

THE IMMIGRATION SITUATION IN JAPAN: A FOLLOW-UP FROM 2006

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ABSTRACT

This article reports generally on the current situation of women as it relates to Japan's fiscal difficulties. It also outlines the immigration and labour situation and is intended as a succinct follow-up of the progress and setbacks of crucial issues raised nine years ago (McNabb, 2006), including Japan's large domestic deficit, shrinking tax base, and declining birthrate, in the context of an ever-burgeoning percentage of retired seniors and concomitant social costs. I have previously suggested that the Canadian multiculturalism model might offer partial solutions to the structural dilemmas facing the Japanese government. This is reexamined.

Key words: immigration, women, population decline, job market, deficit

INTRODUCTION

From my paper in 2006, I variously wrote:

It is well known, even legendary, that (while) at the brink of disaster at distinct periods in her history, Japan has managed to make miraculous recoveries. (McNabb, p.91)

Therefore, just as occurred in the Meiji Era over a century ago, Japanese policymakers would be wise to carefully examine – and with a similar sense of urgency – proven, successful policies in effect around the world in order to mitigate as much as possible against [sic] the dangers that lie ahead. Then, as before, borrowing and adaptation should take place as necessary (p.91)

It is indisputable that the serious challenges brought about by a rapidly aging society, a stalled birthrate, an imminent, large number of retirees, predictable declining population figures, indigence (NEETs and “freeters”), dubious academic standards at middle to lower-ranked universities, a massive debt, a tight labour market, a bloated bureaucracy and cutthroat competition must be dealt with thoughtfully but quickly, for time is of the essence. If Japanese want to maintain their current lifestyle, drastic changes will be required (p.96).

Most of the issues in this paper have now become extremely popular media topics because they are adversely affecting Japan's fiscal prosperity or are at risk of doing so. In spite of this, there have been relatively few comparisons to the situation in years past. Nearly a decade later, then, this paper is an examination of the extent to which some of the interrelated challenges enumerated above have been remediated.

Before 2006, the serious demographic challenges that Japanese politicians, bureaucrats and business leaders would have to face had already been well-documented, so one would expect that various corrective action plans would have been considered and set in motion. Still today, however, what to do to resolve the same issues continues to be discussed in a wide spectrum of general and scholarly publications. Japan seems to be just getting started. Two examples among many are discussed in some detail hereafter. Making efforts to boost the influence that women can exert on the economy has been largely ignored. Second, in the *electronic journal of contemporary japanese studies* [sic], Chapple (2010) was one among several who had already examined the immigration situation in the early 2000s, and has once again detailed some of the likely outcomes if not enough is done in a timely manner to address the issue of population decline, which has been a concern for decades. With a continuing, very strong national disinclination toward mass immigration, it is still effectively an off-limits topic. Immigration in the context of Japan's consistently declining population will be examined in its own section.

Women in the workforce

Given the sustained, perceived unfeasibility and definite unpalatability of having a regular intake of immigrants, one might reasonably expect that some other compensatory policies would have been formulated and begun in order to deal with labor shortages. If immigration is truly a nonstarter, then

2015年4月10日受理

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optimising the role of women could become a key consideration.

Increasing the amount of female participation in the workforce seemed to be one positive, natural and logical “workaround” to avoid all of the vexations and nettlesome accommodations associated with large-scale immigration, but that potential solution was met with opposition at the highest levels of society. Already quite a few years ago, Jolivet (1997) indicated that in spite of his adequate understanding as to what kinds of changes would be needed in order to shore up the ailing pension system, such as implementing policies designed to promote greater participation by women in the workforce, Prime Minister Hashimoto criticized what he believed were the harmful effects of higher education on women's primary role as caregivers, commenting that women should not have gone to university and then entered the workforce. This commentary seems to lend credence to the belief that the blinkered, outdated personal ideology of the old guard has been trumping the formulation of policies for the betterment of the nation.

Getting ready to return women to work

In 2006, one of former Prime Minister Koizumi's more noteworthy gaffes was to have suggested that in the Year of the Dog women could *similarly* give birth to more children. However he did comment about the importance of creating an environment where people would be delighted by the idea of raising children. In his policy speech on September 27, 2001, he reaffirmed his stance of “No fear, no hesitation, and no constraint” (MOFA, 2001) and regarding eliminating employment insecurity, he pledged to “swiftly implement regulatory reform in such areas as medical services, welfare and childcare, and labor.” “...In implementing these measures I will set specific targets, such as the creation of 10,000 new jobs during the course of FY 2002, through such strategies as the zero-waiting list for nursery schools” (MOFA, 2001). Clearly there was hesitation, because this turned out to be an unfulfilled promise. In fact, it appears that except in Yokohama (see below), the data show that, to date, not enough has been done to nurture a delightful environment in major centres where the population concentration is greatest.

Compared to women in many other countries, Japanese women have had a much lower workforce participation rate *and* have given birth to fewer children. According to data from The World Bank, from 2010-2013 the percentage of Japanese women who were in the labour force (49%) substantially lagged behind many other developed countries including Canada (62%), Germany (54%), the UK (56%), Singapore (58%), Switzerland (61%), the USA (56%+), the Netherlands (59%), Scandinavia (59%), Australia (59%) and New Zealand (62%).

Other surveys (Matsui, 2014) show that after childbirth, Japanese women did want to return to the workforce but were no longer able to find suitable positions. So it was not a case of them choosing to remain out of the workforce (For readers familiar with similar OECD data, that data is calculated differently and shows higher rates of participation in all countries, but still corroborates the consistent lag in Japan.). From 2010-2012, along with Singapore, Hong Kong and South Korea, Japan's birthrate was among the world's lowest at 1.4 and had remained almost unchanged since 1995 (1.26-1.41). Fewer Japanese women continued to work *and* at the same time couples elected not to have children. The most recent OECD report, “Economic Survey of Japan” (2015) lists a number of contributing factors including an utterly inadequate national childcare budget, outdated taxation rules that discourage women from fully working, and corporate culture that prevents an appropriate work-life balance. To be direct, physically and emotionally tired people have weak libidos.

Recently in 2015, in a complete volte-face from his previous stance, Prime Minister Abe declared that he would take measures to ensure that 30% of women would be in leadership or management positions within five years, by 2020. This policy statement is at the Cabinet Office's gender website. “Among the goals of his 'womenomics' initiative is to raise the proportion of mothers who will return to work after the birth of their first child to 55 percent by the year 2020” (Fifield, 2014). He has also committed to increasing the number of daycare facilities. This is an excellent, very welcome target when set against the backdrop of societal attitudes toward women in the workplace, for, according to data from the World Economic Forum, Japan ranked 104th in gender equality out of 142 countries and territories, up one spot from 2013. It is an important and necessary socioeconomic initiative, however, since approximately 3,000,000 women in Japan have wanted to return to work but could not due to insufficient daycare facilities (Matsui, 2010).

There is every reason for optimism on this front because Yokohama has already eliminated the problem of not having enough daycare facilities by offering public land and increasing its budget for subsidies as well as by deregulating the market to allow private companies to participate. It is important to note that the driving force behind these rapid changes was Yokohama's no-nonsense *female* mayor, Fumiko Hayashi, a former high profile business executive. In just two years 144 new daycares were built and the wait list of over 1,500 children in 2010 is now zero. It is possible that Mr. Abe's target of 400,000 new openings (200,000 by 2015 and another 200,000 by 2017) and three-year extended child-care leave will be reached.

Women in business – by the numbers

For some time, Kathy Matsui of Goldman Sachs has been a well known, astute proponent of increasing the number of women in business, especially, and has been credited with having coined the term “Womenomics,” recently co-opted by Prime Minister Abe. Her awareness of the increasingly disturbing demographic outlook combined with awareness of the deeply-rooted male tendency to undervalue women in business prompted her to write “Womenomics: Buy the Female Economy” (1999) in which she advocated utilising the power of women in Japan for the good of the economy. This was in stark contrast to the views of then Prime Minister Hashimoto and other leaders of the time. Unfortunately, there was little change, so in 2004 she followed up her initial report with a statistics laden report, “Womenomics: Japan's Hidden Asset” that clearly quantified the monetary benefits of having more women in the workforce such as a greater than 10% increase in GDP. Once again, in 2010 she sounded the alarm by writing “Womenomics 3.0: The time is now.” As conveyed in the report's title, she did not mince words. She wrote,

It is more critical now than ever before for Japan to leverage half its population more fully (p.3).

Japan's demographic tsunami is upon us (p.3).

While the overall female employment has risen to a record level of 60%, there is still a long way to go. 70% of Japanese women still leave the workforce after their first child, and only 65% of college-educated women are employed (p.3).

Obstacles to higher female employment include insufficient childcare and nursing care support, tax distortions, inadequate focus of the private and public sectors on diversity, and rigid immigration laws (p.3).

While Womenomics is only part of the solution to Japan's demographic and growth challenges, we believe that given the limited alternatives, Japan has no choice but to tap its most underutilized resource. It's hard to run a marathon with just one leg (p.3).

Previously and more recently, she has discussed the necessity of capitalizing on Japan's most valuable and hitherto underutilized labour resource (Matsui 2010, 2014). In Womenomics 4.0: Time to Walk the Talk, Matsui (2014) suggests that policymakers do seem to understand the gravity of Japan's myriad problems.

However, as a result of a shrinking and

greying workforce, acute labor shortages, and a recovering economy, a growing number of policymakers and citizens are finally becoming convinced that gender diversity in the workplace is no longer an option; rather, it is an imperative. Japan can no longer afford not to leverage half its population (Matsui et al., 2014, p.3).

Japan's severe demographic headwinds mean that unless radical steps are taken quickly, the nation faces the risk not only of longer-term economic stagnation, but of economic contraction and lower standards of living as well. (p.5)

It is well-documented that the number of workers has been declining and recently more rapidly as baby boomers retire. Labour shortages are becoming more pronounced particularly in the construction industry. This has already lead to increased infrastructure costs and project delays as employers have no choice but to pay higher labour costs in order to attract workers or stop projects because of insufficient labour. Worldwide, women choose not to do construction work, so in this case immigration intake is the only solution. In the service industry as well, the hourly rate has been creeping up so that employers can get enough workers.

Slight improvements for women in business

While the situation is unmistakably dire given that the country's national debt now greatly exceeds 200% of GDP (by far the worst among developed countries), there has been gradual improvement in female representation in employment. For example, from 2000 to 2013 the number of 25-29 year-old women still in the workforce has risen more than 5% and daycare capacity has increased, although it is expensive in Tokyo. According to Goldman Sachs' 2010 and 2014 studies, there is still room to increase the number of women in the workplace and boost the GDP by 10% or even more. The optimum GDP increase of 13% assumes an equal percentage of men and women working (about 80%).

In 2013, the government requested that listed companies disclose gender-related statistics. Only 17% did. Even still, it is a welcome step in the right direction. However, it is not surprising that steps to advance women's roles in business and government is slow, since there is an utter paucity of elected female representatives and very few female leaders within the civil service. In fact, Japan has almost the lowest per person representation *in the world* – 50% less than in Korea, 3 times less than China and 5.5 times less than Sweden (Matsui, 2014, p. 13). In business, currently the situation is similarly bleak. Only about

10.5% of section chiefs are women, which is a minute 0.5% increase since 2005. The percentage of female representation in Japan at the managerial level has seen slight, incremental gains since 2005, but is still far below other developed countries such as the UK, Germany, the USA and Canada. At the boardroom level, in 2013 only 12.1% of listed companies had one or more female board members, ranking Japan at *dead last* among 23 developed countries and second last in the world according to the GMI Ratings' 2013 Women on Boards Survey (p. 3, 20, 22). Still, it was a 2.2% increase over previous years. Given my significant firsthand knowledge of this situation through personal connections, even within proactive firms, 3-4 female internal and external directors out of 20 or more directors overall is now considered rather progressive. The above data and my reliable anecdotal knowledge¹ demonstrate that there is ample opportunity for Japan to become a more dynamic and vigorous society by taking concrete steps that will empower more women.

In order to attract and keep more women in the workforce at all levels and in all sectors, first there has to be a paradigm shift. Matsui notes that in a 2012 Cabinet Office survey, 52% of the Japanese respondents (including women themselves) stated that women should stay at home and men should work, marking a 10% *increase* from the previous survey conducted in 2009 (p. 25). Thus, to change the mindset of society will take time, but whatever changes occur will have to be part of a made in Japan solution, since it would be simplistic to imagine that such a shift needs to be or ever could be a copy of the policies implemented in successful countries such as in Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Canada or Germany because Japan is different and always has been. It is a typical Japanese trait to proudly declare that they are different. Nevertheless, taking the unfavourable future population trends into account (e.g., by 2050 38% of the population may be over 65), Japanese leaders would be wise to examine what other countries have done and act quickly and decisively, for time is of the essence. While still falling short of the current situation in other countries, Prime Minister Abe's declaration that from fiscal year 2015 (precisely now) at least 30% of new civil servants will be women, is a bold, much-needed, non partisan first move forward demonstrating real leadership. It remains to be seen whether Abe's other "*Mieru-ka*" (gender initiatives website) initiatives will also bear fruit, but there is reason for guarded, mild optimism given the effectiveness of top-down decision making that is a mainstay of Japanese society. Because of the government's continuing stance on immigration, to a very large extent, the successful implementation of proposed policies designed to improve women's roles in society seems set to determine the economic fate of the country.

In my previous paper I cautioned against falling into the trap of intellectual flaccidity by too easily accepting straight-line demographic and economic projections reaching out to 2050, since the world is very complex and situations can and do change quickly (McNabb, 2006). This caveat duly noted, nearly a decade later, various improvements for women are only now just getting underway. The slow pace notwithstanding, there has even been a recent, favourable shift in attitude among young men 18-34 years-old toward their future spouse as a working mother (Matsui, 2014, p. 30).

Even if women take on a much more active role in Japanese business, mitigate to some extent Japan's labour shortage and even suddenly decide to have many more children (which is extremely unlikely), thereby producing a baby boom, all of these combined will not be enough to fill future labour shortages according to prevailing expert opinion. Calculations are becoming easier and are more accurate than a decade ago. Babies born in 2015-2020 won't enter the workforce until 2035-2040, which would be too late since they would only just be beginning to make much needed pension contributions. This leads us to immigration as another possible solution.

Immigration

Many people in various countries around the world view immigration – and therefore immigrants – quite matter-of-factly, as an accepted, important, yet essentially unremarkable aspect of their society. When there is trouble (e.g., recently in the USA, France or Australia), governments have been trying in earnest to make bona fide improvements, realising that immigrants are a net benefit to society. The same cannot be said for Japan.

After having had many opportunities to make changes over two decades (being well aware of the problems associated with declining population), the immigration situation in Japan has actually mildly worsened. The majority of Japanese steadfastly reject this view, however.

For readers facing time constraints, regrettably, it is possible to generally yet accurately characterize the current government's posture on immigration in the following few words. Although I have been unable to determine the name and exact broadcast date of the TV programme on which Prime Minister Abe appeared, there is no reason to doubt the credibility of long-term, Japan-based commentator Jonathan Soble of the *Financial Times* and *The New York Times* who, on June 2, 2014 wrote that

“The Prime minister's [sic] answer could hardly have been clearer – or more disheartening for advocates of a

radical new embrace of outsiders. 'In countries that have accepted immigration, there has been a lot of friction, a lot of unhappiness both for the newcomers and the people who have already lived there,' he told the audience, as he held up a white signboard marked with a red "x" to underscore his negative position on the issue" (Soble, 2014).

This is the same prime minister who, in halting English, has been using JETRO to publicly invite foreign investment stating that Japan and Japanese society are undergoing wholesale changes the likes of which haven't been seen in fifty years – except in immigration. Regarding immigration, Abe faithfully articulates the sentiments of most Japanese people, as is demonstrated in the excerpts below.

"The *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper poll in June 2010 asked Japanese about accepting immigrants to 'maintain economic vitality.' Twenty-six percent favored the idea. Sixty-five percent opposed it" (Harlan, 2010).

"A poll by the Jiji news agency in March (2014) showed that just under 60 percent would be willing to accept an increase in *temporary* [my emphasis] foreign workers to address labour shortages..." (Soble, 2014).

Yasutoshi Nishimura at the Cabinet Office, who is a deputy minister in the Cabinet Office in charge of the government's policies on foreign labour, says he is swamped by anti-immigration phone calls and Facebook messages whenever the issue comes up. "It's ordinary housewives, worried that there would be more crime" (Soble, 2014).

In April 2014 a *Yomiuri Shimbun* newspaper poll indicated that while Japanese are worried about the problems associated with declining population, regarding securing the labor supply, the top two answers were to "increase the rate of working women and encourage more elderly to work. Only 37 percent said more foreign workers should be accepted, and only 10 percent of *those* said manual workers should be brought in" (Matthews, 2014).

In *The New York Times*, citing experts, Tabuchi (2011) reported that Japan was losing skilled talent across industries. Investment banks, for example, were moving more staff members to hubs like Hong Kong and Singapore, which have more foreigner-friendly immigration and taxation regimes, lower costs of living and local populations that speak better English.

"The shrinking population is the biggest problem.

The country is fighting for its survival," said Hidenori Sakanaka, director of the Japan Immigration Policy Institute, an independent research organization. "Despite everything, America manages to stay vibrant because it attracts people from all over the world," he said. "On the other hand, Japan is content to all but shut out people from overseas" (Tabuchi, 2011).

The foregoing clearly indicates that for at least the most recent four years, the general feeling toward rejecting immigrants has remained strong and constant.

In principle, then, at least insofar as the current Abe administration is concerned, permanent immigration is not being considered. In Soble (2014), Nishimura says "We don't use the word 'immigration.' There is still a strong insular mentality. Still, [it] would be a big change for Japan."

Some foreigners are leaving

In the same way that the majority of Japanese would prefer not to have foreigners on their soil (*jus sanguinis*), increasingly it would appear that certain foreigners would rather not stay.

Foreigners who submitted new applications for residential status – an important indicator of highly skilled labor because the status requires a specialized profession – slumped 49 percent in 2009 from a year earlier to just 8,905 people. Also in 2009, the number of registered foreigners declined for the first time since records began to be kept. There was a 1.4 percent drop. And in 2008, only 11,000 of the approximately 130,000 foreign students studying in Japanese universities and technical colleges were able to find secure employment probably due to the effects of the so-called "Lehman Shock." It is worth noting that throughout 2009 the yen was consistently very strong in USD terms, at approximately 91 yen in January and ending the year at just under 93, so from an economic perspective there was considerable incentive to remain in Japan. This means that Japan must have lost its appeal for some other reasons. Likely, one main reason was that economic conditions were worsening in some sectors causing industry and government to come up with some controversial initiatives such as paying to *permanently* send home "Nikkei" visa holders. Jiro Kawasaki, a senior member of the LDP political party who spearheaded the plan is quoted in *The New York Times*: "We should stop letting unskilled laborers into Japan. We should make sure that even three-K jobs are paid well, and that they are filled by Japanese. I do not think that Japan should ever become a multiethnic society" (Tabuchi, 2009). This comment combined with Nishimura's and Abe's more recent comments do rather strongly suggest that "regular immigration" was not and is not up for

discussion.

Immigration bandages

The government has been taking measures to attract qualified foreign talent through its “Points-based Preferential Immigration Treatment for Highly Skilled Foreign Professionals” initiative, launched in 2012. In its first round, it failed quite dramatically, attracting just 434 people perhaps because the bar had been set too high, effectively filtering out almost all except those who were already well established in their careers, begging the question, Why uproot and leave for Japan? The initiative was revamped in 2014, so it is still too early to form any strong, definitive conclusions, but in 2014 it was not fully subscribed and by the end of March 2014 only 59 had entered Japan under this visa category, a noticeably slower rate than under the previous, more severe regime. Yet when I filled out the most recent application, I found that for a reasonably well-educated 30 to 34 year-old, getting 60 points was actually not exceedingly difficult. Therefore, there may be other reasons keeping people from moving to Japan and not just fear about radiation. Simply put, the dearth of participants would indicate that there have to be more benefits offered in order to entice this class of worker to immigrate to Japan. The world's young elite are not going to move to Japan without due consideration, as there is global competition to attract the best and the brightest. Why move to Japan when another country has better resettlement conditions? What would prompt an already successful thirty-something, well-educated person or couple to leave their Sydney, Toronto, Shanghai lifestyles to be cramped into a 70m² apartment in central Tokyo for the same income or slightly more? Also, regarding the visa itself, according to current stipulations, if entrants under this category change their visa to a permanent resident status after five or more years (not an uncommon visa category among long-term residents), they lose all previously accorded PR status privileges. Unlike regular permanent residents, they would also be subject to deportation if they were to try to retire or lost their employment for six months or more. It is perplexing that the rules for getting permanent resident status have been relaxed while at the same time their status under that visa (at this time) would be diminished relative to other PR visa holders. In light of the foregoing, that the government hopes to attract 5,000 highly skilled foreigners by 2017 is a wildly optimistic target since, from 2005, there has been an observable trend among educated foreigners from North America and Oceania, Germany, the UK, and even China, Korea to leave (or not come to) Japan. In some countries the trend began earlier, but overall the decline started in 2010. Even well after the Great Japan East Earthquake, this trend continues.

Japan could study the points-based systems used in

Australia, Canada and the USA, which seem to work well, and certainly there is no shortage of applicants for these countries. This noted, if the government is really only seeking temporary residents, albeit educated ones, careful comparisons to other systems that have been designed to attract and *retain* may not be worthwhile. There have been few substantive improvements as regards immigration since my first paper published in 2006 that suggested immigration issues needed immediate attention. Moreover, it appears that at this time no new initiatives are being contemplated.

According to Ministry of Justice records, by far, the bulk of college students, researchers, engineers, professors, intra-company transferees and skilled laborers were from Asia, supporting to some extent, the trend of declining participation from North America, Europe and Oceania. Meanwhile, the population and workforce decline in some prefectures continues unabated. Five Chubu prefectures have negative net migration coupled with an aging population. In fact, 39 prefectures registered a decline in population according to 2012-2013 government figures. Akita, Aomori, Yamagata, Kochi and Wakayama, were particularly hard-hit. In addition, there is a general trend that the prefectures experiencing population decline also have the highest percentage of people over 65 and the fewest number of children. It is common knowledge for many in Japan that there is an ongoing demographic hollowing out and calcification of rural Japan. In addition, there is the apparent problem of *uchimuki* that is stopping young Japanese from wanting to go abroad. This trend has been constant since 2004. Notably, the number of Japanese students studying in the USA, which is their preferred academic destination, has dropped to the point that Japanese are no longer the largest number of foreign students there (now 7th). We should not blame students, however, because one of the main reasons cited by Japanese youth for not wanting to study abroad is that such experience is not considered valuable by most prospective Japanese employers. It would appear that it is the older members of society who continue to be inward looking. This increasing raw number of young people who are expressly avoiding becoming グローバル人材 (globally competent), combined with the national distaste for immigrants, especially from Asia, bodes very poorly for Japan's future.

The Canadian model

The Canadian model is still available for Japanese bureaucrats and politicians to draw on. It works. Unlike in Europe or the USA where multicultural policies are comparatively weaker, resulting in various problems, in Canada there haven't been any massive spikes in crime or violence. In fact, on a per capita basis, crime of *all types* has been falling year

on year. From 2003 to 2012, according to Canada's Crime Severity Index, both the volume and the seriousness of crime in Canada dropped by 36%.² In 2013 the decline was the largest since 1998. So Prime Minister Abe's simplistic premise wherein he equates the somewhat under planned immigration in Europe with guaranteed, de facto greater crime in Japan (i.e., immigration doesn't work), seems like deliberate conflation designed to distort people's perceptions. It does not follow at all that an increase in crime is a corollary that must be inextricably linked to an increase in immigration. Many problems can be prevented from the outset with planning and by having proper systems in place. In Canada, crime consistently fell while immigration intake was constant at between roughly 220,000 and 250,000 people per annum, proving over the long term that Abe's assumptions are not necessarily correct and are probably sloppy.

Canadian multiculturalism has matured over many decades. To be sure, there have been false starts, errors, examples of bigotry and plenty of genuine misunderstandings. Through it all, however, even when there hasn't always been full acceptance of immigration by all citizens, there has been real commitment to fair, transparent government policies.

The governments in Canada have calculated that there are net monetary and social benefits that derive from having a diverse, somewhat younger workforce. Only trailing the USA by one percent, Canada had the lowest percentage of people over 65 (14.8% in 2011) of the G-7 countries. According to StatsCan projections, it will not be until sometime between 2051 and 2060 that 25% of the population is 65 or older. Most importantly, among G-7 countries Canada has the highest proportion of working-age people (68.5%), so the base supporting the population pyramid is relatively stable. Indeed, within the working-age population, the highest income earners and hence the highest taxpayers were aged between 45-64 and accounted for 42.4% of the total.

Unlike Japan, Canada is experiencing a decades-old, carefully controlled population increase of between 0.8% and 1.2%. However, some researchers, including me, are mindful that population increase mainly resulting from international migration (over 65%) may currently be too high. There is no opposition to immigration per se, only the amount and placement. It is being observed *now* that intake of too many too fast is beginning to strain the limits of cultural integration, particularly in and around the Greater Toronto Area, which receives most of the national intake (nearly 50% of all immigrants in Canada choose to live in the GTA). If Japan were to embrace thoughtful, systematic immigration as a means of dealing with demographic and revenue

challenges, bureaucrats would be advised to consider the number of entrants, as well as their placement.

Conclusion

Opportunities for women in Japan have improved and will continue to improve. If Matsui is correct, Japanese women will be able to add a great deal to the GDP, the vitality and the mindset of the nation. At last, the future for working Japanese women seems to be quite bright.

Conversely, nearly a decade later, there is nothing positive to report about immigration policy trends. When viewed from the outside, there has been backsliding. For example, the most recent initiatives designed to attract highly qualified professionals and nurses from the Philippines seem half-hearted at best. Other countries' (Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Sweden) successful immigration systems have been disregarded even against the advice of experts such as Hidenori Sakanaka, while at the same time sound bites that the dangers of European and American-like immigrant-crime would be Japan's fate as well, have been exaggerated and over-publicized. Domestically, the Ministry of Justice set up a hotline and website for Japanese to report foreign crime (especially visa overstayers) and perceived foreign crime even as foreign crime in Japan decreased and the foreign crime ratio was no higher than that of Japanese citizens – in other words, very low. Such measures seem to suggest that there won't be significant attitudinal changes toward immigration in the near term. Finally, it is worth mentioning that most other advanced countries do not even track foreign crime.

I fear that Japan's aversion to accepting long-term immigrants may prove to be her downfall. With regard to utilising women as a valuable resource, Matsui has written that it is time to “walk the talk” (Matsui, 2014). The same concept holds true for immigration. Time is of the essence. If another decade is allowed to pass without squarely addressing the need to better accommodate well qualified, vibrant foreign workers, there is some probability that Japan's standard of living could begin a period of decline unless there is some type of sudden, unpredictable economic windfall (Sony Walkman, a world standard eco-battery, etc.). While it is wonderful that Japanese women may well have opportunities to rise to their full potential, numerically it seems impossible that their contributions alone will be able to make up for the both the looming, imminent workforce shortfall and accompanying lack of tax revenues. We also can surmise that given the current state of affairs in Japan, there will be no baby boom anytime soon. Therefore, without immigration, current straight-line population projections at least until 2035 to 2040 will be accurate: the population will fall and labor

shortages will continue in some sectors.

Japan is at an important crossroads or will be at one very soon. While it seems that “Abenomics” may provide a boost to certain sectors of the economy, others are faltering. Even if the monetary easing and the pump-priming of “Abenomics” strengthen the economy, this strength will most likely not endure over the long-term and probably will not be enough to reduce the domestic debt to a manageable level. There is already a labor shortage in some sectors. Immigration is a taboo topic, but barring exorbitant taxation or some new, unforeseen solutions, in the face of a predictably declining and aging population, it seems to be Japan's only choice.

1. Author's spouse is one such director and former director of women's executive groups. Author knows many female directors through her.

2. All data provided in The Canadian Model were taken from the Statistics Canada website at <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/censusrecensement/index-eng.cfm>
<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2014001/article/14040-eng.htm>

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