districts with “winner-take-all” single-member districts, and also changes to the way in which the LDP president was selected, which reduced the appeal of special interest candidates while favoring those who could appeal to a broader electorate. The novel contribution of this book is that it demonstrates how these proximate factors interacted with much longer-term transformations that occurred endogenously among the postmasters, the postal workers, the political parties, and the ministries that governed postal affairs.

Particularly useful is the description of how long-festering resentments between and among these actors became highly politicized in postwar society. Maclachlan offers a detailed account of how old conflicts met new channels of voice and interest mobilization in the 1950s. The roots of the Koizumi reforms go deep: it was the latest in successive attempts in the postwar period to reform commissioned post offices (and more generally, the bureaucracy). Each such attempt resulted in institutional changes that altered the game for the next set of reform efforts. Koizumi, while establishing new institutions of his own, was able to leverage the political changes made by predecessors to push through the legislation that would ultimately break up the postal system, and break the hold that postmasters and LDP politicians had on each other.

Students of modern Japanese politics will find this a fairly convincing narrative that is well researched and employs numerous interviews and Japanese archival sources. The book’s use of archival photographs from the Communications Museum in Tokyo is particularly engaging. Those who are curious about the uniquely central role of postal savings in Japan’s economic development will also find this book to be informative. The repercussions of the reforms that Maclachlan traces back historically are still felt in Japan’s electoral politics and financial circles. This book goes a long way towards explaining why.

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Japan’s Shrinking Regions in the 21st Century: Contemporary Responses to Depopulation and Socioeconomic Decline. Edited by PETER MATANLE and ANTHONY S. RAUSCH with THE SHRINKING REGIONS GROUP. Amherst, N.Y.: Cambria Press, 2011. 564 pp. $139.99 (cloth); $41.99 (ebook).
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Compiled by eighteen researchers from different scholarly disciplines who partially live and work in rural Japan, this timely and interdisciplinary volume addresses the bleak topic of shrinkage and depopulation in Japan’s rural areas. According to the authors’ prediction, the depopulation of Japan will manifest itself in a shrinkage by an average of half a million people per year over the next forty years, The main question that the authors ask is what would constitute a successfully engineered regional or community regeneration against the background of continuing depopulation.

Demographic transformation in Japan has been previously addressed, such as by Florian Coulmas, Harald Conrad, Annette Schad-Seifert, and Gabriele Vogt in their work The Demographic Challenge: A Handbook about Japan (Leiden: Brill, 2008). Ethnographic case studies by Peter Matanle on Sado Island (2006) and by Philip Seaton on Yubari in Hokkaido (2010) have addressed the implications of population shrinkage in rural areas. However, a merit of this study is the fact that for the first
time ethnographically rich case studies that move beyond the mere acknowledgement of
decolonization and search for coping strategies are summarized in one publication.

The authors show that decolonization is not a new phenomenon but began in the
postwar period after a brief baby boom between 1947 and 1949. Population shrinkage
in developed countries is associated with a decline of the total fertility rate, which is
defined as the average number of children born to a cohort of women in their lifetime.
Since then, Japan’s fertility rate has been declining and reached a postwar level of 1.26 in
2005 (p. 425). Combined with increasing life expectancy, high numbers of postwar baby
boomers (who are approaching retirement age), and outmigration of younger people to
large cities, a decline of fertility has led to population shrinkage. Another form of depop-
ulation occurs when one major industry ceases to exist, such as in Yibari, a former coal-
mining town in Hokkaido, or in Kamaishi in Iwate Prefecture, a former steel town. In
their analysis of population shrinkage, the authors introduce the two key terms kasochi
(depopulated rural areas) and genkai shūraku (communities that have experienced
severe decolonization and aging such that more than 50% of the population is aged sixty-
five and older). As of 2006, 7,878 genkai shūraku exist in Japan, which underlines the per-
tinence of population shrinkage occurring (pp. 25–26).

The volume is divided into two parts. Each chapter is coauthored by two or more
contributors. The first part addresses the impacts and implications of shrinkage in
Japan’s peripheral regions. Following an introductory chapter, two case studies situate
Japan in a global context and address how decolonization is being dealt with in the
Ruhr region in Germany and in rural Scotland. Subsequent chapters present case
studies of population shrinkage in Niigata and the remote islands of Okinawa, paradoxi-
cally an area where population is expected to grow from 1.39 million people in 2009 to
1.43 million between 2010 and 2030 (p. 169). Christopher Hood investigates the exten-
sions of the Japan National Rail’s Shinkansen into rural areas such as Hachinohe (2002)
and Shin-Aomori (2011) in the Tohoku area (pp. 135–56), whereas John Knight describes
the effects on akiya, empty houses, that fall victim to forest encroachment and damage
from aggressive wildlife such as wild boars and monkeys (pp. 159–70).

The second part discusses four different responses in the form of redeveloping, re-
populating, recovering, and reinventing peripheral regions. Contrary to the rhetoric of
governmental measures that seek to achieve renewed growth in rural regions, one
merit of the study is its acceptance of the shrinkage of Japan’s rural areas. Governmental
responses to the shrinkage of peripheral regions have long centered on infrastructure de-
velopment projects, such as building airports and high-speed train connections in margin-
alized areas. Mergers of shrinking cities, such as the Great Merger of the Heisei Era as
discussed by Anthony Rausch, have been an additional policy to counter the depopulation
of shrinking regions. However, the researchers of the Shrinking Regions Group argue
that infrastructure developments have resulted in a relationship of codependency
among national, regional, and local actors, which has prevented local actors from
seeking independent solutions for how to cope with the profound changes in the shrink-
ing regions. Drawing on case studies such as Yibari, a former coal-mining town near
Sapporo, which underwent a radical restructuring response termed “tankō kara kankō e”
(from mines to tourism), the authors further show that attempts to transform shrinking
towns into tourist destinations have often failed and that tourism as a means to revitalize
rural regions is not sufficient.

Based on the problematic nature of infrastructure developments and tourism as
strategies to revitalize declining regions, the authors present four policy recommenda-
tions: firstly, the inclusion of local nongovernmental actors in decision-making processes;
secondly, the development of professional brand-creation capacities that highlight the
cultural assets of shrinking regions; thirdly, the establishment of an independent think tank, which compares and addresses population shrinkage in Asia and Europe and seeks solutions; and finally, doing more research on the relationship between depopulation and reducing human pressures on the environment.

In light of the tragic events of the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster that occurred on March 11, 2011, in the Tohoku area in northern Japan, the authors offer an epilogue, which seeks to restore hope and outlines ten policy responses to the disaster, such as strengthening community ownership, sustainable local employment, renewable energies, and sustainable agriculture.

The merit of this study is its fresh and unconventional approach towards the acceptance of population shrinkage. As such, the authors’ viewpoint is not one of resignation but one of cautious optimism, which is expressed in policy recommendations that are summarized and augmented in the epilogue. However, these policy recommendations are not detailed but rather appear as a list of future tasks whose method of implementation remains unclear. Furthermore, the various parts of the volume appear at times disjointed, although each chapter offers valuable ethnographic insight. Despite these flaws, this study is essential reading for students of sociology, cultural anthropology, and public policy studies. In particular, readers who are interested in the effects of demographic transformation processes and search for sustainable concepts of improving the quality of life for future generations in shrinking rural regions will greatly benefit from this book.

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East Asia—currently one of the most dynamic and powerful regions globally—has historically experienced substantial economic development. Dwight Perkins’s book *East Asian Development: Foundations and Strategies* provides a unique comparative account of economic development in ten East and Southeast Asian economies that achieved rapid economic growth in in the second half of the twentieth century.

Perkins clearly says that this book does not attempt to define an “East Asian model of economic development,” because no single model accurately describes what the ten most successful economies in the region did to achieve this transformation (p. 201). The book does not explore an ideal model; instead, Perkins provides interesting and detailed stories based on his “direct experience in working with governments in the region” for a substantial period as an advisor on economic policies and performance (p. 12).

The book attempts to answer important research questions: Why have several of the East and Southeast Asian economies achieved rates of growth seldom witnessed elsewhere? Why have some economies in the region performed better than others? Lastly, why have all the richest economies eventually slowed their growth (p. 5)? To solve these questions, Perkins classified the ten economies into three groups based on per-capita GDP growth rates. The first group includes Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, all of which grew rapidly until they reached over $13,000 GDP per capita and then slowed their growth. The second group includes Malaysia, Thailand,