The COVID Pandemic and Changes to Migrant Experience in Central Tokyo

Tetsuo Mizukami (Rikkyo University)

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Introduction

How some sociological sub-disciplines will rise to new challenges that are becoming manifest in urban life ?

Let us focus upon the impact of the new corona virus on the migrant community of central Tokyo.

The dramatic changes that have involved Japanese metropolises, that was the impetus driving migration studies in Japan.

'This encouraged the field of migration and ethnicity studies, including multiculturalism, social inclusion or policies related to migration, and research has flourished ever since, in what can be described as a 'new dawn' for this specific field of Sociological studies.' *(Mizukami 2018).*

In this paper, I would like to take account of some particular changes and manifested problems in urban communities, dealing with basic three topics. First, I will briefly review the perspective of transnational migrants in sociological studies. Second, I would like to show how migration has ceased due to Corona pandemic by referring to Japanese government's statistical data. Third, I would like to depict the characteristics of the inner-city in Central Tokyo and the impact of COVID-19 upon the communities of immigrants.

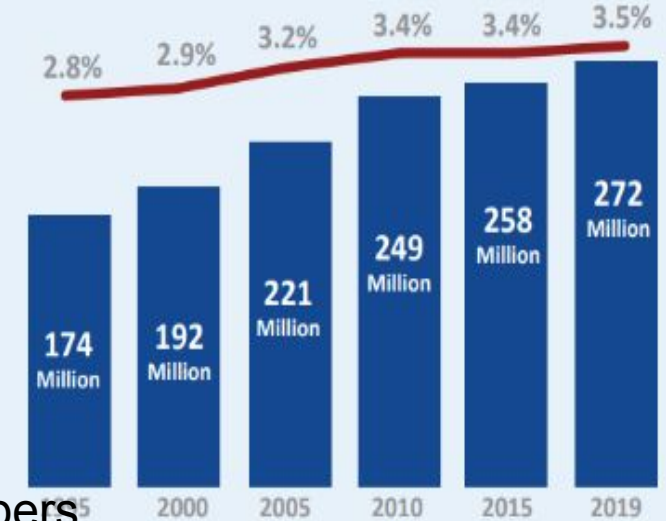# *International human movements and their sudden cessation*

International human movement has accelerated in recent times, and thus sociological research has been confronted with important challenges. Migration and the resultant emergence of ethnic communities have become much more complex and even more diverse than ever before,

Overall, the estimated number of international migrants has increased over the past five decades. The total estimated 281 million people living in a country other than their countries of birth in 2020 was 128 million more than in 1990 and over three times the number of 1970.
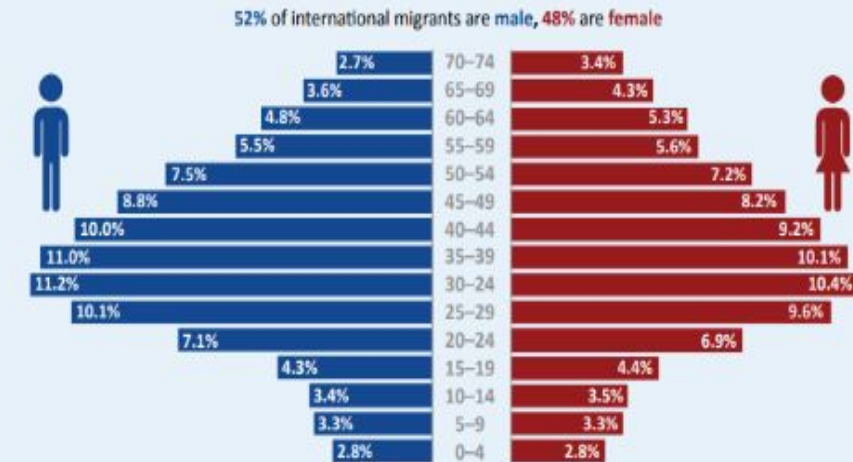
Dramatic changes have occurred in these years, and we have faced new and unprecedented experiences as publicm everywhere has been regulated to accommodate the pandemic.

Snapshot of international migrants

The international migrant population globally has increased in size but remained relatively stable as a proportion of the world's population

International migration around the world, by the numbers Image: IOM World Migration Report 2020.

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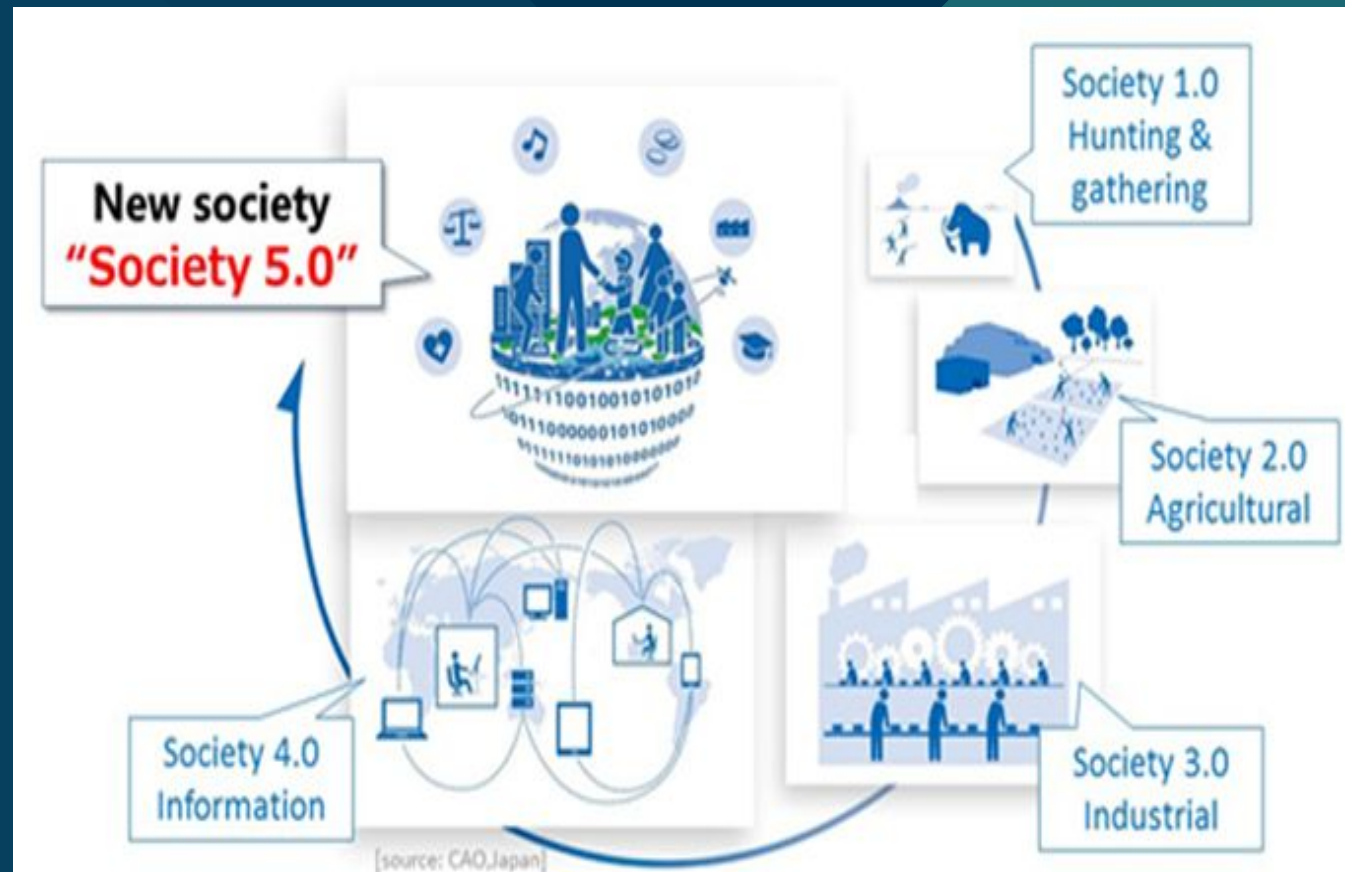
Movements and Transnational Migration

- Urban life has increasingly been characterized by the possibilities of 'movement,' commuters have been the typical urbanites. Across the globe, in nation after nation, major metropolitan areas feature a great variety of migrant settlement and consequently manifest the diverse expressions of various ways of life.

- Ready access to places overseas has become easier than ever before for large sections of national populations.

- Up until the 1980s most immgration studies were based on surveys and fieldwork in particular areas within any one country in which newly arrived migrants had come to live. However, since the mid-1990s, another perspective has emerged and there is now also a distinct research evaluation of *transnational* migration.

  - Ports, an expert in migration studies, noted in his 1997 article, "Immigration Theory for a New Century", how transnational activities had

    become a novel path of adaptation quite different from those found among immigrants at the turn of the century."

- Transmigrants must have access to transnational channels to initiate their ties with their intended host destinations, but they are also able to maintain ready contact with their homelands.

- Transmission of remittances "back home" is one of the major activities undertaken by transnational migrants.

Introduction of Online Meetings

In addition to development of transnational networks, other innovative change has occurred due to the circumstances that arose from the COVID pandemic. This is manifest in online communication.

The advancement of the ICT environment can also be a driving force for expanding the overseas reach of broadcasts.

How are we to develop a 'system that highly integrates cyber space (virtual space) and physical space (real space)?

The Japanese government has proposed Society 5.0 as a vision of the future society the country is aiming for. Society 5.0 is a society that follows the hunter-gatherer society (Society 1.0), agrarian society (Society 2.0), industrial society (Society 3.0), and information society (Society 4.0). Society 5.0 refers to a human-centered society that achieves both economic development and solutions to social challenges by means of systems that fuse cyber spaces with the real world in a highly integrated manner (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. 2019: 3).

Changes in the resultant lifestyle

One of the major changes that has gained attention is 'Workcation.' The word "workcation" is coining from joining "work" and "vacation". It not only means teleworking during "vacations", but especially for "work" after arriving at travel destinations.

Some real estate companies are promoting vacation home areas by encouraging a shift from a home that adapts in its workstyle to the life experienced in a holiday resort.

After the outbreak of the COVID pandemic, many nations closed their borders, major international events were cancelled or postponed. Now we are witnessing a lot of changes with new styes of communication arising in global cities.

Table 1 The Numbers of Foreigners' Arrivals and Their Departures in 2019-2021

Number/ Period	2019		2020		2021	
	April	October	April	October	April	October
Entries	2,885,456	2,441,612	5,312	35,578	17,558	33,228
(Re-entries)	202,408	207,059	4,056	14,761	13,964	22,229
Departures	2,946,845	2,390,786	29,566	33,314	45,051	39,015
(Re-entries' Departure)	254,587	205,953	7,232	15,438	23,625	25,799

*The number of Chinese indicate people from mainland China but the entries from Hong Kong and Taiwan were not included in this data. Source: Homusho [The Ministry of Justice] (2021).

Table 2 Population in Toshima ward in 2017-2021

Category/ year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Foreigners	27,060	29,010	30,223	29,672	26,458
Chinese	13,152	13,727	14,250	13,525	12,414
Population	284,307	287,111	289,508	290,246	287,300

*The number is counted every first day of January.
Source: Toshima no tokei [Statistics of Toshima ward] 2021.

Gateway Towns

Various ethnic groups settled in the inner cities of metropolises in North America and Australia, and with the social success of the second generation, their settlements usually expanded into the suburbs. This trend can still be observed today, but on the other hand, there are many cases of people moving directly from overseas to the suburbs where the middle class is concentrated.

Table 3 Number of foreigners moving in and out of Toshima ward by year.

	moving in			moving in			Foreign Population
	New registration	From other wards	Total	Closure	Out of this Ward	Total	
2018	6,696	7,751	14,447	4,142	9,092	13,234	29,010
2019	6,121	7,218	13,339	4,588	9,302	13,890	30,223
2020	3,755	5,821	9,576	5,053	7,737	12,790	29,672
2021	1,982	5,744	7,726	2,843	7,141	9,984	26,458
2022	7,584	7,009	14,593	2,537	7,323	9,860	24,200

Source: Unpublished data from Toshima wards.   *New registration includes entry into the country, birth, loss of Japanese nationality/withdrawal, etc., while closure includes departure, death, naturalization, acquisition of Japanese nationality, etc.

Emigration from the Inner-City

- A major reason for emigrating from the inner-city tends to be the desire to obtain better jobs and increase life security. According to a survey conducted by Shinjuku Ward (2020), there have been some certain trends as below:

- The movement of restaurant owners and chefs, as well as international students, stands out. In interviews with several people, it is said that "chefs change restaurants every two years, and there are almost no chefs who have worked at the same company for five to ten years." A teacher at the school said, "Recently, international students move easily. At first, many of them live with two or three friends, and then become independent once they get used to living in Japan. More and more students are moving to the western part of Tokyo, which is about an hour away." After 10 years in Japan, there are cases of people moving to outskirts of Tokyo, such as neighbouring Chiba or Saitama prefectures, after purchasing a home.

Experience of Corona Pandemic

In order to clarify the situation of the residents from China, I conducted interviews with a school manager and an entrepreneur from China.

A manager from one of the Japanese language schools located near to the Ikebukuro station told,

With the changes brought about by COVID-19, the students cannot develop the social networks that are naturally formed in educational settings. The number of depressed students has been increasing under the Corona crises and it is hard when teaching contact is online to tell whether or not they are sick. And so now the school staff receives a lecture from educators concerned with the mental care of students (18 June 2021).

The entrepreneur from China who runs a few Chinese restaurants around Ikebukuro told,

As a result of the corona crises, there is no gathering. Before that, we have had gatherings for each event of the festival. That was when we joined together with groups of shop owners and home town people and the like, but now such gatherings have disappeared from the shock of the corona threat. We have to be satisfied with seeing each other sometimes at home (18 June 2021).

Concluding Remarks

'COVID-19 is a disease not only for globalization but also of the Anthropocene.' (Hanafi (2022).

When the communication environment is ready, it is possible to connect online and create opportunities for learning, and the development of the ICT environment will expand channels to overseas. However, the need for face-to-face communication cannot be overlooked. Now we have witnessed and experienced on-line communication, we realise we have been examining the ways to appropriately use the cyber space and real world.

Sociology deals with situations that we encounter in our daily lives, such as relationships between individuals, families, groups and organisations, local communities, nation-states, globalization, and so on. Thus, Sociology as a scientific discipline has become more important than ever in dealing with a changing society as globalization progresses.

Thank you!

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