

The Making of a Minahasan Community in Oarai:  
Preliminary Research on Social Institutions of  
Indonesian Migrant Workers in Japan (<Special  
Issue> The Community of Indonesian Migrant  
Workers in Oarai Town, Ibaraki)

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journal or publication title	異文化コミュニケーション研究
volume	17
page range	105-138
year	2005-03
URL	<a href="http://id.nii.ac.jp/1092/00000252/">http://id.nii.ac.jp/1092/00000252/</a>



# The Making of a Minahasan Community in Oarai: Preliminary Research on Social Institutions of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Japan<sup>1)</sup>

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In the mid-1980s, Minahasan migrant workers from North Sulawesi began to trickle into Oarai Town of Ibaraki Prefecture, Japan, to work in the local seafood processing companies, and Oarai became 'little Manado' with their increasing numbers. As primarily irregular workers, the Minahasans depended heavily on social institutions for help on the basis of kinship, locality and religion, as the pillar of the Minahasan societies. This self-support system of Minahasan family and *kerukunan* (village association in Indonesian) promoted the endurance and sustainability of their community. Later, the system came to be extended to larger organizations in connection with the outside world, such as *kaisha* (company in Japanese) and Christian churches in Japan. The Minahasan people successfully penetrated the Japanese labor market by translating their concept of family to the *kaisha* or traditional labor-management relations. Additionally, they performed informal religious activities in their *kerukunan* until the *kerukunan* were finally integrated into formal churches. Thus, they developed their social institutions, sometimes in extending them to the local inhabitants of Oarai and the neighboring areas. This paper discusses the developing roles of these institutions, family-*kaisha* and *kerukunan*-Church, in the life of the vulnerable community of Oarai. At the peak of the Minahasan immigration in early 2000, the Oarai-Minahasan numbered slightly over one thousand people, and there flourished four churches and ten *kerukunan*. The future of those Minahasan, however, seems to be bleak because of intensifying control since the 1990s of irregular workers by Japanese immigration officers as well as the police. In fact, the employers of Oarai have started to recruit regular workers, such as the *nikkeijin* (Japanese-descended foreigners) and *kenshūsei* (trainees). This structural change in the employment system of the manufacturing industry has weakened the exist-

ing employment channels of Minahasan irregular workers. As a consequence, many of the Minahasan have moved from Oarai to other regions in Japan, or have returned to their homeland.

**Keywords:** Minahasan, international labor migration, social institution, family, *kaisha*, *kerukunan*, church, immigration policy.

## Introduction

*While unskilled foreign workers are barred in principle from entering the country to work, in actual fact large numbers are working illegally, and there appears to be well-established network helping them to get into the country and to find jobs.*

(Haruo Shimada, 1994: 202)

This paper is a result of my intermittent observations on a particular Indonesian community in Japan, for a few weeks in total (2004–05).<sup>2)</sup> The community focused here consists largely of Minahasan people, a group which originates in Minahasa, one of the districts of North Sulawesi Province in Indonesia (see Map 1). Their highly dense and homogenous community in a single location, Oarai Town in Ibaraki Prefecture (Kanto Area), is quite a remarkable, even though it still belongs to the typical communities of early foreign workers who began arriving in Japan in the 1980s (see Okushima 2005 in this journal). While the Indonesian residents of Japan rarely form a socially or culturally homogeneous group, the Minahasan of Oarai fascinatingly established their identity as ‘Oarai-Indonesians,’ a community well-known to other Indonesian residents of Japan as well as to those who are involved with the Indonesian labor migration to Japan.<sup>3)</sup>

The subject of my study is to describe the life and survival strategies of Indonesian migrant workers in Japan. Hugo (1995) suggests that the family values of Indonesian migrant workers is a crucial factor in their decision to work overseas, and that they leave their homeland

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**Map 1:** Indonesia



usually following their family members or friends who have gone before. Religious protection is another important factor for the Minahasan people; for example, Christian migrant workers from Flores Island seek shelter under the churches in Malaysia (Tirtosudarmo 2004).

In the case of the Minahasan migrant workers in Japan, they themselves have a self-support system into which are integrated principles of kinship, locality and religion. In the developing stages of this system, the people first established employment channels from Indonesia directly to local companies in Japan through personal networks of family and residence. It was not difficult for them to penetrate the Japanese labor market by translating their concept of family to traditional labor-management relations, specifically, the solidarity between the employer and the employees of the very domestic industry in Japan. As their numbers increased, the Minahasan organized various

kinds of associations for mutual help in their daily life in Oarai, but especially a village-based type of association, *kerukunan*, which organizes meetings and feasts of the village members.<sup>4)</sup> These *kerukunan* are strongly linked to religion, functioning as subgroups of a Christian church that practice services in rotation such as prayer, songs, etc., just as in their homeland. Hence, the Minahasan of Oarai developed only later their informal Sunday Mass groups as formal Church organizations (three Protestant churches and one Catholic) with the assistance of the existing Japanese and Indonesian churches.

All of the social institutions above promote activities of mutual assistance, or *mapalus*, in the indigenous philosophy of the Minahasan. In other words, having enlarged the extent of the *mapalus* group toward the outside world, from a family or *kerukunan* to a company (*kaisha* in Japanese) or church, the people finally succeeded in integrating their fragmental associations and groups into a single large community. Nevertheless, even this self-support system is limited by recent circumstances, namely, the intensified control of the Japanese Immigration authorities as well as of the police over irregular workers since the 1990s, and a shift in Japanese employment structure, especially in the manufacturing industry, from direct to indirect employment (Okushima 2005). Let us examine below the stages of development of this system and its limitations.

## 1. The Minahasan in Indonesian Contexts

Minahasa is the name of a region in the northern tip of Sulawesi (or Celebes) Island (see Map 2), and the name is extended to the inhabitants. During colonial times, Minahasa was known also as *Twapro* (*Twaalfde Province*), or the twelfth province of the Netherlands, for several reasons (Lundström-Burghoorn 1981: 17): The Minahasan, non-Islamic inlanders, had largely converted to Christianity by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and in the process, they accepted, at least in part, the Dutch way of life. Many of them were considerably fluent in

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Dutch, and so were able to work, as local officials, scholars and even soldiers of the Dutch East Indies Army (KNIL). Thus, after Indonesian Independence, part of the Westernized Minahasan decided to flee to the Netherlands. Lundström-Burghoorn (1981: 28) still finds Dutch features in a Minahasan village of today: “In most villages the houses are situated on both sides of the streets. Each house is surrounded by a garden of flowers, spices and fruit trees, and white painted bamboo fences mark the house lot towards the streets — the Dutch influences are unmistakable.”

Map 2: Sulawesi Island



The word ‘minahasa’ or ‘mina-esa’ means ‘alliance,’ ‘confederation,’ or ‘union’. According to local oral histories, this name refers to the establishment of a treaty in the 10<sup>th</sup> century in Watu Pinawetengan, in central Minahasa, where the female chief ancestor, Lumimuut, determined the territorial borders for her descendants. This division is said to have created the Minahasan subgroups. Today, the Minahasan constitute eight linguistic subgroups according to place of residence: (1) Tontemboan or Tompakewa, (2) Tonsea, (3) Tombulu, (4) Toulour or Tondano, (5) Tonsawang or Tonsini, (6) Bantik, (7) Ponosaken and (8) Bantenan. Until the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Minahasan spoke only their respective dialects. Later, however, they gradually introduced Malay vocabulary as the *lingua franca* with both European and other ethnic groups. Minahasan-Malay spread throughout the region, as did the Dutch languages, mainly because of modern education and missionary activities. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Minahasan in general could understand Malay, which were still in co-use as mother tongues in rural areas.

In contemporary Indonesian contexts, the Minahasan can be said to be a minority group, both in the sense of scale and religion. According to the national census of 2000, the Christian population of Minahasa amounts to 1,004,873 people, or only 5% of the total Indonesian population, a great part of which consists of Muslims.<sup>5)</sup> However, the Minahasan people are still the dominant ethnic group in the North Sulawesi province (Map 2). It is this ethnic domination that became a push factor for the Muslim minorities of North Sulawesi to split from the province and form a new province, Gorontalo, under Decentralization starting in 2000 (for greater details, see Tirtosudarmo 2002). In comparison with other Indonesians, the Minahasan in general have a higher level of education and a more cosmopolitan life as a result of colonial policy and missionary work.

The majority of the Minahasan engage in agriculture, and only in urban areas do we find small industries, services and trade. The most



important cash crops are coconut, cloves, rice, maize and cassava. The local economy can therefore absorb only a limited labor force, mainly of skilled and educated people, and many Minahasans therefore must migrate outside their province to find employment.

This historical internationalization of Minahasan societies seems to provide the people with a foothold in the world, especially in terms of recent trends in trans-national labor migration ('Minahasan diaspora,' see Jacobsen 2002). In addition to Minahasan cosmopolitan characteristics as a historical legacy, the recent decline of their local economy and employment opportunities seems to have stimulated the Minahasan outflow.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, it might be wrong to assume that poverty is the primary impetus behind Minahasan migration — especially working overseas — because a certain amount of capital is required to make the journey. The poor Minahasans are likely to have to find employment in their homeland, being unable to finance their journey, especially since it often requires an extra-high charge and bribes for the government and sending agency.<sup>7</sup> But in fact, the Minahasan are now one of the most mobile ethnic groups in Indonesia, emigrating to the urban centers of the world, including Europe (chiefly the Netherlands) and North America (mostly concentrated on the west coast, such as in California); Japan has also recently become a favorite destination. The pattern of Minahasan migration is therefore quite different from general trends of Indonesian migration, in which the migrants are primarily Muslims to Malaysia and the Middle Eastern countries.

## **2. Travelling to Japan and Obtaining Employment**

What is the place of the Minahasan people in the Japanese labor market? An Indonesian non-governmental organization (NGO) (Yayasan Excel 2003: 26–27) estimates that approximately 6,000 Minahasans are working in Japan today, consisting of irregular workers (85%) as their earliest and most common style of labor migration,

the *kenshūsei* or trainees (10%), and the *nikkeijin* or Japanese-descended Indonesians (5%). The number of these Minahasans corresponds to 20% of the total Indonesian population in Japan, which consists of some 23,000 residents of various legal statuses and over 7,000 overstays (see Figure 1 in Okushima 2005). Minahasan migrant workers to Japan are in fact largely irregular workers, as a result of the Japanese ‘back-door policy’ excluding unskilled foreign workers, who, therefore, came to work irregularly in so-called 3-D jobs (dirty, dangerous and difficult), for example, in the seafood processing industry in Oarai. There is also a considerable flow of trafficking of women and entertainers to work in the bars and amusement places in Japan. The Minahasan women are well-known to be good-looking and friendly, that is, very suitable for the entertainment industry.<sup>8)</sup> It is within such a labor market that the Minahasans have found employment opportunities and have gradually formed a community that has continued into the present.

Let us examine the departure process of Minahasan migrant workers, as the first stage in the development of their social institutions. There are many ways to enter Japan, but most commonly the Minahasan enter as undocumented workers, depending for the whole procedure of travel on local ‘travel agencies,’ that is, brokers who send people illegally on a tourist visa. This costs an extraordinary amount per person; the price of the flight to Japan together with passport and visa fees reached as much as 40 to 45 million rupiah in 2003 (Yayasan Excel 2003: 26), and even up to 50 million rupiah today according to one of my Minahasan informants. Some agents provide a guarantee that the person will be reprocessed for entry into Japan free of charge if the first attempt fails. On the other hand, trainees, entertainers and *nikkeijin* must be processed through specific recruiting agencies or governmental organizations (on employment channels according to type of job, see Figure 2 in Okushima 2005).

The most important thing for Minahasan undocumented workers

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arriving in Japan is to know how to safely pass through the immigration check points in Narita International Airport. According to an informant in Oarai, once a Minahasan irregular worker has passed through immigration, he or she need only take a taxi and say ‘to Oarai!’ Then the taxi driver takes the worker to Oarai, where he/she will be met by friends or family. These same friends and family would also introduce the worker to their *shachô* (a company’s boss) to ask for a job.

The development of the Oarai-Minahasan networks is quite similar to that of networks of other foreign workers, as shown by Shimada’s observation cited at the beginning of this paper. In Ibaraki, the number of registered Indonesian migrants has shown the highest increase in Oarai since 1999 (Table 1), while their numbers in other cities or towns have remained stable, or even declined (Sakai, Ryugasaki, Iwai, Iwama) (see Map 3).<sup>9)</sup> The remarkable growth of the number in Oarai since 1999 results from the arrival of regular Minahasan workers, *nikkeijin*, recruited by one of the seafood processing companies.

The early situation of the Oarai community can be heard in some local legends. Among the information gathered during my field research, there are two dominant versions of the origin of the Oarai-

**Table 1:** Indonesian Migrants Registered in Ibaraki by City/Town.

	Total	Oarai	Tsukuba	Iwai	Iwama	Sakai	Ryugasaki	Hitachinaka	Iwashita
2002	1535	533	119	64	48	38	33	33	33
2001	1521	464	148	78	57	32	37	31	24
2000	1242	324	142	92	50	23	49	13	20
1999	1087	183	143	94	52	35	24	7	45
1998	967	58	119	108	62	43	23	7	45
1997	789	19	102	92	54	40	21	2	21

Source: Ibaraki Prefectural Government

**Map 3:** Ibaraki Prefecture and the concentration of Indonesian nationals.



Minahasan. I will refer to the first version as ‘Vony’s story,’ and the second as ‘*Shachô*’s story.’

According to the first version of the legend, the first Minahasan woman to reside in Oarai, whom I provisionally call “Vony” here, came to Oarai in the 1980s as the wife of a Japanese man. Soon, she began to invite her relatives from Minahasa to seek employment in the local seafood processing factories, so that a small number of Minahasan started to settle in Oarai. According to the second version of the legend, which is recounted by a *shachô* of one of these factories, the settlement of the Minahasan in Oarai began in the 1980s, but in this story because the *shachô* himself recruited the Minahasan woman and

her relatives. She had previously been working in an Indonesian restaurant in the Roppongi suburb of Tokyo. As a regular customer of this restaurant, the *shachô* offered her a job in his factory. Since his experience with her confirmed that the Minahasans were good and reliable workers, he then asked her to invite her Minahasan relatives to work in Oarai.

Despite the different viewpoints above, both versions agree that once informal and direct connections had been established between the local employer and the Minahasans, the latter developed and enlarged this employment channel of irregular workers by continuously recruiting their family members.

The period of the rush to Oarai varies somewhat depending on the informant. A Minahasan informant who was persuaded to migrate to Oarai by his close relatives states that only fifteen Minahasans already worked in the seafood processing companies at the time of his first arrival in Oarai in 1990.<sup>10</sup> According to one of the Protestant priests who have been working in Oarai since 1997, the peak time of the Minahasan arrival in Oarai was between 1988 and 1999. He remembers very well that during this period, about twenty new Minahasans participated in each new session of the 'pertemuan' (weekly meeting in Church) and introduced themselves to him, while after this period, there were only two or three new Minahasans at each meeting.<sup>11</sup>

### **3. Establishment and Development of Social Institutions**

As the second stage of development, the Minahasans who had been concentrated in Oarai organized social institutions at a larger level than the family networks discussed above for the convenience of daily life. There are four primary social institutions in Oarai: family, *kerukunan* or association, *kaisha* or company, and the Church.

Being an egalitarian society without a history of a certain descent group or social stratification, the grouping pattern of the Minahasans was chiefly based on their cognatic family ties and territorial subdivi-

sions (Lundström-Burghoorn 1981; Schouten 1998). In fact, they are said to be an association-oriented people, who typically form various kinds of temporary and permanent associations, for example, those for reciprocal labor exchange, religious activities, political parties, men or women, youth groups, etc. (Lundström-Burghoorn 1981; Mai 1994). Some of the associations last only a short time, or are absorbed to into another, depending on time and social need. Others persist over a long period of time, or develop into some formal type of organization like a foundation, NGO, etc. This tendency can also be seen in other foreign immigration destination countries (for example, see Jacobsen 2002 on the Netherlands).

Hence, as I wrote in the introduction, the social institutions in Oarai more or less link with and overlap each other because they share a principle of mutual assistance, *mapalus*, which has traditionally been applied throughout their societies, families, villages or regional communities, and churches or groups of believers. At the same time, however, the emphasis on a horizontal relationship between members, rather than a hierarchical one, may cause frequent splits of these groups, for example, the division of a *kerukunan* after quarrels between some family groups.

A *mapalus* is a symbolic form of all sorts of mutual assistance and includes members at any level, from the nuclear family to a regional or religious community, as a long-persistent tradition of the Minahasan people through historical transformation. The term *mapalus* means a 'rotating work group' in which the members of the community exchange their labor in their basically subsistence economy (Schouten 1998: 65), especially in agriculture in the past. Other social activities are also carried out under this system. Because the activities of a *mapalus* were largely involved in spending a quantity of time together and sharing food and other materials, the Dutch colonial government strongly disapproved of the system (Lundström-Burghoorn 1981: 166). Nevertheless, they could not exterminate the *mapalus* from

Minahasan communities because the latter also organized themselves as subgroups of laymen of a church for religious activities like prayer, reading the Bible and choir. Moreover, after Independence, the *mapalus* came to be an understanding or translation of the Indonesian government ideology, *gotong-royong* in the Constitution (Schouten 1998: 221–222). Thus, the *mapalus* has persisted as a nucleus of social relationships among the Minahasan until today.

Contemporary Minahasan life still has a considerable dependence upon associations based on the *mapalus*, for instance, cooperation among villagers during marriage, farming, building houses or funerals (Lundström-Burghoorn 1981: 4–5), while its reciprocal character also applies to a new institution in which money occupies a central place (Schouten 1998: 65). Let us now examine Minahasan social institutions in the case of Oarai.

### **(1) Family values and networks**

The family is the most fundamental core of all Minahasan social institutions. As mentioned above, Indonesian labor migration is generally based on family values and networks. The process of labor migration within or outside the homeland can be said to function primarily as a family effort to improve livelihood and find ‘a niche’ (Miyazaki 1998) in a certain economic sphere. Many studies on cross-border migration phenomena suggest the importance of family networks in establishing trans-local and trans-national families between the place of origin and the destination (for example, see Yeoh et al. 2002).<sup>12)</sup>

For the Minahasans, family values are also the basis of their migrating behaviour, given that their socio-cultural resources and survival strategies developed in their local history and culture. Kinship relations are physically and metaphorically extended over any other social institutions, such as the *kerukunan*, Church and *kaisha*. Indeed, the term ‘family’ among the Minahasan has a wider sense than only one’s

nuclear family, including also relatives and other affinities both within and outside the village; in some contexts, it even includes certain kinds of blood-brothers and close friends. Thus, the members of a family constitute, at least in part, those of a *kerukunan*, Church or group of co-workers of a company, all at the same time.

Let us examine a typical case of labor migration through family ties. One Minahasan informant who has lived in Oarai for more than ten years decided to go to Japan when his uncle invited him to work at his workplace. Two years later in Oarai, he himself also invited his wife and then his two teenaged children, because the demand for part-time workers in the local seafood processing companies rose very high at that time. Thus, many members of the same family came to settle and take employment in these companies in Oarai. It was easy for this informant to find jobs for his relatives, as his *shachô* considered him and his family reliable and thus entrusted them to recruit more relatives from Minahasa. Not only jobs but also other accommodations like housing, cars and food were also either provided by the family, or assistance in obtaining them was offered by the family, until the person was able to earn a sufficient amount to pay back his debts.

Such informal and direct employment channels used to be established between migrant workers and employers in various temporary jobs in Japan beginning in the 1980s. A good rapport with the local key persons, both in Japan and in the place of origin, is particularly important for irregular workers.

## **(2) *Kerukunan*, or village association**

The social institution closest to family is the *kerukunan*. The *kerukunan* is a typical village association or committee for meetings, mediation, or national and local events; this system is common not only among the Minahasans, but also among other Indonesians. In this institution, the extent of the membership is a village or group of several villages, in their homeland of Minahasa. A *kerukunan* is often



composed of several families who live in the same village or in neighboring villages, although the grouping principle of *kerukunan* is based primarily on locality.

It is noteworthy that the Minahasan *kerukunan*, as well as other kinds of associations, are inevitably bound up with religious activities, as stated above. Indeed, the early *kerukunan* in Oarai used to hold various services like Sunday Service, Bible reading, youth club, and Christmas and Easter celebrations, only for members or together with another *kerukunan*, in the local churches, or in a rental space such as a community center. Later, when the number of Minahasan migrant workers grew considerably, this resulted in the foundation of formal churches in Oarai specific to Minahasan/Indonesian believers. One of these Churches, the GMIJ (Gereja Masehi Injili Jepang), a branch sect of the GMIM (Gereja Masehi Injili Minahasa), is a typical example of how a *kerukunan* developed into a Church. (see section (4) below).

As the general system, a Christian Church is organized by its believers, who are sometimes divided into subgroups in rotation, or *kelompok kebaktian* (an informal and voluntary 'Bible reading group') in Indonesian words, with the help of the priests. This subgroup corresponds to a *kerukunan* among the Minahasan, while a Church consists of a single or plural *kerukunan/kelompok kebaktian*. To function as a *kelompok kebaktian* is one of the most important roles of the *kerukunan*. The *kerukunan* of a church is the mediator between the believers and the church committee to gather donations and encourage cooperation for administration (for more details, see Okushima 2006). The hymn chorus (singing group) is also arranged by the *kerukunan*.

The *kerukunan*, however, are also for other purposes mostly needed by the members. For example, when someone becomes sick, or needs help to return home, the person or family may ask their *kerukunan* to lend money for the hospital or to buy a flight ticket, etc. The largest

**Picture 1:** A *kerukunan* party serving Minahasan cuisine (Oarai, 2004).



sum of money is required when someone dies and the body must be sent home. One informant stated that there were at least six Minahasans who died in Oarai prior to 2004. Cooperative preparations for feasts and celebrations are also carried out on various occasions by each *kerukunan* (see Picture 1).

The *kerukunan* of Oarai emerged and developed in parallel with the increase in numbers of Minahasan migrant workers. Today, there exist ten *kerukunan*, each of which originated from sub-districts (*kecamatan*), or from former tribal territories as mentioned in the first section above, of their homeland, with numbers varying from twenty to several hundreds. The homeland territories of these ten *kerukunan* are the following: (1) Kawangkoan, (2) Karegesan, (3) Sonder, (4) Tondano, (5) Langoan, (6) Kiawa, (7) Tomohon, (8) Tonsea, (9)

Sumonder and (10) Tumpa Lembean, with the largest *kerukunan* probably being Kiawa, which is estimated to have as many as 200 members.

However, some Minahasans of Oarai state that only some *kerukunan* still function to organize various social activities, while the rest simply retain the name. According to these informants, this is because the functions of a *kerukunan* have been absorbed into the churches, or it may be due to structural changes in the employment system, both in the local and national labor markets. See the next section for further discussion.

Furthermore, because of the dispersal of the Minahasans to other regions since the end of the 1990s, they finally integrated their *kerukunan* into a single, wider organization in 2004, namely the *Kerukunan Keluarga Kawanua di Jepang* (K3J), or ‘Kawanua Family Association in Japan,’ in which all the Minahasan of Japan may participate (see Sumakul 2005).

### **(3) *Kaisha* as a metaphorical family**

The family- and locality-based institutions of the Minahasan can be extended or applied to other scenes in the outside world. In the subsections hereafter are two examples of these enlarged social institutions, *kaisha* and Church.

As seen above, Minahasan irregular workers successfully intruded into the Japanese labor market by establishing direct employment channels with the local seafood processing companies or *kaisha*. These companies in Oarai are run hereditarily by small Japanese families. There, the employees, both foreigners and Japanese, are often treated as family by the employers, in a very typical and traditional example of the Japanese labor-management relationship. For example, a *shachô* shows his sympathy and good will to his Minahasan employees in calling them *anak* (children); the *shachô* himself functions as their father.<sup>13)</sup> In this quasi-family relationship, informality, consensus,

**Picture 2:** Minahasan workers' apartment building, leased under the name of their *shachô* (Oarai, 2004).



protection and loyalty are important bonds securing the irregular workers in Japan. A Minahasan family state that, without the help of their *shachô*, they would not have been able to stay in Japan for very long. The *shachô* always supports them in every aspect of life, and even becomes the guarantor in the purchase of a house, car, etc., whenever required (Picture 2) (see also Pudjiastuti 2005, in this journal).

Not only practical security in jobs, but also the metaphorical family relationship with the employers in the *kaisha*, makes the Minahasan feel at home, just as in their own family, *kerukunan* and Churches in their homeland. The existence of some key person or people (family and *kerukunan* leaders, *shachô* and priests) means physical and mental

patronage for irregular workers. These key persons are also expected to support the workers' families in the homeland.<sup>14)</sup>

A *kaisha* group includes in some cases not only the Minahasans and their employer, but also other co-workers, Japanese employees and part-time workers. A cooperative and harmonious attitude is usually extended to all members of the *kaisha*. This is also easily understood and put into action by the Minahasans, who have a strong tradition of such behavior among their families.

#### **(4) Churches as the integration of Minahasan societies**

As the last stage of the development of their social institutions, the Minahasans organized themselves into several church groups according to affiliated sects in their homeland.

In general, a church is administrated by its committee, including the clergy and the representative laity, and is also supported by the rest of the believers. We saw above that different Minahasan *kerukunan* were often integrated into a single church, and so reduced their functions. At present, there are four church communities in Oarai: three Protestant Churches, the GIII (Gereja Interdenominasi Injili Indonesia), GISI (Gereja Injil Seutuh Indonesia) and GMIJ (Gereja Masehi Injili Jepang), and one Catholic Church (see Pictures 3 and 4). The clergy of these churches, both Indonesian and other nationals, are in fact live-out members who commute voluntarily to offer Minahasan Sunday Service in the Indonesian language, except for those of the most recently founded GMIJ, who are themselves Minahasan *nikkeijin* workers incidentally in possession of the title of priest (for more details, see Okushima 2006 in press). The total number of believers belonging to the GIII and GMIJ together amount to two to three hundred active members, while that of the GISI and Catholic Church are between fifty and one hundred.

Each Church in Oarai has its own history. The early formalization of the church occurred in the Catholic Church (1997) and the GIII

**Picture 3:** Place for the Minahasan Catholic Church in the local community center (Oarai, 2004).



**Picture 4:** Rental building of the GMIJ since 2003 (Oarai, 2004).



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(1998). As we saw above, these churches began to offer ‘persekutuan doa,’ or an informal Sunday Service group, around 1992–93. They then asked several Japanese and other priests in neighboring regions for support. As the number of Minahasans increased in the late 1990s, they finally formalized themselves as churches. The latest GMIJ was established in 2001 by Minahasan *nikkeijin* workers newly recruited since 1999 as a branch of their mother Church, the GMIM in Minahasa. The GSI is also a branch of a mother church in Indonesia under the influence of American evangelicalism (Full Gospel Church) (for more details on the development of Indonesian churches in Japan, see Okushima 2006 in press).

As in the case of the *kaisha*, churches among the Minahasans are windows to the outside world. There, they can establish contact with

**Picture 5:** Sunday Service of the GSI (Oarai, 2004).



priests, temporary visitors, and any other Japanese and foreign neighbors. For the Minahasans, priests are men of status as well as physical and mental leaders, and so they are usually very busy providing counselling, medical services, amusement, etc. On the other hand, the churches also hold a centripetal power over Minahasans who are now scattered in many other industrial regions but return for Sunday Service or special annual rituals like Christmas (see Picture 5).

#### 4. The Entrance of the *Nikkeijins* and *Kenshūsei* in Oarai

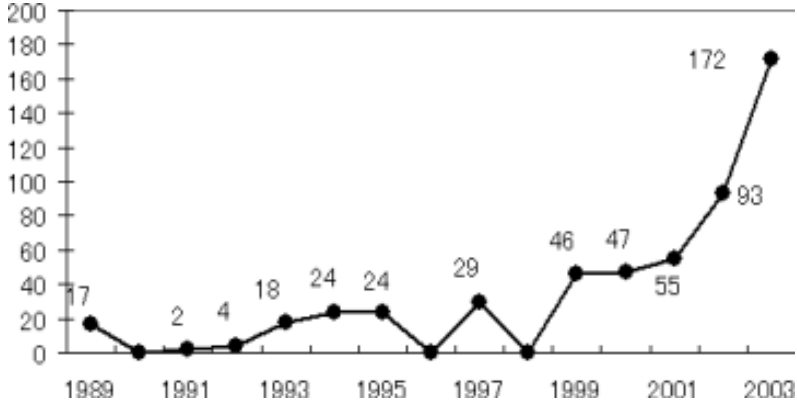
Since Japanese Immigration Reform in 1990, the irregular migrant workers in Oarai as well as in Japan in general have been challenged by immigration control authorities, and also by the recruitment of alternative legal labor forces such as *nikkeijin* and *kenshūsei* (trainees) (Yamanaka 1993; Yamada 1994; Clammer 2001). The terror of 11 September 2001 also added considerable pressure in terms of administrative surveillance on foreigners in general (see Meguro 2005 in this journal; Tessa-Morris Suzuki 2003, etc.).

Previously, Immigration allowed much greater tolerance toward the irregular migrant workers in Oarai. The attitude of local administration (*yakuba* or the local government, Immigration, and police) toward Minahasan irregular workers shows a contradiction or dilemma in Japanese policy for foreigners (Pudjiastuti 2005). A mass arrest of fifty Minahasan irregular workers occurred in 2002, as the harshest experience for the Minahasans. This seems to have resulted from the accidents and crimes in 2000–2002, e.g., car accidents and theft by Minahasan and other Indonesian irregular workers, and also the arrest of several employers of seafood processing companies in Oarai who hired intentionally Indonesian irregular workers.<sup>15)</sup> Then, there added a new trend in security policy after the terror of September 11 2001. In fact, the number of Indonesians arrested by the police increased sharply from 55 to 172 persons during this period (2001–03) (Table 2). Another factor is that the rapid increase in the numbers of foreign-



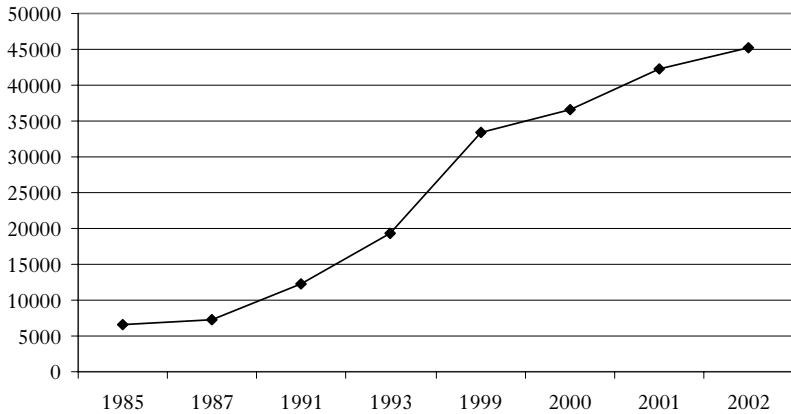
The Making of a Minahasan Community in Oarai:

**Table 2:** Numbers of Indonesians arrested by the police, 1989–2003.



Source: Japanese Police Office

**Table 3:** Numbers of registered foreigners, Ibaraki, 1985–2002.



Source: Ibaraki Prefectural Government

ers in Ibaraki Prefecture (Table 3) promoted security threats, requiring the establishment of an Immigration branch office at the end of 2004 in Mito, the capital city of Ibaraki.

As a consequence, Minahasan irregular workers began to be re-

placed by Minahasan *nikkeijin* and Chinese *kenshūsei*. The Minahasan *nikkeijin* were recruited in Oarai from 1998–99, and now number some 200 individuals (Picture 6). Nevertheless, their number is very small in comparison with that of other *nikkeijin* nationals such as the Brazilians. Many Minahasan *nikkeijin* seem to be descended from the fishermen of Okinawa Prefecture (on more details, see Okushima 2005 and Meguro 2005, in this journal). In fact, some of the Minahasan *nikkeijin* had already migrated to Oarai before 1998, where their status of residence was only as temporary visitors because they had not yet found alternative ways to work in Japan. This was due to the efforts of a Japanese employer who succeeded in recruiting the *nikkeijin* from the region of his branch company in North Sulawesi.

The Minahasan *nikkeijin* were partly supported by existing Minahasan irregular workers and their social institutions that had gradually grown

**Picture 6:** Minahasan *nikkeijin* workers at lunch time (Oarai, 2004).



up since the 1980s. However, the situations of regular and irregular Minahasan workers vary in some contexts; for example, the *nikkeijin* can choose and change their jobs freely, according to their own estimation and favor. Also, the Minahasan *nikkeijin* preferred to establish another new Church, the GMIJ, rather than to join one of the existing Protestant Churches where the different sects mixed in cooperation.

In contrast, the increasing numbers of Chinese *kenshūsei* during these several years have been cause for complaint by both the Minahasan irregular and regular workers. According to my informants, many local employers now prefer to employ Chinese *kenshūsei* because they are willing to accept very low wages. Additionally, the Chinese *kenshūsei* are generally unable to communicate well with the Minahasans.

Nevertheless, some Minahasan irregular workers told me that some employers are still fond of the 'good' Minahasan old settlers, considering them to be more reliable than the late-comer *nikkeijin* and *kenshūsei*. One of the oldest Minahasan residents and one who has been in Oarai the longest says: "Our *shachō* still likes and trusts us because we know best what the *shachō* expects from his employees. We are hard workers and punctual and we complain less. That is the reason why the *shachō* always treats us like his family." The employers of Oarai have always made their best efforts to utilize the foreign labor force at low cost, often having to face the inspection of the Immigration and police. Some of them were even arrested because of their continual employment of irregular workers.

In the changing circumstances discussed above, the Minahasan community of Oarai has begun to shrink, losing members as people move to other regions, especially irregular workers. Some are now working in the farm fields (*hatake*) on the outskirts of Ibaraki, in towns like Asahimura, Iinuma and Hokota. In fact, the Minahasans are less willing to engage in the much harder work of the *hatake* than in seafood processing. Nevertheless, their farms are usually very

isolated from local centers, and both the Minahasans and their employers feel less pressure from Immigration authorities and police control.

Other Minahasans have moved to the Chubu Area, such as the Aichi and Mie prefectures, where they are largely hired in the automobile industry. According to my informants, this is more difficult for the Minahasans because in order to find employment, they have to depend on local “brokers” instead of on their existing networks that could connect them directly to an employer. The term “broker” in this context does not mean a purely professional intermediate agent or an illegal broker, but rather the responsible agent of an outsourcing services company. The manufacturing industry in Japan has shifted drastically from a direct employment system to an indirect employment system since the 1990s, and now many more temporary workers are recruited than permanent ones were in the past, including an enormous number of South American *nikkeijin* through outsourcing services companies. Under this new system, the former loyalty and consensus between employers and irregular workers has declined to a considerable degree (Okushima 2005). Furthermore, the Minahasans in their present circumstances must spend a considerable amount on mobile phones,<sup>16)</sup> cars, etc., in order to remain in contact with their relatives and friends in remote regions.

Nevertheless, the social institutions of the Minahasan people still play important roles, and in some respects have become even more important than before. The *kaisha* and churches are crucial for them to keep in touch with the changing world, with the aid of the *shachô* and priests to support them. Some *shachô* have voluntarily tried to form an NGO to improve the daily life of Minahasan workers in general. The churches serve them more directly as their physical and mental guide, and as a place where they can express their anxiety and distress as well as their devotion and worship. The priests also recommend that the Minahasan to take care of their health, avoid commit-

ting theft or adultery, do not indulge in drinking sprees, and establish a positive rapport with the Japanese and their other neighbors. There are also a few Minahasan *nikkeijin*, who have already obtained the status of permanent or semi-permanent residents in Japan, and who have recently begun to promote certain jobs to other Minahasan *nikkeijin*.

### **Concluding Remarks: The Future of the Oarai Community**

We saw above that the core of the Minahasan community has been based on the family and the *kerukunan*/village association, both of which organized larger and more formal social institutions in the form of the *kaisha*/company and the church. These institutions used to function as a self-support or self-protection system for the Minahasans, who were primarily irregular workers, under the control of the Japanese Immigration authorities, which has been intensifying since the 1990s. Later, however, individualism and professionalism began to spread among the Minahasans because of the introduction of *nikkeijin* and *kenshūsei* in Oarai on the one hand, and because of structural changes in the employment system of the manufacturing industry in Japan. There is also the influence of the September 11 terror, which has increased the surveillance of the Immigration authorities and the police over all foreign nationals.

In proportion to the declining practicability and effectiveness of their informal and direct connections to employers, the importance of family and the *kerukunan* has also declined. Minahasan irregular workers have become more cautious, and they are less likely to help their fellows with job-seeking and other forms of assistance. The decline of kinship networks also has an influence on one of their churches, the GMIJ, where it is difficult for the believers to maintain themselves as a constant group because of the high mobility of the *nikkeijin* to other regions. The other church groups (the GIII, GIZI and the Catholics) are less influenced by this decline because their

churches were branches of mother churches initially established by the Japanese or other Indonesian residents. Now the fate of the Minahasans hangs on key people such as some employers, priests, etc., who negotiate the territory between the community and the outside world.

The Minahasan community in Oarai is thus likely to shrink more in the future. Its only hope is the possibility of improving the attitude of the Japanese immigration system toward foreign workers, and especially toward the unskilled workers, who are in such significant demand today (see Table 1 in Okushima 2005). In order to respond to the problems of the irregular migrant workers in general, the Japanese Prime Minister's Commission on Japan's Goal in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (2000: 35) suggests that prompt action be taken in 'the frontier within':

To respond positively to globalization and maintain Japan's vitality in the twenty-first century, we cannot avoid the task of creating an environment that will allow foreigners to live normally and comfortably in this country. In short, this means coming up with an immigration policy that will make foreigners want to live and work in Japan. Achieving greater ethnic diversity within Japan has the potential of broadening the scope of the country's intellectual creativity and enhancing its social vitality and international competitiveness.

The Minahasan community of Oarai provides us with a case study of the phenomenon of trans-border migration. We must therefore continue our research on Indonesian workers in Japan as a new trend in Indonesian labor migration.

### Notes

- 1) The major part of this paper was presented at the 1<sup>st</sup> workshop on the Intercultural Communication Institute (ICCI) project 'Indonesian Society in Japan,' organized by the ICCI of Kanda International University (in Arcadia Ichigaya Hall, Tokyo, 23 January 2005). The main issues

were also discussed in other workshops at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, and at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. I am very grateful for the comments on my presentation and for the advice offered by the workshop participants; the final responsibility for the content of this paper, of course, lies with myself.

- 2) I first researched the Minahasan community in Oarai during my one-year stay as a visiting professor at the Research Institute for Language and Culture of Asia and Africa (ILCAA), Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, in Tokyo (2003–04). My last visit in January of 2005 was supported by the ICCI of Kanda University of International Studies. I would like to thank above all my many Minahasan friends in Oarai for sharing their stories with me. I would also like to thank my former host Professor Koji Miyazaki (ILCAA) for his constant support. I am very grateful for the various kinds of support provided by Dr. Iko Pramudiono (Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corporation, Tokyo), Ref. Albert Adam (Gereja Interdenominasi Injili Indonesia, Oarai), Professors Roger Downey (Sophia University), Jun Wada and Mika Okushima (Kanda University of International Studies), and my interpreter Go Iwata (undergraduate student of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies).
- 3) The situation of Indonesian migrant workers in Japan has been almost unknown in Indonesia until recent days. A special publication on the lives of Minahasan workers in Japan was issued by the Excel Foundation (Yayasan Excel 2003) in conjunction with a fund-raising event and theatrical music show under the theme ‘Solidarity Night with Indonesian Migrant Workers in Japan.’ In the present study, we first examined the lives of Minahasan workers in Oarai. An issue of *Tempo* weekly magazine published in August 2003 also presented a special report on Indonesian female workers in the sex industry in Japan. Papers on the Minahasan workers in Japan are also available from the seminar in Manado, North Sulawesi, organized by a Christian NGO, the Center for Indonesian Migrant Workers (CIMW) in Jakarta. In addition, a short report on the Minahasan in Oarai was also presented by Pudjiastuti (2004) during a seminar at ILCAA, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies in January 2004.
- 4) While the term *kerukunan* is a standard Indonesian (Malay) term for the traditional social institutions found in many regions, this concept

- includes, in Minahasan society, both social and economic reciprocal ties between people.
- 5) This figure was obtained by my own calculation based on the 2000 population census, and raw data on ethnicity provided by the Biro Pusat Statistik (Central Bureau of Statistics). Based on the categorization of the Minahasan in these statistics, I group together other ethnic minorities that are sometimes considered to be Minahasan, such as the Tonsawang, Tontemboan, Tonsea, Tombalo and Bantik.
  - 6) A recent report shows that the worsening economic welfare of the people in Minahasa has resulted partly from the current practice among the rich of buying land from the poor, significantly contributing to the increasing number of families who live below the poverty line. For a comprehensive analysis of the economic situation in North Sulawesi, see Sondakh and Jones (2003).
  - 7) For example, the migration of the Thai to Japan is not due to poverty; rather, it is believed to serve as a way of earning money easily and quickly in order to establish a reputation, to buy a house and land, or to start a new business using their earnings from Japan (see Ruenkaew 2004). However, as Ruenkaew (2004: 39) finds, the most decisive factor in their migration is the embeddedness of social and kinship networks. The trans-national migration of the Thais constitutes migration chains, in which the pioneers function as the starting points of a social network between the new area of residence and the home community, as a source of information on living and work conditions and on modalities of entrance into the target country, and also as the organizers of newcomers. With these networks, the migration of Thais has become self-sustaining. In many cases, such networks function more efficiently than the process offered earlier by the brokers. In addition, recruitment by relatives is free of charge, although the migrants must pay other costs, such as document fees.
  - 8) The recruitment of female entertainers from Indonesia to work in night clubs in several cities of Japan was reported by an Indonesian weekly magazine, *Tempo* (August 2003).
  - 9) The number of Indonesian migrants registered by the local government is very likely lower than the actual number of migrants, due to overstays, etc.
  - 10) This person is now the longest Minahasan overstay in Oarai as well as



- the Minahasan resident who has been in Oarai the longest.
- 11) Indonesia has been hit by a monetary crisis since 1997, and many people have suffered inflation and job loss; the political situation also quickly deteriorated.
  - 12) It would be interesting to examine the social and economic impacts of Minahasan workers in Japan on their families, as well as their impact on their home village or region.
  - 13) See the NHK special program series, "Close-up Gendai," (NHK broadcasting, in September 2002).
  - 14) The problems of long separation of a couple because of labor migration to Japan, for instance, and the resultant influence on their children, has been a concern of several Christian NGOs in Manado and Jakarta. A special seminar organised by the Center for International Migrant Workers (CIMW) to address the problems and issues of Minahasan workers in Japan was held in August 2003 in Manado, North Sulawesi. In this seminar, several papers were presented, among others an eye-witness report by a priest, Meiva Lintang (2003), "Labourers: The right, responsibility and its system in Japan," based on her experience and observation working with Indonesian workers in Japan.
  - 15) For example, see the Japanese newspapers, *Mainichi-Shinbun*, 1 February 2002, 30 March 2002, and *Asahi-Shinbun*, 1 November 2002.
  - 16) The availability of mobile phones makes it very easy for the Minahasans to communicate with their friends and families, in Japan as well as in Indonesia. For a vivid description of the life of irregular migrants in Japan, see, for example, Ray Ventura's semi-autobiography *Underground in Japan* (1992) and the informative analytical review of the book by Caroline Sy Hau (2003).

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