

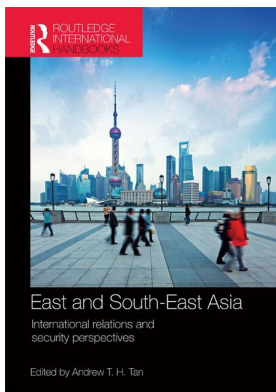
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Andrew T. H. Tan

### **Japan's demographic crisis**

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# Japan's demographic crisis

## Security implications and obstacles to resolving an issue symptomatic of national decline

*Brad Williams*

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### Introduction

Japan faces a demographic crisis. The rapid ageing of the country's population, as well as the low fertility rate, means that Japan's population will suffer a gradual and perceptible decline over the coming decades, unless bold moves are made to address this problem. In addition, the decline in the working age population relative to the large numbers of elderly will place enormous strains on the economy, hindering a sustainable recovery. The ageing problem is symptomatic of the general decline of Japan, with enormous strategic and political ramifications for East Asia.

This chapter comprises three sections. The first provides an overview of the twin phenomena of population ageing and decline that together have triggered the demographic crisis in Japan. The second section examines the implications of this crisis from both a human and traditional security perspective. The final section explores some of the measures the Japanese government has adopted to deal with the problem, focusing, in particular, on the issue of immigration. Domestic advocates of large-scale immigration face the challenges of lobbying for an overhaul of government policies in a country where many perceive the presence of foreigners, especially (Asian) undocumented workers, as a threat to public safety and order—with some even seeing them as a threat to national security. Japan is in a state of a muted immigration security dilemma, with many people worried about the impact a large influx of migrants would have on what is still a relatively homogeneous nation.

### Japan's demographic crisis

According to the most recent census in 2010, Japan's population stood at approximately 128.06 million. While this figure is a very slight increase (0.2%) from the last census in 2005, it represents the slowest growth on record, according to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (*Kyodo*, cited in *The Japan Times* 2011). Moreover, this figure is primarily attributable to

a nearly 6% increase in the number of foreign residents in Japan and overshadows a general trend that has troubling implications for Japan and the region. Excluding non-Japanese residents reveals that the population decreased by approximately 0.3%, the first decline since the government started counting the Japanese population separately from foreign residents in 1975 (*Kyodo*, cited in *The Japan Times* 2011).

Demographic decline is not a temporary phenomenon. A population trend estimate announced in early 2012 by the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare's National Institute of Population and Social Security Research revealed a gradual population decline over the next five decades: 116.62 million in 2030; 99.13 million in 2048; and 86.74 million in 2060. In other words, by 2060 Japan's population is expected to fall by nearly one-third from the current figure (Kokuritsu Shakai Hoshō Jinkō Mondai Kenkyūjō 2012: 1).

Japan is not only faced with the problem of a long-term decline in its population but is also disadvantaged in terms of composition: Japan's population is also rapidly greying. Over the same period, the youth population (ages 0–14) will drop from approximately 13% to 9% while the working age population (ages 15–64) will fall from just under 64% to nearly 51%. Meanwhile, Japan's aged population ratio (aged 65 or older) will increase from 23% to just under 40% (Kokuritsu Shakai Hoshō Jinkō Mondai Kenkyūjō 2012: 1).

Societal ageing is the product of declining fertility rates and increased life expectancies. The total fertility rate in Japan—the number of children to which the average woman is expected to give birth during her life—is forecast to be 1.35 in 2060, which is well below the 2.07 thought necessary to keep a population stable (Kokuritsu Shakai Hoshō Jinkō Mondai Kenkyūjō 2012: 8). In 2011 the number of newborns came to a record low of 1.057 million, indicating the downward trend in birth rate is accelerating (*Kyodo*, cited in *The Japan Times* 2012b). In order to highlight the gravity of declining fertility rates, one group of Japanese researchers published a study suggesting that the country will have no children under the age of 15 in 999 years (Yoshida *et al.* 2012). The average life expectancy in Japan—already among the highest in the world—for women is due to rise from 85.93 years in 2011 to 90.93 years in 2060, and for men from 79.27 years to 84.19 years during the same period (Kokuritsu Shakai Hoshō Jinkō Mondai Kenkyūjō 2012: 3).

Japan is therefore faced with the dual dilemma of a declining birth rate and an ageing population (*shōshikōreika*). Japan is not alone in confronting the massive challenges arising from an ageing population. Among the great powers, the People's Republic of China, France, Germany and Russia share many key demographic characteristics with Japan. However, Japan is comparatively worse off and by 2050 is expected to have the highest percentage of the population over 65 (35.9%) and the oldest median age (52.3) (Haas 2007: 117). Japan is ageing faster than any country in history.

## Security implications

For those who have experienced Japan's crowded rush hour trains and cramped housing, the prospect of a diminishing population might seem ostensibly appealing in terms of reducing the excessive population density, easing urban congestion, falling land prices and improving both the dwelling and natural environments. Moreover, increased life expectancy is a positive demographic development. Nevertheless, a growing number of observers see Japan's dwindling and ageing population in a less positive light, with some arguing apocalyptically that the country is 'on the brink of survival' (*kokka sonbō no fuchū*) (*Sankei Shimbun* 2011: 2). This section considers the implications of Japan's demographic crisis from both a human and traditional security perspective.

### *Human security*

As noted above, Japan's aged population is steadily increasing and by 2060 is expected to comprise nearly 40% of the total population. The most obvious effect of a greying Japan will be the upward pressure on social security costs. Welfare benefits are expected to grow over the next three decades; in 2011 these expenditures already constituted one-fifth of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) (Yoshikawa 2012). The concurrent decrease in the Japanese workforce means a decline in tax revenues to fund welfare, unless the retirement age is postponed. Japan will, in effect, have a steadily dwindling number of workers being asked to support an ever increasing aged population.

The Japanese government has four options to pay for the ballooning expenditure arising from an ageing population: 1) raise taxes; 2) deficit spending; 3) slash benefits; and 4) cut spending in other areas (Haas 2007: 120). As the heated debate in Japan over the consumption tax demonstrates, raising taxes is immensely unpopular, especially in a deflated economy, and is politically risky for proponents in a government with a fragile hold on power. Deficit financing is unappealing due to Japan's astronomical public debt (as of 2011, nearly 213% of GDP), which will rise further due to reconstruction costs from the triple tragedy of 11 March 2011 of an earthquake, tsunami and the destruction of the Fukushima nuclear power plant. This raises questions over the government's ability to pay for these costs without further burdening future generations. To put Japanese government profligacy into perspective, only Zimbabwe has a higher public debt-to-GDP ratio. Slashing welfare benefits risks endangering the economic security of a vulnerable segment of society—one that traditionally has a high voter turn-out rate. This leaves diverting funding from other areas, which, as discussed below, is already occurring but with potentially negative implications in terms of national security.

The responsibility of elderly care in Japan has traditionally fallen on the family, thereby reducing dependence on the government for maintaining health and living standards. However, demographic trends threaten to undermine home-based elderly care, as well as the family unit. Nicholas Eberstadt (2011: 83–84) notes that the ageing and shrinking population, coupled with rising divorce rates, will impact negatively on family lineages, leaving Japan 'increasingly filled with aged isolates, divorcees, and adults whose family lines end with them'. The elderly will be forced to rely on assistance from a state that will find it increasingly difficult to provide aged care. Moreover, by 2050 it is estimated that one in 20 adults could suffer from the debilitating Alzheimer's disease, placing further strains on Japan's health system (Eberstadt 2011: 85). It is in this gloomy milieu that growing attention has been drawn to rising incidence of the macabre social phenomenon of 'dying alone' (*kodokushi*).

While retirees tend to spend more, thereby stimulating consumer demand—important in a deflated economy such as Japan's—this also puts pressure on savings and investment necessary for long-term growth (Haas 2007: 119). The elderly are also believed to be more risk-averse, which will have a limiting impact on funding entrepreneurship (Haas 2007: 119), identified by the Japanese government as an important means of improving economic conditions. A declining population can also lead to a contraction of the domestic market, which is especially damaging over the short to medium term for non-export industries. Moreover, a decreasing workforce raises labour costs, already high in Japan owing to the strong yen, prompting a further 'hollowing out' of industry as firms relocate overseas in order to access cheaper labour.

It is not only manufacturing that will be adversely affected by Japan's demographic crisis. The ageing and shrinking population also has the potential to undermine Japan's food security. Because of limited arable land and climatic conditions better suited for rice cultivation, Japan relies heavily on imports to satisfy domestic demand for basic cereals such as wheat, corn and

soybeans, a reliance which has grown with the increasing Westernization of Japanese diets. This has contributed to the general problem of low food self-sufficiency in Japan. The decline in the agricultural workforce—primarily attributable to a lack of successors to take over farms as rural youth move to the cities in search of work, leaving growing expanses of abandoned, cultivated land—hampers efforts to raise the food self-sufficiency rate (Kawai 2011). The deleterious impact on Japan's food security is one of the arguments that domestic critics have employed against the Trans Pacific Partnership. While there will be fewer mouths to feed in the future, domestic supply will have to be drawn from a smaller, older and less productive agricultural workforce.

The impact of Japan's declining and ageing population is also likely to be felt across those occupations that require youthful energy and vigour such as the state security organs (Kawai 2011). Japan enjoys a reputation as one of the safest countries in the world, with low crime rates by international standards. Crime rates for penal code offences evinced a steady increase since the mid-1990s, reaching post-Second World War highs every year from 1998 to 2002, but have been declining since (Hōmushō 2011). Potential difficulties in recruiting young, able-bodied personnel to fill the police ranks could nevertheless negatively impact public security in Japan.

### *Traditional security*

It is not only policing that could be adversely affected by changes in Japan's demographic profile. The shrinking and ageing population could also undermine national security by diminishing both the quality and quantity of recruits in the Self-Defence Forces (SDF)—an institution that has traditionally experienced recruitment problems, primarily as a result of pervasive antimilitaristic sentiments. Antimilitarism, coupled with protection derived from the alliance with the USA, has enabled Japan to maintain a military force incommensurate with the size of its population and economy. Technological advancements, facilitated by the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), have aided further the modernization of what is already the most advanced and well-equipped military in North-East Asia. Still, technology cannot compensate completely for the recruitment problems faced by a military force that is gradually assuming a more prominent (non-combat) role in international security affairs (Kawai 2011).

The impact of Japan's demographic crisis on national security is also evident in the economically induced declining defence budgets over the past decade. Moreover, an ageing population is likely to prompt militaries to spend more on personnel and less on other areas such as weapons development and procurement (Haas 2007: 140). Nearly 45% of Japan's military budget is dedicated to personnel (and food provisions) expenses and approximately 18% for weapons purchases (Bōeishō 2012: 36). Japan thus spends about 2.5 times more for personnel than weapons purchases. Without regular infusions of young talent, the SDF will become a microcosm of a greying Japanese society, placing upward pressure on pension obligations to retired personnel. While Japan's defence budget does not include the cost of military pensions, these are still expenses that have to be borne by the state annually for decades (Haas 2007: 141). Haas (2007: 143) neatly captures the security opportunity cost of growing pension expenditures for military retirees: 'Every dollar spent on retirees is one less dollar that can be spent on weapons, research, or active personnel.'

Japan's demographic woes also have important implications for the country's strategic weight in the Asia-Pacific region. Brendan Taylor (2011) offers several negative scenarios arising from Japan's demographic crisis. He argues that Japan's subsequent economic constraints raise doubts over the country's ability to respond effectively to a rising China, thereby rendering it a less

reliable partner in Washington's attempts to counter-balance Beijing's growing economic and military might. At stake, according to Taylor (2011: 875, 883), is Japan's continued centrality in US Asia strategy, the downgrading of which has the potential to 'inadvertently steer Sino-US relations down a more competitive path', or even result in a regional arms race should Tokyo decide to acquire a nuclear capability in the event of a significant divergence in relations with the USA.

Japan has traditionally eschewed a prominent role in international military affairs, instead preferring to contribute to the maintenance of global peace and security through a variety of non-military means. Chief amongst Japan's tools of statecraft has been official development assistance (ODA), which has helped promote economic, social infrastructure and human resource development, as well as institution building in low-income countries, especially in East Asia. ODA is also believed to have played an important role in helping to promote historical reconciliation among the countries victimized by the colonial domination and military aggression perpetrated by imperial Japanese forces (Glosserman 2011: 90), although this has been relatively more successful in South-East Asia than Japan's immediate neighbours. Just as Japan's ageing crisis has contributed to 'the slowing of economic growth and the crowding out of military expenditures for elderly care' (Haas 2007: 145), the country's demographic problems have also impacted negatively on the ODA budget. The world's largest donor of ODA in the 1990s, Japan has slashed spending and, as of 2011, was ranked fifth in terms of disbursement behind the USA, Germany, Great Britain and France (Gaimushō 2011). Cuts to ODA spending not only have the potential to affect specific goals such as disaster relief and curbing new security threats like piracy and terrorism (Glosserman 2011: 90) but also threaten to reduce Japan's ability to shape favourable global developmental outcomes, as well as diminish its influence in international affairs.

While the security challenges emanating from Japan's ageing and shrinking population are serious, it is important not to be too consumed with doomsday security scenarios. For one, despite problems over the realignment of US military forces in Okinawa, any talk of ending the alliance is certainly premature and not given serious consideration in either capital. Indeed, since the so-called 'alliance drift' of the early 1990s, Japan and the USA have further strengthened security co-operation across a broad range of fields and this is expected to continue over the short to medium term. It would take a fundamental transformation in Japan's security environment for the government to consider that its interests would be better served by ending a relationship that has long been the cornerstone of the country's foreign and security policies. For the foreseeable future Japan's military modernization is likely to occur within the broader strictures of the US alliance.

Moreover, it has been suggested that a militarily weaker and older Japan might weaken the perception of the country's possible return to nationalistic militarism (Glosserman 2011: 92)—a view held to varying degrees by élites and public among its North-East Asian neighbours. While there is ample evidence, including from within Japan, that a country's socio-economic malaise can also stimulate nationalistic sentiments, virulent nationalists remain on the margins of political life. Moreover, antimilitarism remains relatively robust, although slightly weakened, and will continue to constrain a more forceful articulation of security policy in the foreseeable future (Oros 2008). Any further changes are likely to be incremental rather than radical. It is also plausible that an inability to staff or finance the SDF could result in Japan's neighbours no longer considering it a viable security threat, thereby decreasing tensions and eliminating one reason for rising defence budgets and military modernization in the region (Glosserman 2011: 92). Of course, improving regional security perceptions of Japan are also highly contingent upon progress in resolving seemingly intractable history-related and territorial/maritime disputes

that a coterie of élites in all the countries concerned have sought to enflame and instrumentalize for political and diplomatic gain.

### Dealing with the demographic deficit

There are several measures to deal with Japan's demographic problems. Uncertainty surrounding the viability of the nation's pension system has encouraged the growth of international retirement migration in which retirees move abroad to countries with lower living costs than Japan, enabling them to enjoy a financially comfortable life on their existing pensions (Ono 2008: 152). Some countries in South-East Asia actively encourage Japanese retirement migration, which they see as contributing to national development. However, while the emigration of Japanese retirees may help them secure a better living standard in their golden years and, as a consequence, assist in lowering the nation's median age, it does little to halt the decline in the working population.

Demographic planners have increasingly looked to robotics to ease the pressures of a declining and ageing population. The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry has been behind efforts to promote the development of next-generation robots in conjunction with service providers that are designed to assist in the tasks of securing an adequate workforce (promoting greater efficiency in the workplace, teleworking and job assistance for women and the elderly) and responding to the demands of nursing care (nursing robots and support for medical examination and rehabilitation) (Keizaisangyōshō 2006). The country's advanced technological base and reputation in this field makes Japan well placed to fulfil the vision of a future society in which robots and humans co-exist, although the ageing-related curbs in investment and entrepreneurship noted above could undermine further advances. For the foreseeable future robots will still only function as a supplement and not a replacement for humans across a broad range of occupational tasks and are thus not the answer to alleviating adequately the nation's demographic woes.

### Boosting fertility

Boosting the fertility rate and encouraging immigration are two approaches with the potential to offer a more fundamental and lasting solution to Japan's ageing and declining population. As noted above, the fertility rate in Japan is already below replacement level and is evincing further decline. The problem of declining births attracted widespread attention in Japan in the aftermath of the so-called '1.57 shock' in 1990 when the fertility rate dropped below the 1966 level (Otani 2010: 10). Since then, successive Japanese administrations have adopted several laws, regulations and policies aimed at encouraging couples and families to have more children. In 2003 the Koizumi Government even created a special ministerial portfolio in recognition of the severity of this issue. However, that approximately three-quarters of those to have filled the post have been women in a country with politics dominated by males suggests that the issue of population decline, at least in Nagatachō, is seen primarily through the lens of gender rather than as a broad social concern. Other measures include boosting public spending—already low by international standards—to support child raising, which has resulted in, *inter alia*, the expansion of maternity leave and child care facilities. One of the primary campaign promises of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) in the lead-up to the August 2009 Lower House election was the provision of a monthly child care allowance of 26,000 yen (approximately US \$327) for each child aged 15 or younger to all child-rearing families. However, faced with problems of securing the necessary funding to continue the universal allowance, which was compounded by its

defeat in the 2010 Upper House election, the DPJ was forced to compromise with the opposition by accepting an income cap on families eligible for the allowance (*The Japan Times* 2012a). While an obvious setback to the DPJ government, boosting spending alone would have been insufficient, with research indicating that while it could lead to a spike in births, the lasting impact would be negligible, especially in a country such as Japan where the problem is acute (Ōshima 2009: 11).

Striking an appropriate balance between one's working and private lives is also considered important in boosting fertility rates (Otani 2010: 10). In Japan there has been a chronic imbalance in the past as family and leisure were subordinated to work for a large number of Japanese men. While the majority of males' waking hours were spent in service of corporate Japan, the Japanese employment system, characterized in part at least by lifetime employment and seniority-based pay scales, meant that couples could plan families with some degree of certainty. The virtual collapse of this system and companies' increasing adoption of irregular forms of employment amid a prolonged climate of economic stagnation has erected higher obstacles in the path of Japanese wishing to marry and raise more children (Ōshima 2009: 11). Quite simply, many young people in Japan today lack confidence in their financial futures to marry and raise families sufficient in size to arrest the declining fertility rate.

At this point, it is important to note that the stability the previous employment system might have provided for family planning was possible because of systemic gender discrimination. For Japanese women, raising children has been mostly a solo task that entailed significant career interruptions and substantial reductions to lifetime earnings. Japanese women's attitudes towards marriage, work and child rearing are changing. Many are no longer content to bear full responsibility for child raising and elderly care—considered part of the 'marriage package' (Toyota 2011)—and instead are becoming increasingly active outside the home, either by choice or necessity, resulting in the decision to postpone marriage or remain single, subsequently constraining fertility rates.

### *Immigration: securitizing a potential resolution*

Japan's steadily declining population would ostensibly make it a logical candidate for large-scale immigration akin to many European countries, Australia and the USA, which have benefited from sustained infusions of talented and ambitious people from abroad and have, in the process, been transformed into rich and diverse multicultural societies. The United Nations Population Division (2001: 2), according to one scenario, estimates that Japan will need a total net immigration of just over 17 million between 2000 and 2050 to prevent depopulation, and a net inflow of approximately 32 million people aged 15–64 just to keep the working population from shrinking. With a relatively small registered foreign population of approximately 2 million, the level of migration needed to counteract population ageing is substantial, entailing vastly more immigration than has previously occurred. There are a small number of outspoken immigration advocates such as the former head of the Tokyo Immigration Bureau, Sakanaka Hidenori, who argues that Japan needs radically to boost immigrant numbers if it wants to be a great power playing a commensurate role on the world stage (Morris-Suzuki 2010: 245). Unfortunately, proponents face the difficulties of lobbying in a country that has earned a reputation for being generally averse to immigration and sees foreigners as a threat to public safety and order (and for some, national security).

The prominence of what Tessa Morris-Suzuki (2010: 10) dubs the 'closed country narrative' has its roots in Japan's pre-modern history of enforced isolation from the outside world under the Tokugawa Shogunate and the discourse of ethnic homogeneity, which not only relegates



minorities to the peripheries of society but also serves as an, 'ideological justification for immigration restrictions' (Morris-Suzuki 2010: 11). That Japan's post-war growth and development did not rely significantly on immigration, at least until the years of the bubble economy (Morris-Suzuki 2010: 16), may have contributed also to a psychological unpreparedness for many to perceive a radical boost in the foreigner population as a remedy to the nation's economic problems.

The terrorist attacks on the USA on 11 September 2001 marked the first time in recent years that the government has framed migration as a threat to national security (Vogt 2011: 215). Vogt (2011: 215–16) outlines several measures that the government has adopted to deal with the potential threat from foreigners, both at the border and within the country. In a campaign targeting the illegal employment of foreigners, since 2004 immigration authorities in Tokyo and Osaka have held a campaign month in June in which police patrol the cities seeking out undocumented foreigners. Large posters placed around major inner-city train stations also highlight the 'various [unspecified] problems' arising from hiring undocumented workers. This campaign also features a link on the Immigration Bureau website that encourages the general public to share information on foreigners who might look or act like undocumented migrants ([www.immi-moj.go.jp/zyouhou/index.html](http://www.immi-moj.go.jp/zyouhou/index.html)). The website allows anybody to insert data anonymously concerning the details (e.g. place of residence, work, etc.) of anyone whom they consider appears 'foreign and undocumented'. In a measure aimed at enhancing border control, in November 2007 Japan became the first country after the USA to collect biometric data from foreign arrivals. A further example of enhancing surveillance on foreign residents is a partial amendment to the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act (hereafter Immigration Control Act) in 2009. While the new system of residence management does feature some conveniences such as eliminating the need for re-entry permits (for qualifying foreign nationals), it does centralize under Ministry of Justice control all data on foreign residents, which had previously been divided between central and local administrative bodies.

The Japanese public seems to have responded zealously to government calls for vigilance, with the Tokyo Immigration Bureau receiving 'approximately 20,000 letters and phone calls per year denouncing foreigners' (Shipper 2008: 198). It is the issue of illegal foreign workers, in particular, that has raised the opprobrium of the Japanese. Since the Cabinet Office (Naikakufu 1990, 2000, 2004) began taking surveys on the issue in 1990, Japanese public attitudes towards illegals have changed. The surveys reveal an increase over the period that the three surveys were conducted in 1990, 2000 and 2004 for respondents who: follow the issue with concern (48.6%, 48.8%, 53.1%); believe it undesirable for tourists to earn a living in Japan (32.1%, 49.2%, 70.7%); cite the subsequent deterioration of public safety and morals as a significant reason for this undesirability (43.3%, 52.4%, 72.5%); and who think the problem of illegal workers should be resolved by deportation since it violates Japanese laws (33.6%, 49.6%, 61.8%).

Are these fears of the threats that illegal foreigner workers pose to public safety and order justified? Police statistics reveal that between 2001 and 2010 theft accounted for just over one-half of the overall crimes for which foreign visitors were arrested. Special act offences, of which violations of the Immigration Control Act are believed to constitute the majority, accounted for between one-quarter and one-third of the remaining arrests (Keishichō Keijikyoku Soshiki Hanzai Taisakubu 2011). It is important to note here that Japanese criminal records are based on arrests and not convictions. While Japanese conviction rates in criminal cases are extremely high, 'arrest' and 'conviction' should not be seen as legally interchangeable concepts. In addition to the well-published problem of coerced confessions, criminal records in Japan 'are further exaggerated because non-Japanese are more likely to be arrested on suspicion of crimes than are Japanese' (Friman 1996, cited in Douglass and Roberts 2000: 24–25). Moreover, Shipper (2008:

156, 158) suggests that official statistics are used to distort the reality of crimes by illegal foreigners. Despite these problems, statistics consistently reveal the crime rate for foreigners to be at worst equivalent or lower than for Japanese. In fact, while the presence of undocumented workers in the country is illegal, the majority are law-abiding residents who work—often in the so-called ‘3D jobs’ (difficult, dirty and dangerous) that Japanese are unwilling to perform. In short, foreigners in Japan do not have a predilection for committing felonies and there is no firm basis to claims that the country has been in the grips of a foreign-led crime wave.

It is state organs such as the National Police Agency that produce sometimes questionable crime statistics, aided by the Japanese media who, in the search for attention-grabbing headlines, tend to sensationalize foreigners’ felonies without adequately scrutinizing these data, which help reinforce the negative perceptions surrounding illegal immigrants (Shipper 2008: 172). Conservative political actors such as the outspoken, nationalist governor of Tokyo Ishihara Shintarō also play a role in demonizing foreigners in Japan, especially illegals. Ishihara’s derogatory statement in 2000 about foreigners (*sangokujin*) causing civil disorder in the event of a natural disaster in Tokyo is perhaps the most well known of his many controversial anti-foreigner remarks. These political and social actors do not exist in a vacuum; their views and statements are given sustenance in a nation struggling to overcome the prolonged socio-economic malaise. This milieu has fostered growing nationalism and has also proven particularly fertile for accusations of immigrants, *inter alia*, undermining Japanese culture and bringing unwanted cultural practices and racial impurity to Japan (Douglass and Roberts 2000: 23).

The discourse in Japan on foreigners to a certain extent parallels Chinese immigration in sparsely populated Pacific Russia during the 1990s and the fears this engendered among the local people. Alexseev and Hofstetter (2006) apply a core concept in international relations theory, the security dilemma, to explore this phenomenon. The authors identify four key elements that can fuel an immigration security dilemma: 1) emerging anarchy; 2) migrant intent; 3) migrant ‘groupness’; and 4) economic vulnerability.

Anarchy in the context of the immigration security dilemma refers to diminishing state capacity to control migrant flows and a change in the ethnic balance in favour of new migrants. The second element borrows from the classical security dilemma’s emphasis on the indistinguishability of offensive and defensive capabilities. In the migration context, it is the everyday activities of foreigners that can be either defensive such as legal or temporary work, or offensive when manifested as illegal, permanent settlement and territorial and/or autonomy claims (Alexseev and Hofstetter 2006: 11). The security dilemma is likely to be accentuated when migrant-sending and host states have a history of violent conflict, territorial claims and border disputes, which raises suspicions about the character and scale of migration (Alexseev and Hofstetter 2006: 12).

The third element is based on the classical security dilemma notion of national groupness serving as a military power multiplier. As Alexseev and Hofstetter (2006: 15) note, ‘in cases of migration, ethnic groupness is a prospective economic and political power multiplier’. This ‘groupness’ can take on an offensive character when migrants’ enhanced cohesiveness and distinctiveness makes them appear more threatening to host populations. Migrants’ ‘offensive’ power enables them to violate local laws and social norms and promulgate their own cultural and social norms (Alexseev and Hofstetter 2006: 14).

The final element—economic competition and vulnerability—relates to ‘the distribution of economic gains among host and migrant populations’ (Alexseev and Hofstetter 2006: 16). Anti-migrant sentiments are likely to rise when: 1) migrants are perceived to be gaining relative to the host population; and 2) the general socio-economic impact of immigration on the host society is perceived negatively (Alexseev and Hofstetter 2006: 18).

Space constraints do not allow for a full exploration of the veracity of the immigration security dilemma model to the Japanese case. Nevertheless, the following claims can be made. While it is impossible to prevent completely the arrival of illegal workers, Japan has a relatively robust, and strengthening, border protection regime. Immigrants hail from many countries and represent a minuscule and, since 2009, declining share of the total population. The overwhelming majority work legally, while most of those who do not work in low-paying jobs that Japanese shun. Many low-wage earners are subject to blatant discrimination and prejudice—monetary gain is frequently accompanied by psychological pain. While theft represents over half of so-called ‘foreigner crimes’ (*gaikokujin hanzai*), visa violations (victimless crime) are also prominent and overall felonies by non-Japanese have been declining in recent years. While ethnically identifiable communities have arisen, there are few isolated ghettos, which, in any case, tend to be populated by immigrants (*Nikkeijin*) who were initially seen as an ethnically acceptable source of cheap, unskilled labour but are now being encouraged to return home by the Japanese government because of the nation’s economic difficulties. Immigration generally benefits rather than burdens the Japanese economy (Omura 2011). Thus, some constitutive elements of the model seem applicable to Japan and others less relevant. The immigration security dilemma in Japan is muted.

Nevertheless, Japanese can generally be said to be averse to immigration—a potential panacea for the nation’s demographic woes but one that has been excessively securitized. Among the myriad problems that a large influx of foreigners is thought to pose, it is the perceived threat to public security and order, as well as perhaps to the dominant discourse of ethnic homogeneity, that presents the biggest barrier to increased migration.

## Conclusion

Japan is faced with a dual problem of a shrinking and greying population the magnitude of which is unprecedented in peacetime. Japan’s demographic crisis is symptomatic of the country’s general decline and has far-reaching national and regional implications. If the current trend continues, a gradually diminishing working population will be called on to support a ballooning number of retirees. Social security and labour costs will rise—the latter possibly accelerating the ‘hollowing out’ of industry and adversely impacting on food security and public safety. Family lineages could be broken. Savings and investment could decline, undermining further long-term growth.

In terms of traditional security, the demographic crisis could problematize recruitment for the SDF, constrain defence budgets and diminish Japan’s strategic weight in the Asia-Pacific region. Japan’s diplomatic influence might also be curbed if the downward pressure on the ODA budget continues. On a positive note, a smaller and weaker Japan might be seen as less threatening, thereby eliminating one motivating factor for rising defence budgets and a spiralling arms race in the region, although this outcome is also contingent upon a broader set of domestic and international variables.

While these possible scenarios might leave observers less than sanguine about Japan’s prospects in the coming decades, the future is not preordained. Japan’s demographic problems have not suddenly emerged; they are decades in the making and thus can be ameliorated with sound, long-term planning. Boosting fertility and immigration offer the prospect of a more lasting solution but are not without difficulties. In a prolonged climate of economic stagnation many young Japanese lack confidence in their financial futures to raise families sufficient in size to arrest declining fertility rates.

Immigration represents the most controversial panacea. Despite the efforts of a number of local governments and immigration rights non-governmental organizations (Shipper 2008),

foreign workers, especially the undocumented and therefore illegal, are generally seen in Japan through a security prism. Japan is in a state of a muted immigration security dilemma. Nevertheless, a widespread reluctance to embrace migration makes the large-scale immigration necessary to restore the nation's demographic health politically unfeasible and makes calls for multicultural co-existence (*tabunka kyōsei*) ring hollow. As the health care worker programme with Indonesia and the Philippines and the oft-criticized trainee scheme demonstrate, Japan is content to host short-term, preferably skilled, foreign workers but not long-term migrants who will probably experience difficulties integrating into society. Japan, as one scholar notes, would seem to have made a trade-off: 'settle for ... a [downgrade to] eventual upper middle power economic status in exchange for a homogenous and harmonious society' (Lam 2012: 5).

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