

The Japanese Experience

Tony Fielding (University of Sussex)

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The problem

Other things being equal, one might expect that the ageing of the population would result in lower migration. This is because young adults are almost universally more geographically mobile than elderly people. So, as the top of the age pyramid became wider due to greater longevity, and the base of the pyramid became narrower due to lower fertility, a higher proportion of the population would be located in the older low-mobility age groups and a smaller proportion in the younger high-mobility ones.

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- Under two conditions (i) a steady downward curve in internal migration rates matching the upward curve in median age of the population; and (ii) no change in age-specific migration rates over the period, one might be tempted to assume that it is solely, or very predominantly, the changing age composition of the population that is responsible for changes in the volumes and rates of internal migration. End of story!

Or so it seems ...

The problem is that neither of these two conditions is met.

First, the facts about internal migration, then the age-specific migration rates...

Figure 1. Japan: Annual inter-prefectural migration, 1959 to 2014 (volume and rate)

Source: annual household registration data

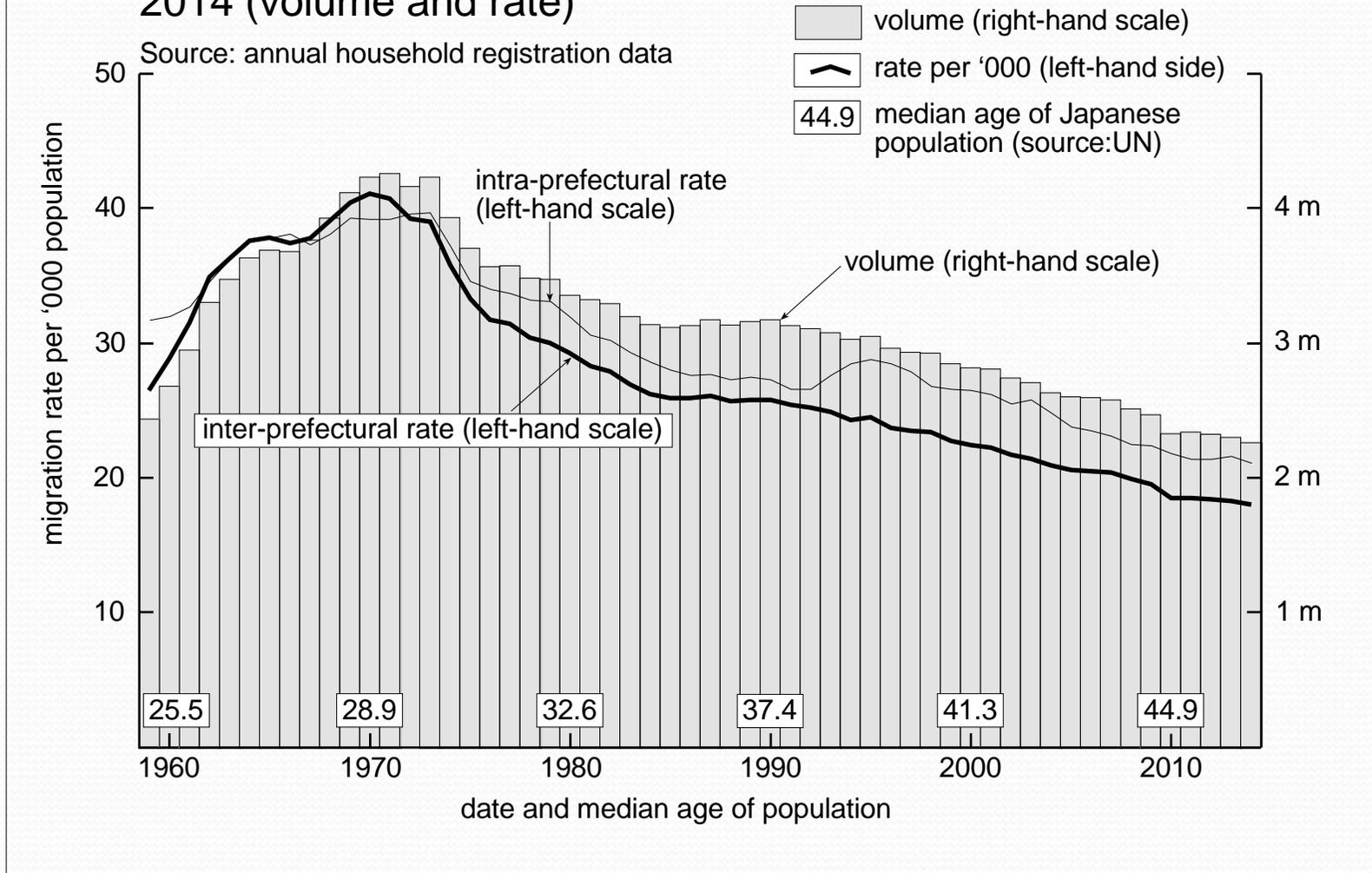
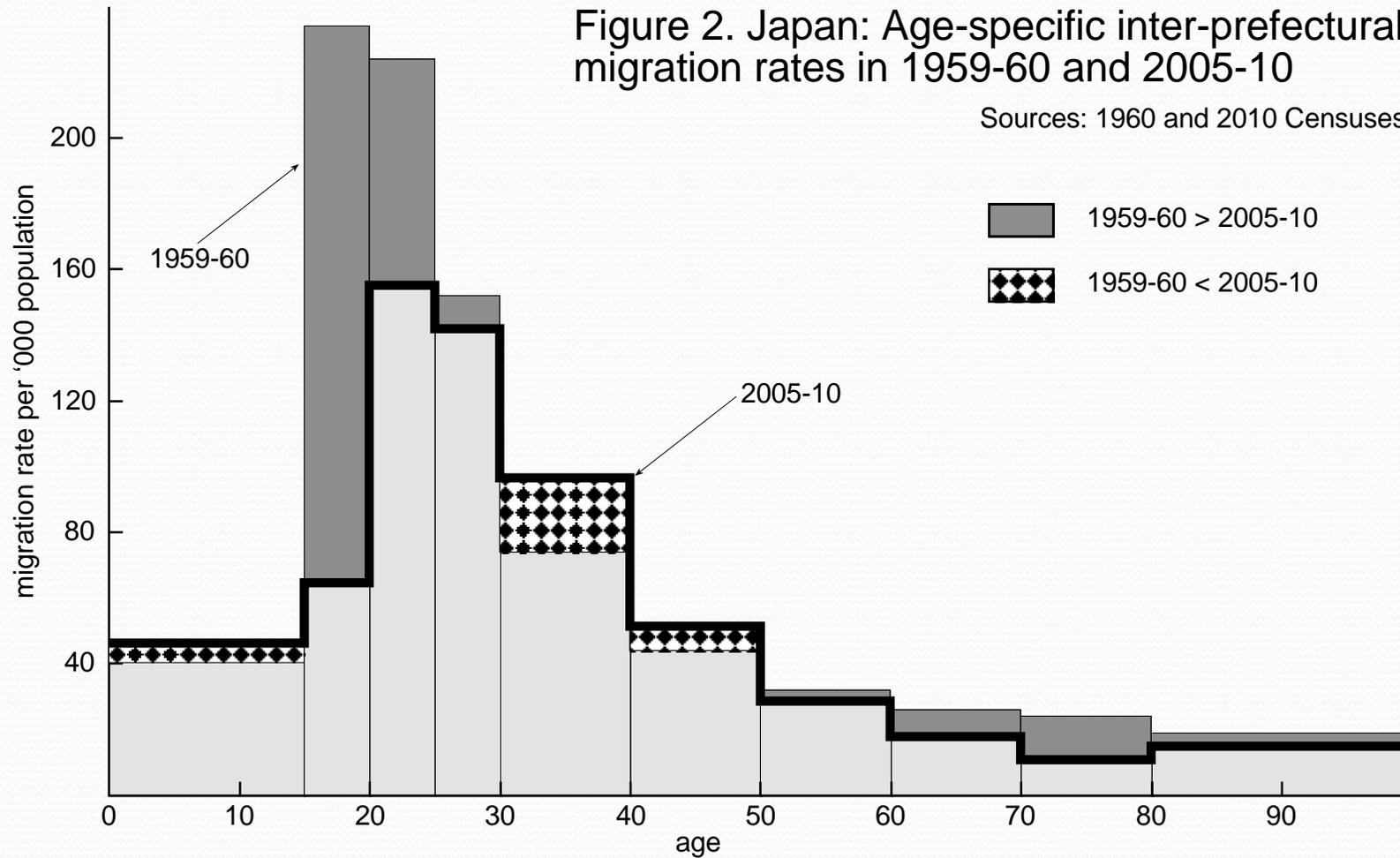


Figure 2. Japan: Age-specific inter-prefectural migration rates in 1959-60 and 2005-10

Sources: 1960 and 2010 Censuses



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- Far from being stable over time, the whole curve of age-specific migration rates has become flattened and extended to the right in the recent period. What this clearly does not mean is an overall reversal of the tendency for those who are in the younger adult age groups to migrate more than those who are in the older ones. What it does mean, however, is that, at the individual level, in line with many other demographic variables, migration has not just become less, it has become later.
 - To summarize, the problem is this: we cannot fully explain the trends in inter-prefectural migration rates shown in Figure 1 as a product of population aging; but, in addition, the national socio-economic changes since the late 1950s seem weighted on the side of causing greater volumes of internal migration rather than smaller ones. So what then is going on?



- **The solution - part I: Japan's changing space-economy**

Japan's space-economy can be conceived as a system undergoing changes that are occurring at different rates:

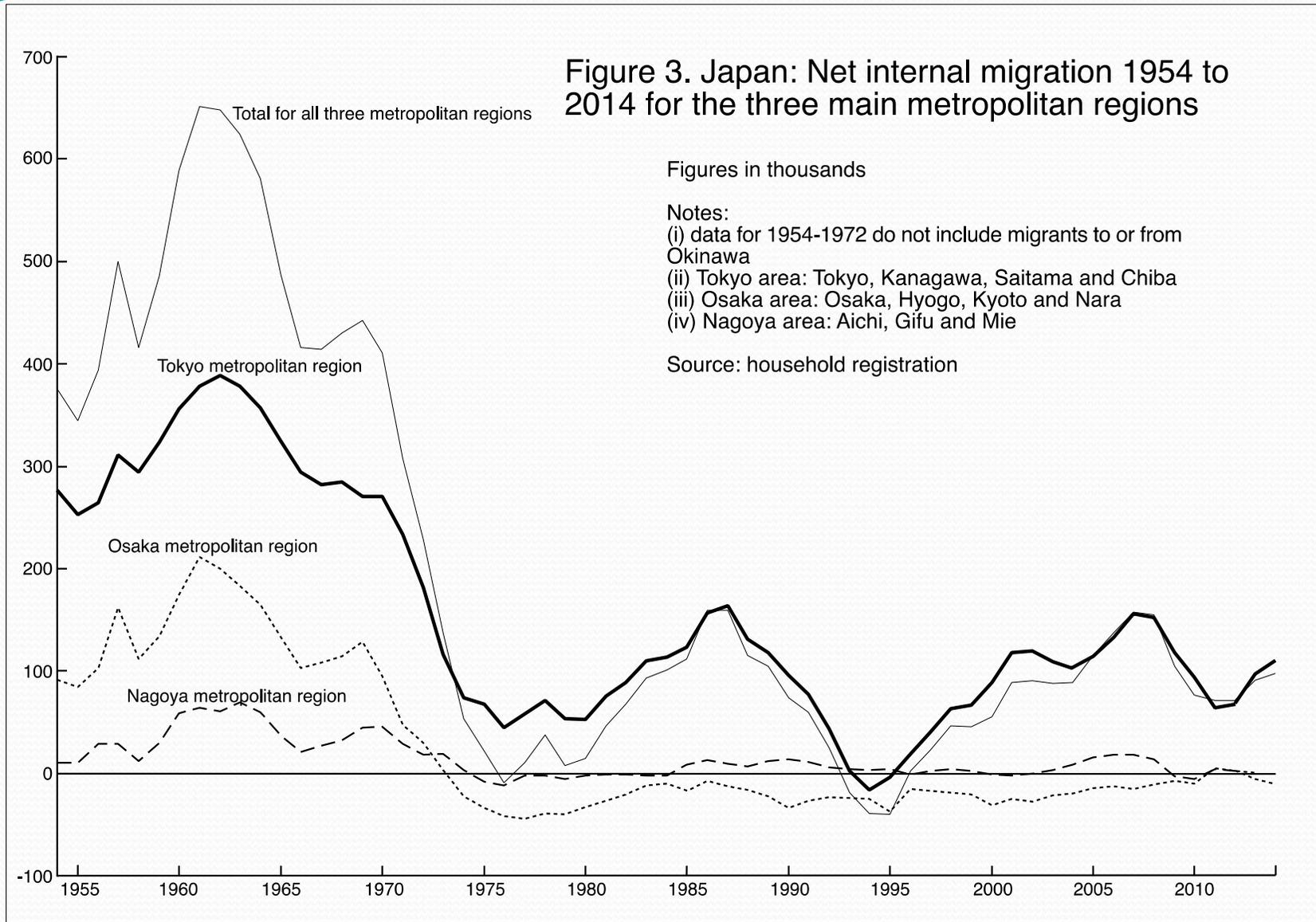
(i) those that can be characterized as 'conjuncture' are rapid – they are the ups and downs of the business cycle;

(ii) those that involve the restructuring of urban and regional economies - such as the decline of agricultural areas and of 'old industrial regions' - are much slower; and

(iii) those that relate to the underlying geography of opportunity – such as the attractiveness of the capital city region compared to the rest of the country – change almost imperceptibly slowly.

Each of these bundles of processes has migration effects.

Figure 3. Japan: Net internal migration 1954 to 2014 for the three main metropolitan regions

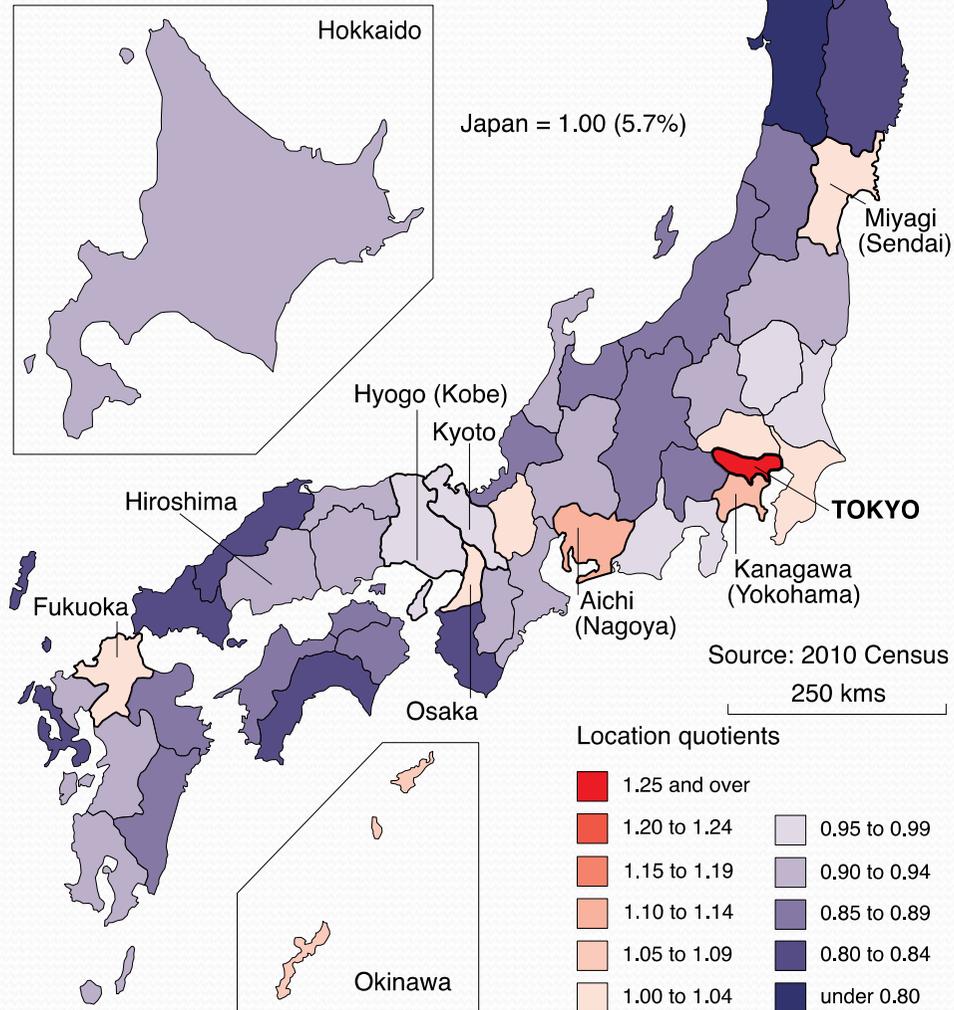


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- Late 1940s until about 1975 – regional sectoral specialization (social division of labour market) results in rural depopulation and massive net migration gains in major metropolitan regions (the centres of Fordist mass production of consumer goods);
 - 1960s to about 1990 – new spatial division of labour (technical division of labour - planned) results in lower migration rates, the U-turn (that is, counterurban) migrations and changes in the social composition of migration streams (less BCWC, more PRO and MAN);
 - 1980s to present – regional functional disconnection (globalization and ‘hollowing out’) results in even lower migration rates and net gains in the Tokyo Metropolitan Region.

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- And yet inter-prefectural migration remains high (2.25 million in 2014). What is it about the political economy of Japan that promotes this groundswell of internal migration? A significant part of the answer is the formation of middle class careers, and upward social mobility more generally, in the context of a massive (and almost unchanging) concentration of wealth and power in the Tokyo Metropolitan Region. NB + ‘churn’
 - If you are an able, well-educated and ambitious young adult, you risk losing a great deal of career advancement if you choose to stay in a provincial city or region. Migrate to Tokyo, however, and you insert yourself in an environment that is teeming with all kinds of job opportunities, is criss-crossed with influential social networks, and is the location where social, cultural, celebrity and entrepreneurial success, though by no means assured, is far more likely than in other parts of Japan.

JAPAN: POPULATION AGED 25-29 IN 2010

Local proportion of population aged 25-29 as a ratio of the national proportion in the same age group (location quotients)



• **The solution - part II: changing society/demography**

- Results of the 7th National Survey on Migration (2011):
 - (i) further overall decline in migration since 2006;
 - (ii) shift of peak mobility to older adult age groups continued – now 30-34;
 - (iii) decline especially at short-distance end (that is, lower level of suburbanization);
 - (iv) importance of Tokyo Metropolitan Region and importance of foreign- and Tohoku-born in TMR;
 - (v) housing and family motives dominate reasons for migration – but not for men in 40s and 50s (work) or young people aged 15-24 (study), very elderly move to be near children;
 - (vi) importance of return migration (especially among young elderly);
 - (vii) low expectations of future migration.

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- **Socio-demographic changes and the life course:**
 - young adults: high school graduates – importance of local social capital; undergraduate/postgraduate students – university cities as ‘siphon cities’; revolution in attitudes of late adolescents and young adults towards Japanese society – Kinsella’s survey ‘the negativity of the answers given is startling. Their assessments of Japanese society were very dark, and their impressions of adult life in that society equally depressing.’ She adds ‘for their part young women – even more than young men – desire to remain free, unmarried and young’. These feelings help explain delays in, and avoidance of, key decisions that involve migration (leaving home, permanent job, marriage, kids ..)

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- Young adults in their twenties: job insecurity (freeters) + difficulty of entering home ownership + later and less marriage ('poor couple culture') --> 'parasite singles'. This extension of dependence on parental financial, housing and emotional support is not, of course, conducive to migration.
 - For young adult and middle-aged adults in their thirties and forties the major change since the 1960s-80s has been the decline in suburbanization. The combination of changes in values and behaviours with reduced opportunities in the labour and housing markets has produced a preference for city-centre (student-style) lifestyles with their local job and housing (im)mobilities, while holding back the career-building, house upgrading mobilities that would be likely to result in one-way suburban and inter-prefectural migration.

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- This is not, however, the whole story. For the (heterosexual) married majority, one of the key changes to family life has been the increase in the likelihood that the wife will also work. What this means is that, whereas in the high growth period, it was only one member of the household who had to change job when moving to a new location, now it is two. This dual-income feature might assist entry into house or apartment ownership but it puts a brake on migration – it also privileges the largest cities, but especially the Tokyo metropolitan region, because such places have a wealth of employment opportunities for both men and women.

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- Middle-aged and older adults in their fifties, sixties and seventies in many respects comprise the lucky generation in contemporary Japan. Mostly born after the horrors of war, defeat and occupation, they became adults when jobs were secure, plentiful and increasingly well paid, and when land and houses were cheap. Most of them have enjoyed a life during which their material living standards and social wellbeing have improved. One of the key contributions to this wellbeing has been home ownership. The migration rates for home-owners are, however, very low. This is because people in Japan hardly ever use housing as a tradeable asset (they rarely trade-up in the housing market), they tend not to use housing as equity (for example, for borrowing to invest in buy-to-let), they do not use their homes for the purpose of equity release, and housing equity is not used for care costs in old age.

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- The migration of those aged over 80 is dominated by the need, arising from frailty and loss of independence, to be close to their offspring upon whom there is still a very strong social obligation to care.



- **Conclusions**

Japan is unusual in its low rate of internal migration when compared with other high income capitalist societies. It is not unusual, however, in its recent history of internal migration rates; these peaked around 1970, then declined rapidly, then declined slowly right up to 2014.

The story of this decline lies partly in the changing political economy of urban and regional development in a country that experienced 'miracle' rates of economic growth until about 1990, followed by 'lost decades' of essentially no economic growth since.

The other part of the story lies in the social and demographic development of Japan – its ageing, of course, but also the major shifts in attitudes and beliefs, behaviours and practices that turned a modern mobile society of the 1960s and 70s into the arguably post-modern, certainly lower mobility, society that it is today.

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- East Asian migrations: types of migration and main differences from European and North American migrations - the specificity of Asian migrations
 - 1. LM working class (male manual workers, domestic workers): (i) sojourner tradition (temporary, circulation); (ii) no settlement/family reunification (iii) rapid feminization. Gulf; HK; Taiwan; S Korea; Japan; guest worker policies (e.g. EPS in S. Korea)
 - 2. LM middle class (high status/education/skill): (i) global households – ‘astronauts’, kirogi gasok ; (ii) new destinations – Shanghai ‘rush’
 - 3. Migration as a business: (i) trafficking; (ii) debt bondage; (iii) high and growing use of brokers/agents

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- 4. Forced migration/displacement: (i) natural disasters 2004/2011; (ii) many IDPs (Sulawesi, Mindanao, Rakine, Papua); (iii) no refugees (in UNHCR sense), but Myanmar to Thailand etc.
 - 5. Place preference migration: (i) primate cities/gateway cities; (ii) resort 'paradises' Bali, Phuket etc.
 - 6. Life course – students out: (i) massive emigration of students to English-speaking countries (US/Canada, EU/UK, Australia/NZ); (ii) language teachers in
 - 7. Life course – marriage: (i) marriage migration (brokered/instrumental) e.g. Vietnamese in Taiwan; (ii) care chains e.g China (internal); (iii) growing retirement migration

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- 8. Political/policy: (i) constraints on migration (extreme case N.Korea, but hukou in China, sakoku in Japan – anti-mobility history; (ii) ‘internal colonialism’ – strong redistribution policies (especially Xinjiang, transmigration programmes in Indonesia, but also Vietnam (Central Highlands), Philippines (Mindanao) etc. project displacements e.g Three Gorges Dam (iii) promoted export of labour (especially Philippines, but now also Indonesia) importance of remittance income; (iv) co-ethnic preference – joseonjok, waishengren, nikkeijin; (v) *ius sanguinis* > *ius solis*