed, leaving colossal debts, while hundreds of thousands of older people live miserable lives in neighbourless communities. Rural shrinkage has been the unseen corollary of Japan's extraordinarily dynamic twentieth century urban expansion; indeed, Japan's postwar economic miracle has been achieved at the expense of rural retreat. Potentially disastrous is the negative-sum game that national depopulation triggers, as one community's gain becomes another's loss. Japan's Shrinking Regions in the 21st Century reveals how communities are responding positively to these emerging circumstances, delivering a message of hope and vitality to shrinking regions worldwide. Setting Japan alongside Europe, and with an epilogue describing the T?hoku earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown of 11 March 2011, the book offers policy makers and practitioners up to date advice for community revival born of extensive collaborative fieldwork across the whole Japanese archipelago. Japan's Shrinking Regions in the 21st Century brings together the work of 18 international scholars to present the first comprehensive study of regional shrinkage under Japan's national depopulation. Interspersed throughout with numerous illustrations, the book reveals a richly textured examination of shrinkage at the local level, from which emerges the overall story of Japan's depopulation and its place within the trajectory of world development. This will be an important source for all social science collections, as well as for

researchers, policy makers, students, and practitioners with interests in regional development, demography, East Asia, and post-industrial change.

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