URBAN GEOGRAPHY
OF
POST-GROWTH SOCIETY

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I have no doubt this volume will introduce the concept of “post-growth society” to a generation of Urban Geographers. The wide ranging but concise introduction by Michael Pacione sets the context for what follows perfectly. The book brings together a series of chapters, based on original research papers, many of which were presented at the IGU Regional Conference in Kyoto 2013 and which collectively far outweigh their individual contributions to the topic. The editors are to be commended for assembling a group of such prominent Japanese Urban Geographers. It is both noteworthy and correct that urban geographers from Japan introduce this topic to the world given the advanced state of some of the processes outlined in their own country. The book explores the related concepts of depopulation and shrinking cities under the banner of “post-growth” society through a series of specific examples of urban change in Japanese cities. The authors are very clear that we should not confuse these concepts with decline. Each chapter focuses on a different aspect of “post-growth” that highlights changing societal structures that are impacting on population, economic activity, the built environment, land prices, urban morphology, family life, and the image of urbanism in Japan today. What emerges is a clarity of thought that suggests we may be entering a new paradigm of urban transformation where managing change in an innovative and sustainable manner becomes the goal of all those involved in planning and addressing the problems of cities in the future.

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Preface

This book is a collection of articles monitoring urbanization processes in Japanese cities since the 1990s. Two major aspects of this book are notable with respect to the study of urbanization globally.

First, this book examines the depopulation (population decline) phase of cities, whereas most previous discussions of urbanization (e.g. the Klaassen model for urbanization in developed countries) have explicitly or implicitly focused on population increase. Because the number of births has fallen below the number of deaths since 2005, a natural decrease of population is common throughout Japan, and this trend will probably become substantially worse in the future. In this depopulation phase, even though the overall urban population will remain relatively stable, Japanese cities will undergo radical changes as compared to when an increasing population was the dominant trend. Because Japanese cities have only relatively recently begun experiencing these types of structural changes, the studies presented herein are new and will provide a different paradigm of urban studies.

Second, this book focuses on the “shrinking city” phenomenon, which has become a key issue in recent urban studies. Since the 1980s in developed countries, shrinking cities have dominated in some areas. In many eastern European countries, remarkable shrinkage has occurred as a result of social structural changes, causing serious problems and increasing the attention being paid to the relationship between globalization and shrinking cities. In the field of urban planning, the problem of shrinking cities has become an urgent issue under the threat of depopulation. This has resulted in the need for modification of previous planning because most plans were based on a growing population, not a shrinking one. In this context, the concept of the compact city has been proposed and, especially in the field of urban planning, widely accepted. The shrinking city trend is also found in Japan and it is not temporary or unique to one area. Japan’s struggle to maintain sustainable development under a depopulation trend is an important challenge. In this sense, monitoring the urbanization processes in Japanese cities will be very informative.

We chose the title Post-Growth for several reasons. We don’t think that post-growth and growth are mutually exclusive concepts. A Post-Growth society can be conceptualized as one in which sustainable development, which has been a common goal globally since the 1990s, is valued more than simply growth. Even though the population is declining, as long as economic, social and cultural sustainability can still be obtained, the quality of life would be preserved subsequently. In this sense, the prefix “post” is not used negatively, but rather it connotes the potentially positive aspects of our future society.

We would like to introduce the book structure here. Part I consists of 10 chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the book based on a review of the body of literature about urbanization studies in the Post-Growth society. This chapter was written by Dr. Michael Pacione,
a professor at the University of Strathclyde in the United Kingdom. He is also the author of the well-known and widely distributed book, *Urban Geography: A Global Perspective* published by Routledge. This chapter overviews the worldwide trend of shrinking cities, examines trends in Japan, and raises several urban geographical questions related to the Post-Growth society. In this society, investment in infrastructure will not by itself be sufficient, and the ability to identify and solve specific problems will be critically important. In this process, geographical approaches, including fieldwork and map representation will be crucial.

Following 9 chapters identify the cessation of metropolitan expansion as well as the revival of population centralization in two major Japanese metropolitan areas: Tokyo and Keihanshin (Kyoto–Osaka–Kobe). Several phenomena are examined, including the distribution of residents by cohort (Chapter 2), commuting patterns (Chapter 3), the spatial pattern of population change (Chapter 4), regional differences of lifestyle (Chapter 5), and so on. In addition, the problems associated with an aging society are addressed, including the isolation of single elderly people (Chapter 6), the “food-desert problem” (Chapter 7) and the increasing number of vacant houses (Chapter 8). The recent gentrification of areas of Osaka and the subsequent social problems related to discrimination against low-income residents are considered in Chapter 9. Finally, Chapter 10 evaluates how the Great East Japan Earthquake, which occurred on 11 March 2011, seriously influenced land price evaluations in Tokyo and Osaka. In sum, Part I provides a clear and practical image of what has happened in Japanese metropolitan areas since the 1990s.

The 4 chapters that comprise Part II consider Japanese regional cities outside of the Tokyo and Keihanshin metropolitan areas. The focus is on four Regional Centre Cities (Sapporo, Sendai, Hiroshima and Fukuoka), all of which have the common characteristic that their growth was strongly driven by the “branch-office economy” (an accumulation of branch offices of major companies) during the period of high economic growth. Commonly, new high-rise buildings and prestigious office buildings occupy the central parts of these cities. After the collapse of the “Bubble” economy (roughly, since the late 1990s), most major Japanese companies have reorganized their management systems. This has resulted in the cessation of growth and, even worse, a decline in the number of branch offices in these cities. The office vacancy rate has risen in these cities since the late 1990s, but new types of activities have been observed. In Sendai, volunteers’ activities, supported by local residents, supplement the decline in the branch-office economy and help to revitalize the cities (Chapter 11 and 12). Through these activities, a new model of the Post-Growth society can be found. Chapter 13 looks at examples of how municipality consolidation, strongly encouraged by national policy as a countermeasure for population decline, could threaten the development of local autonomy in small and remote municipalities. In Chapter 14, the focus is on the “knowledge spill-over effect” driven by the accumulation of environment-related industries because this type of phenomenon can be regarded as a type of “qualitative growth” of a city. In the 21st century,
modern society can be conceptualized as being knowledge based rather than labour or capital based. Knowledge, which can be regarded as a source of innovation, should offer important insights for the future of Japanese cities for which the extent of population concentration or dispersal is yet unknown.

Most of the articles included in this book are based on the presentation held at the Urban Commission of the International Geographical Union, as a part of the Regional Conference of International Geographical Congress in Kyoto, August 2013.

We owe gratitude to many people who gladly supported us in writing this book. Comments from Professor Céline Rozenblat (Chair of the IGU Urban Commission: University of Lausanne, Switzerland), Dr. Daniel O’Donoghue (Vice Chair of the IGU Urban Commission: Canterbury Christchurch University, UK) and colleagues attended the conference greatly assisted our work. In addition, we owe endless gratitude to Professor Dr. Michael Pacione who willingly agreed with us that we decided to raise his original attractive title to the book title.

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This book has considered the characteristics of urban areas in the ‘Post-Growth’ society of Japan. In the introduction, Dr. Michael Pacione, a professor at the University of Strathclyde in the United Kingdom, provided an overview of the worldwide trend of shrinking cities, examined trends in Japan, and raised several urban geographical questions related to the Post-Growth society. Evaluating the quality of life and using maps to interpret regional differences of social status were regarded as particularly important. Here, we briefly examine some of the material from the various chapters from the point of view of Dr. Pacione’s discussion in Chapter 1.

Dr. Pacione introduced a four-stage development model in which the final stage is ‘re-urbanization’, where the population of the city core increases again after a decline. The city cores of two major metropolitan areas (Tokyo and Kei-Han-Shin) have experienced slight population increases since the mid 1990s. We call this phenomenon a ‘regression of population distribution to the city core’. Until the 1980s, these city cores experienced serious population decreases as the metropolitan boundaries expanded during the process of suburbanization. In addition, gentrification issues have been raised as the number of high-rise condominiums increased in the city cores. From these points of view, the phenomena observed in these two large Japanese metropolitan areas could be representative of Pacione’s concept of re-urbanization. However, population changes associated with re-urbanization in Japanese cities are quite different from those seen in cities of the United States and Europe (Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 6). Two major factors make Japan different: a rapidly declining birthrate combined with an aging population and a surge in the number of high-rise condominiums built in the city core driven by the sharp decrease in land prices due to the collapse of the Bubble economy. These phenomena could be considered to be partly the result of the globalization of finance that triggered re-urbanization in U.S. and European cities, but based on the analyses presented in this book, we think the ongoing phenomena found in Japan have different causes. One possible factor affecting these phenomena is the shift from an increasing to a decreasing population since 2005.

The expansion of metropolitan areas has already stopped in Japan, and even worse, suburban residential areas are beginning to experience declining populations. The most dominant factor affecting the trend of population shifts seems to be easy access to railway services (Chapters 4 and 8). When looking at the spatial pattern of growth, metropolitan areas are also dominated by access to railway services. This trend has not changed over the last several decades. The degree of dependence on railway services, which functions as a key means of daily transportation, is very high in Japan as compared to most U.S. and European cities, where a high dependence on automobiles can be seen.

Although the Japanese major metropolitan areas do yet appear to be entering the stage of
depopulation that Dr. Pacione regards as the first phase of shrinking cities (Chapter 1), severe
depopulation can be observed in many small cities throughout Japan. A key factor in trigger-
ing municipal consolidation, as examined in detail in Chapter 13, is the declining birthrate
and the subsequent aging population, which has resulted in depopulation and increases in the
cost of welfare services. Reacting to an aging population is an ongoing and common task, not
only in major metropolitan areas, but also in small cities in Japan. Several types of problems
derived from the aging population were considered in Chapters 7, 8, and 9. For example, the
problem of food deserts, an ongoing and serious problem in Japanese metropolitan areas that
is also common in other aging societies, was examined in Chapter 8. Currently, in the early
2010s, an imbalance in the demand–supply of infrastructure, generally considered to be a
major problem related to aging populations, has not yet been observed in Japan. However, an
abundance of vacant land and vacant houses (examined in Chapter 9) has become a serious
concern in the suburbs of medium-sized Japanese cities. Creating and implementing counter-
measures against vacant houses has become a major concern for urban planners.

Forming ‘individual-city-centered’ networks is a crucial strategy for future growth, espe-
cially for Regional Centre Cities (Sapporo, Sendai, Hiroshima, and Fukuoka) in Japan (Chap-
ter 11). Chapters 12 and 13 examine the vulnerability of the industrial infrastructure, which is
the key element for growth, in these Regional Centre Cities. In addition, establishment of new
Research-and-Development type firms has tended to be limited to the major metropolitan ar-
areas. The concept of future growth requires more discussion and study.

Japanese urban planners, urban policymakers, and researchers who are engaged in urban
studies (including urban geographers) have a common recognition that the urban population
will decrease in the near future. Therefore, they are working on the ‘compact-city’ concept
that would be preferable in future urban societies. The compact-city concept has been adopted
in the revitalization schemes of many cities in Japan. In addition, further development is now
partially restricted in some suburban areas, and the subsequent expansion of city boundaries
is complete in most Japanese cities. At this point, Japan has already turned to face the Post-
Growth society, but the term itself has not been commonly used in previous studies. This may
be because the concept of Post-Growth may appear to implicitly be the opposite of growth.
Many people think that simple growth is necessary for the revitalization of city centres and
therefore hesitate to adopt the Post-Growth concept. As Dr. Pacione explained, the concept of
Post-Growth is derived from the idea of urban sustainability rather than simple growth. He
also pointed out that discussing the problems related to shrinking cities will provide a para-
digm shift from simple growth-driven urban planning to a new type of urban planning based
on urban sustainability. In this sense, monitoring Japan’s urban experience since the 1990s
and providing feedback to society are important activities.

Unfortunately, this book still has a shortcoming on map interpretation of the regional dif-
ferences of social status. However, related issues of quality-of-life are examined in several
chapters. The time–space budget of working mothers in central Tokyo examined in Chapter 5 is one example because it is related to the work–life balance debate. The viewpoint of universal design in urban infrastructure reflecting the needs of an aging population in a residential area in the suburbs of Osaka (Chapter 7) and discussions related to the food-desert problem (Chapter 8) are also good examples of the types of quality-of-life issues that Japan must consider in the future.

It is our hope that readers will find this book a good opportunity to become more engaged in the discussions of the Post-Growth concept.

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