

Migrant Entrepreneurs and Regional Revitalization: A Qualitative Case Study

Osamu Nakajima *

Abstract

In Japan, the number of people involved in community activities is decreasing due to population outflow; thus, the survival of some communities is in jeopardy. Although various local governments, residents, and businesses are attempting to ensure communities' survival, some limitations remain. However, the changes in lifestyles and values resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic have reduced the psychological hurdles for people to migrate to rural areas. Under these circumstances, migrants who arrive in rural regions and start businesses have an economic impact on their destination, increasing the value of the region. To identify these agents, in this paper, I propose the concept of "migrant entrepreneurs," which has diverse meanings depending on these individuals' relationship with the local community and the form of their entrepreneurship. Taking the town of Higashikawa, in the prefecture of Hokkaido, as a study case, I clarify the characteristics of migrant entrepreneurs, who comprise a new entity responsible for regional revitalization.

Keywords: community, decision-making, migrant entrepreneur, regional revitalization, stranger

1 Introduction

In 2014, the "Act on the Creation of Towns, People, and Workplaces" was enacted to address Japan's pressing issues regarding declining birthrates, aging population, and the excessive concentration of population in the Tokyo metropolitan area. According to this law, each region must promote regional development to ensure a livable environment and maintain a vibrant society in the future. The second "Comprehensive Strategy" phase began to be implemented in 2020 to continuously promote regional development [1]. However, in some regions, local economies are shrinking; these regions' survival is jeopardized because of the decrease in the number of people involved in local activities due to population outflow. Therefore, local governments, residents, and businesses are attempting to ensure the region's survival.

Meanwhile, residents' lifestyles and values have changed since the COVID-19 pandemic, thereby opening the possibility for new regional activities in rural areas. In a survey of 3,200 men and women in their 20s to 50s conducted by the Forestry Agency, 24.4% of respondents

* Maehashi Institute of Technology, Maebashi City, Japan

expressed an intention to move to rural areas. Of these, 71.9% said they would consider moving to rural areas if teleworking was possible [2]. In a survey on the trends of corporate relocation to rural areas, 18.4% of the 680 companies surveyed had relocated or dispersed, while 7.8% were considering relocation, indicating that some companies felt the need to relocate to rural areas [3]. In addition, according to a survey conducted by the Teikoku Databank from January to June 2022, more companies (168) moved out of the Tokyo metropolitan area to rural regions, compared with the number of companies that moved in (124). This trend of over-migration began in 2021 and is expected to continue [4]. Furthermore, in a survey by the Cabinet Secretariat, 20.8% of respondents interested in emigrating said that they wanted to start their own businesses or become sole proprietors [5]. Thus, expectations for companies and people to migrate to rural areas have grown since the pandemic.

The theory of “strangers, youths, and fools” is often discussed as necessary for local development and regional revitalization [6]. This theory categorizes the agents of these processes as either “strangers” (who do not know the local way of thinking), “youths” (who are not bound by common sense), or “fools” (who do not mind deviating from basic ideas to bring innovation to the region) [7]. In rural areas, population aging and the exodus of young people to urban centers have resulted in homogeneous populations, which makes it difficult for innovation to occur. Therefore, there are high expectations for “outsiders” to bring novel ideas. However, given the rapid depopulation of many areas, expecting strangers to move into them to solve this issue is unrealistic.

However, some migrants arrive as strangers, settle in the aforementioned areas, and start businesses there. Although this phenomenon is not indicative of large-scale relocation—i.e., major companies are not attracted to these regions as a result—and does not lead to a significant increase in population or tax revenue, it adds new value to these areas through local branding and increased loyalty to the community, as well as the formation of new communities with residents who have lived in these areas for a long time. These migrants’ characteristics differ from those of individuals who move to these areas to make a living or start businesses, and they not only bring economic benefits to the area they move to but also contribute to increasing the value of the community.

Therefore, this study proposes the concept of “migrant entrepreneurs,” who comprise a new entity responsible for regional revitalization. Furthermore, it verifies the validity of this concept and clarifies its characteristics by analyzing actual cases in which migrant entrepreneurs have started their businesses. By clarifying this, it is expected that the effects of the decision-making of migrant entrepreneurs in each region will become more apparent, and their acceptance in these areas will increase, thus creating a synergistic effect of regional revitalization.

Section 2 summarizes previous studies on regional revitalization. Section 3 explains a new agent in the process of regional revitalization. Section 4 verifies the case studies. Section 5 discusses the implications. Section 6 presents the conclusion.

2 Previous Studies on Regional Revitalization

The concept of “migrant entrepreneurs” is not entirely novel. It has been used by certain local governments and previous studies [8-10] to refer to people who have migrated and started businesses. However, the definition of this concept has been ambiguous. This concept has been examined in research on migrants and the revitalization of regions that have entered a period of population decline. As this concept is yet to be clearly defined, in this section, I review previous

studies on various concepts related to regional revitalization that are necessary to determine the concept of migrant entrepreneurs.

2.1 Previous Studies on Strangers

First, I will review the related concept of “strangers,” as it holds a special significance to the concept of migrant entrepreneurs. According to Shikida [11], “strangers” are generally defined as people who are not related to a region or space and are perceived as alien. Additionally, the term mainly refers to people who come from outside the region as travelers [11]. Further, Shikida states that the status of the stranger is not decided based on a dichotomy between homogeneity and heterogeneity, but rather that their *strangeness* has different stages and that these stages exhibit continuous change, which he calls the change in the “otherness” of the stranger [12]. This “otherness” is the self-assertion of the stranger who tries to express himself/herself by deviating from the common sense and rules of the community or organization. Shikida [12] analyzed the characteristics of these strangers and found that they have five effects on their communities:

- ① Transfer of technology, skills, other technologies, and knowledge not available in the region
- ② Attracting and fostering creativity in the region
- ③ Support for the representation of the knowledge that the community has
- ④ Facilitating community (and organizational) transformation
- ⑤ Proposing solutions to problems from an outsider’s perspective

According to Simmel, who is considered the pioneer of the sociological discourse on the stranger, “the stranger is not the wanderer who comes today and leaves tomorrow, but the one who comes today and stays tomorrow, the one who does not continue his journey but has not completely overcome the separation of coming and going, the potential wanderer” [13]. However, simultaneously, the stranger is a person who is not a member of a social group. Simmel posited that the stranger brings a quality to a social group that does not and cannot originate there. Simmel also argued that “the stranger comes into contact with all the individual elements in a given sphere but is never organically connected to them through kinship, geographical or occupational fixation” [13]. In this regard, Tokuda argued that “the ‘stranger’ has both the characteristics of a ‘migrant’ cultivated outside the social group and those of a ‘settler’ as a factor constituting the group,” as well as “the existence of a ‘settler’ within the group” and “the existence of a ‘settler’ within the group” [14,15]. The stranger also described as “a person who occupies a unique social position within a group, maintaining a certain distance and estrangement from nearby people and things” [15].

In 1944, Schutz published a study on the stranger, whom he defined as “an adult individual who constitutes the age and civilization in which we live and who attempts to be permanently accepted by, or at least tolerated by, the group with which we approach” [16]. Moreover, Schutz described that strangers need to operate in a new place as “the cultural pattern of group life” [16]. He identified three characteristics of the behavior of stranger belong to a group: lack of consistency, partial clarity, and lack of coherence and inconsistency [16]. Each group’s “cultural pattern of group life” is difficult for outsiders to understand. Still, it can be interpreted as the ability to accept the “cultural pattern of group life” after belonging to a group for a long period. In this regard, Tokuda stated that for outsiders, the “cultural pattern of group life” is not scientific or logical but rather vague and not easily accessible, which “causes strangers to feel the sense of confusion and shock when they visit a new society” [17].

2.2 Prior Research on Entrepreneurs

The term “entrepreneur,” is thought to have originated in the words of Richard Cantillon in 18th century France [18]. It is a combination of “entre,” meaning “between,” and “preneur,” meaning “taker.” This term was originally used to describe a middleman or trader and has since been adopted in English.

Schumpeter, who described an innovator as a person who creates innovation, was a pioneer in using the term “entrepreneur” to describe a person who creates a new business. According to Schumpeter, innovation can be divided into the following five categories: (1) production of new goods, (2) introduction of new production methods, (3) development of new customers, (4) acquisition of new sources of raw or semi-finished goods, and (5) realization of the new organization [19]. Schumpeter defined the entrepreneur as “an economic agent whose function is to carry out innovation and to be an active element in its execution” [19]. In other words, entrepreneurs can predict innovation.

Drucker proposed that the entrepreneur dismantles order [20]. Thus, the entrepreneur must “create and destroy” and “look for change, respond to change, and use change as an opportunity” [20]. Drucker encapsulated this notion by stating “We must innovate” [20].

Furthermore, some studies on entrepreneurs have pointed out that the social relational capital required to start a business differs from that needed to make a profit [21]. Entrepreneurs who are involved in creating jobs in the area they are moving to are expected to not only live in the area but also establish various social relationships within the local community.

2.3 Summary

Prior studies show that a stranger is someone who has moved across a boundary from one area to another. Therefore, the concept of “stranger” is comprehensive and includes all newcomers to a new place. Some strangers move to new places to make a living, whereas others start businesses in new places with a fresh start. However, I argue that when people move to a new place, they do not simply move to make a living. They also transfer skills and knowledge that do not exist outside of the area by acting as local entrepreneurs. This phenomenon cannot be adequately explained solely in terms of the concepts of “stranger” or “entrepreneur.” Therefore, I propose the concept of migrant entrepreneurs. In the next section, we discuss the concept of migrant entrepreneurs, a new entity that plays a key role in regional revitalization, which is the purpose of this study.

3 A New Agent in the Process of Regional Revitalization

3.1 The Migrant Entrepreneur

To propose the concept of migrant entrepreneurs based on the literature review presented in the previous section, this section focuses on the characteristics of strangers who migrate and entrepreneurs who set up businesses.

Tokuda [17] defines a stranger as “a person who possesses the characteristics of a ‘migrant’ cultivated outside the social group and those of a ‘permanent resident’ as a factor in the group’s composition. In this respect, he agrees with Schutz, who says, “One who tries to be permanently accepted by, or at least tolerated by, the group with which one approaches” [16]. Simmel also

describes the stranger's nature as a settler: "Only by continuing to play the role of a 'mover,' bringing products produced outside the sphere into the group when needed, can he become a permanent fixture" [13].

Following Simmel [13], strangers are individuals who bring something from the outside as migrants and establish themselves as permanent residents of the land from which they obtain something from the outside. Moreover, Shikida argues that the stranger, by bringing something from the outside, transfers skills and knowledge that do not exist in the region and encourages creativity [11].

As mentioned above, in Cantillon's words, an entrepreneur is "a person who starts and operates a new business or specializes in such a business" [19]. Thus, it is possible to consider strangers as agents who transfer technology and knowledge from the outside by acting as local entrepreneurs. This can be accomplished by realizing Schumpeter's five types of innovation [19]. It is also consistent with Drucker's idea of looking for change, adapting to change, and using change as an opportunity [20].

Simmel argued that even when strangers become established, they are "mobile" because of the nature of their occupation [13]. Although they belong to particular groups, they are not confined to or bound by them. As Simmel states, they are mobile beings sustained by their general relationships with the region. However, a strong attachment to or responsibility for the region does not necessarily establish this relationship. In other words, strangers may become rooted in a region through their attachment. Thus, it can be concluded that some strangers are intermediaries between the outside and the inside, and that those who become entrepreneurs create new value.

Therefore, I proposed the concept of "migrant entrepreneur" as an agent that creates new value within a region by serving as a link between the inside and the outside, bringing skills and knowledge from the outside and becoming attached to the region to which they have migrated [22]. This concept can explain fill a gap in the literature regarding entrepreneurs who start businesses as strangers (without fully conforming to either the concept of "entrepreneur" or "stranger").

3.2 Characteristics and Roles of Migrant Entrepreneurs

In this section, I introduce the concept of migrant entrepreneurs as one of the entities that play a role in regional revitalization, as proposed by Nakajima, and elaborate on the characteristics of migrant entrepreneurs [22]. By detailing the characteristics of migrant entrepreneurs, we thought it would be possible to explain the role of migrant entrepreneurs in regional revitalization [22]. With this in mind, we will now explain the characteristics of migrant entrepreneurs.

3.2.1 Making a Difference in Community Relationships

Akasaka argued that "the stranger is not an entity concept but a relational concept" [23]. He states that the relational concept here does not refer to an individual human being as an entity but rather to a social existence that appears in the relationships among human beings. Kito points out that the roles of inside and outside in the environmental movement within a community may change and that eventually strangers may assimilate through their relationships with the locals [24]. In other words, the arrival of migrant entrepreneurs in a region can bring about changes in the status quo, which can allow them to further establish themselves in the area.

Within the context of Isahaya Bay in the Ariake Sea, Kito pointed out that natural science researchers who migrated and settled in the area were “strangers” [24]. These migrant entrepreneurs/strangers analyzed and made sense of the local situation from a relatively objective point of view. They approached the local life and culture through empathy and understanding. In such situations, the migrant entrepreneur is an agent of change in local community relationships.

3.2.2 Developing a Creative City

Migrants in Europe can be considered strangers. In terms of what immigrants mean to the communities they move to, Landry pointed out that their skills as workers lead to creative activities in the city, and noted that “In Europe, the involvement of strangers and immigrants has historically contributed to the creative cities” [25]. On the other hand, Florida identified the creative class, stating that “belonging to this industry are science, technology, art, design, entertainment, media, law, finance, management, medicine, and education,” and argued that the concentration of creative people is a factor in fostering creativity within cities [26].

It can be argued that by settling in an area, migrant entrepreneurs bring creativity to the region and contribute significantly to city formation. The region also encourages inclusive social participation, including that of social minorities, through art and culture. In other words, accepting strangers as migrant entrepreneurs into a region can foster creativity.

3.2.3 Creating Industries and Employment in Rural Areas

Sasaki et al. proposed the concept of “creative rural villages,” based on the idea of creative cities [27]. They referred to these villages as “attempts to open up a new society from the periphery rather than from the system’s core” [27]. In contemporary rural areas, migrant entrepreneurs may foster creativity in Japanese farming villages. They also suggested that local communities can be revitalized through art, food culture, and urban-rural exchanges through alternative tourism, and that the independent actions of local communities can generate exchanges with migrant entrepreneurs and create new cultural values, industries, and employment in marginalized communities. The key to fostering such exchanges is creating a society that prioritizes the creativity of each human being, including migrant entrepreneurs. These exchanges are a product of the creativity and labor of human beings. By working creatively, migrant entrepreneurs contribute to the formation of local industries and employment.

3.2.4 Contributions to Local Branding

Shikida [12] referred to the changes that strangers foster vis-à-vis community development as the “stranger effect” and argues that we should seek to manifest these effects, including local rediscovery, pride cultivation, and knowledge transfer. Shikida et al. [28] posited that branding by the “intermediate system,” a mediator within the region, determines the success or failure of towns’ tourism development. They argued that beyond inward-focused tourism, which has tended to be limited to facility development-type tourism, a comprehensive management directed toward needs outside the region is required.

When aiming for image enhancement and economic revitalization through branding that takes advantage of the attractiveness of products and services, culture and climate, natural landscapes, and tourism resources in such regions, the activities of migrant entrepreneurs can make

significant contributions to regional resources. The activities of migrant entrepreneurs in an area can help clarify their characteristics and establish their identities, thus making local residents aware of the new values and fostering their pride in their home region.

3.2.5 *Becoming a Member of the Community*

Nakajima [29] pointed out that migrant entrepreneurs can be recognized as adding value to the local community. The bearers of the region's industries are those born and raised in the region and those who have migrated from other areas—thus being strangers. Although they may see themselves as strangers when they first move to an area, this conception may change as they become involved in revitalizing depopulated areas. Subsequently, as they establish themselves in the community and continue their business, they become insiders. They may then grow to see themselves as residents who play a role in the community and become attached to it.

4 Case Verification

Having introduced the concept of migrant entrepreneurs as new agents responsible for regional revitalization, I clarify whether active people in a specific region have the characteristics of migrant entrepreneurs. Thus, I examine the case of the town of Higashikawa, in the prefecture of Hokkaido, in Japan [29].

4.1 Overview of Higashikawa

Higashikawa is located at the center of Hokkaido prefecture, approximately 13 km from Asahikawa city. Its population peaked at 10,754 in 1950 and reached its lowest point (6,973) in March 1993; it has since recovered to 8,500 as of June 2022, owing to increased immigration since 1994. The migrants account for 56.6% of the total population. These comprise migrants who moved into the town within the last 25 years [30]. Some of these migrants decided to move because of the cultural characteristics and economic policies of Higashikawa, which encouraged activities such as photography, furniture-making, and crafts [31].

Some migrants run furniture and craft workshops, general stores, and cafés. Additionally, agriculture is a core industry in Higashikawa. However, according to the prefectural and municipal industry subcategories in the “2016 Economic Census-Activity Survey” conducted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications and the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry, the manufacturing industry has the most employees. Specifically, the furniture and equipment manufacturing industry is the largest, accounting for approximately 40% of the total.

4.2 Survey Methodology

Until now, most migrant surveys in rural areas such as Higashikawa have been conducted using questionnaires [31]. However, because the total number of migrant entrepreneurs in rural areas is small, it is difficult to conduct a quantitative analysis of this population. In

addition, the effectiveness of such surveys can be improved. Therefore, I conducted interviews with the participants of this study, believing that the qualitative data obtained from may yield valuable findings. The survey attempted to clarify the kind of transformation in value and meaning that occurred because of the entry and establishment of migrant entrepreneurs into the region, both for the migrants themselves and for the local community. The interviews are summarized in Tables 1–3.

Table 1: Summary of the Interview Survey

Survey Title	Survey of Migrant Entrepreneurs in Higashikawa Town
Purpose of the survey	The study focused on the behavior of entrepreneurs who immigrate to Higashikawa, settle there, and start businesses. The study also aimed to reveal the social, economic, and cultural impacts of their long-term settlement and local activities on both the entrepreneurs themselves and the community.
Method of investigation	This was a survey using life-story interviews with semi-structured open-ended questions
Study period	March 26, 2019– March 30, 2019
Subject of investigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The interviewees were selected using the snowball sampling method. • Six entrepreneurs had moved to Higashikawa between 1980 and 2008, established themselves there, and were producing and selling furniture and equipment (wooden furniture, toys and accessories, and ceramics). • Six operators were covered by the survey.

The four main themes of the interviews are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Interview Themes

Number	Interview Theme	Summary
1	How did you start your migrant business?	How they migrated and started their own businesses; their life so far.
2	Current job	Daily livelihood and the products they produce.
3	Interaction in the area surrounding their place of business	Interaction with the surrounding area and the local community.
4	Successors	Availability of future successors. Or the development and production of independent entrepreneurs.

A summary of the interviews is presented in Table 3. The names of the participants were anonymized.

Table 3: Participant Characteristics

Survey Respondent	Business	Date and time of interview
Respondent-A	Manufacture and sale of wooden furniture, etc.	2021/03/26 10:00-12:30
Respondent-B	Manufacture and sale of wooden furniture, toys, and accessories	2021/03/26 15:00-16:00
Respondent-C	Manufacture and sale of wooden furniture, etc.	2021/03/27 15:00-16:00
Respondent-D	Manufacture and sale of wooden furniture, etc.	2021/03/28 10:00-11:30
Respondent-E	Manufacture and sale of wooden furniture, etc.	2021/03/29 15:00-16:00
Respondent-F	Production and sale of ceramics and other items and pottery classes	2021/03/30 16:30-18:30

4.3 Survey Results

This section summarizes the narratives identified in the interviews, by theme. Matters and events related to personal information were presented in a manner that did not interfere with the business activities of the participants.

4.3.1 Why Do Migrant Entrepreneurs Move and Start Their Own Businesses?

In 1980, Respondent-A moved to the area after an acquaintance showed her a closed elementary school, which she later used as a workshop to start her own business. In 1987, Respondent-B purchased a plot of land, following a recommendation from F, who had already moved to the area and started his own business. In 2000, Respondent-C opened his business on the site of a former factory in the town after his employer went bankrupt. In 2005, Respondent-D took over his employer's factory from the former owner. In 2008, Respondent-E started his own business. Respondent-F moved to Asahikawa in 1980 to start his own business, as it is close to his hometown Asahikawa City.

After he moved to the area, Respondent-B was treated as a stranger who would soon leave; at first, he was not even introduced to the neighborhood association. Later, although he was allowed to join the neighborhood association, he was forced to leave a general meeting due to an urgent call from a business partner, to which he sarcastically replied, "What do you want with so much money?" However, over time, this relationship gradually disappeared.

After moving to the area, Respondent-F attended farmers' gatherings to learn about their work. This was not because he wanted to work in farming but to get to know the local community and get involved in things outside of his specialty. Through this involvement, his relationships with the locals expanded; he even received vegetables and fruit from the

farmers. When he went to thank the farmers and was told that he did not need to thank them, he was initially surprised, but he realized that he had become a member of the local community.

4.3.2 *Livelihood*

The number of employees at each workshop ranged from one to twenty. Respondent-A did not divide labor or subcontract but instead handled the entire process from production to sales. Company Respondent-B received orders for educational toys from companies specialized in learning materials. Respondent-C stated that he is proud that a small town like Higashikawa is known throughout the country. Respondent-E worked with the mindset of creating original products. Respondent-F lived and worked in Asahikawa, a large village in a neighboring city, and he reported having a good lifestyle.

Currently, chairs, tables, and other footed furniture are Higashikawa's main products. However, the 2000s were the heyday of wedding furniture, and the status of craftsmen who produced chairs, tables, and small wares was seen as lower than that of craftsmen who made wedding furniture.

Some craftspeople prefer to work alone, while others maintain their livelihoods by developing their own sales channels or participating in the Asahikawa Craft and Design Association. Residents enjoy living near a large urban hub (Asahikawa City) because they enjoy the positive aspects of both large and small towns. In terms of work, they have easy access to tools and resources. In addition, they all share the characteristics of valuing their work highly and prioritizing creativity.

4.3.3 *Interaction in the Area Around the Craft Street*

According to Respondent-F, the area where businesses similar to his are located became famous when it was introduced in a JR Hokkaido in-train magazine as "Craft Street." Respondent-B also stated that representatives of nearby workshops got together and came up with a name for the area around their workshop, and the result was "Craft Kaido." Wooden signs were erected along the streets to make people aware of their names. The Asahikawa Craft and Design Association, established in 1989 and dissolved in April 2021, was a trade organization that held exhibitions as part of its activities, and its members sought to build a foundation for their businesses.

When examining the relationship between migrant entrepreneurs and the region, regional development and cultural policies led by the Higashikawa Town Office to promote migrants should not be overlooked. In 2016, "Centpure II," an exchange complex in Higashikawa that promotes furniture, Daisetsuzan, and photography was opened, while the Higashikawa Style Section was established at the town office. The Higashikawa Style Section hosts several annual events to promote the region's unique industry and culture. All six respondents participated in these events as local producers.

4.3.4 *Successors*

The workshops nurtured several independent businesspeople. Thus far, Respondent-B allowed one employee to start his own business. A person from Respondent-C's workshop

in Higashikawa started his own business. Participant Respondent-D is currently seeking successors. Respondent-E did not employ workers but sometimes taught trainees through internships. Respondent-F taught pottery to local children and had daily interactions with the local community—e.g., receiving farmers' gifts of vegetables and fruit as part of their association with local children.

5 Implications

The interview results were analyzed by considering the proposed concept of migrant entrepreneurs. The first point worth noting is the origin of Craft Street: As Respondent-B stated, "Representatives of nearby workshops got together and came up with a name for the area around their workshop, which became Craft Street." The fact that the name "Craft Street" was introduced in JR Hokkaido's in-train magazine, which Respondent-F referred to, also contributed to the increase in brand value. Shikida refers to these results as the effects of rediscovering a region and cultivating pride [11]. The impact of branding on an area, caused by migrant entrepreneurs, should also be considered.

In this process, the establishment of "Centpure II" (an exchange facility centered on furniture, Daisetsuzan, and photography), through regional development and cultural policies led by the Higashikawa Town Office, succeeded in attracting many designers and creators to this area, which makes them migrant entrepreneurs. Although it is difficult to assert that Higashikawa is a creative city based on this fact alone, it can be said to be in the process of transforming into a creative city due to the presence of migrant entrepreneurs.

From the perspective of succession planning, each participant created various forms of employment in the area. Although they do not create jobs *en masse*, like large corporations do, each of the interviewees support their employees to set up their own businesses, while some of them are opening businesses in Higashikawa or accepting trainees as interns, thereby creating the groundwork for employment promotion. According to interviews with the Higashikawa town office, more than 30% of Higashikawa's residents are involved in furniture and craft manufacturing, including family businesses, and there are 43 establishments involved in wooden furniture and craft manufacturing. It is safe to assume that these entrepreneurs support the industry through the jobs they generate.

This form of succession planning has led to the development of successors who are becoming bearers of one of the characteristics of migrant entrepreneurs: regional revitalization. The number of people involved in the wood furniture and craft manufacturing industry has increased, especially among migrant entrepreneurs, while open exchange facilities such as "Centpure II" have been established. In addition, the Higashikawa Town Office is considering establishing a wood furniture and crafts learning center, utilizing the former factory site of Sakura Kogei Ltd., located at No. 9 Northwest Higashikawa, to encourage the emergence of successors in the wood furniture and crafts industry. Furthermore, since 2021, the Kuma Kengo & Higashikawa Town KAGU Design Competition, an international event for students and amateurs under 30 years old, has been held to foster human resources. The aim of this government support is to make Higashikawa a place where furniture industry workers and the general public can gather to learn about furniture manufacturing. This may enable the people involved to become leaders in regional revitalization.

Finally, I will mention some of the difficulties experienced by the survey respondents after they migrated. Two respondents mentioned various challenges they experienced after they

migrated; they both had to make adjustments to fit in the local community. From a relational perspective, as described by Akasaka [22], it is likely that the interviewees were initially treated as strangers because of their position as migrant entrepreneurs. However, as time passed, the interviewees began to play a larger role in the community and were eventually accepted by the local residents. Kito refers to this as the assimilation process, which brings about significant changes in human relations in the local community [23].

6 Conclusion

The discussion thus far suggests that the concept of migrant entrepreneur proposed here is compatible with actual cases and that the concept of migrant entrepreneur has some validity. However, the results of the interviews were limited to only six cases. This limitation means that this study's data may not adequately capture the characteristics and roles of migrant entrepreneurs. Therefore, it is necessary to increase the number of interviewees to improve the quality of the concept of migrant entrepreneurs. Subsequently, questionnaire items should be extracted to empirically validate the ideas of migrant entrepreneurs.

Regarding this study's theoretical development, although I developed the concept of migrant entrepreneurs based on various theories about strangers and entrepreneurs, I believe that the behavioral characteristics of migrant entrepreneurs are yet to be explored. Based on the results of future interviews and questionnaire analyses, it will be necessary to continue developing the theoretical aspects of the study.

This study proposed the novel concept of migrant entrepreneurs—agents responsible for regional revitalization—and attempted to clarify their characteristics. Consequently, we verified the validity of this concept based on a study of the case of the town of Higashikawa, in Hokkaido prefecture, Japan. Based on these results, I constructed a behavioral model that considers the conceptual and behavioral characteristics of migrant entrepreneurs, which offers valuable insights for all stakeholders in the process of regional revitalization.

References

- [1] Secretariat for Promotion of Regional Revitalization, “Comprehensive Strategy for Overcoming Population Decline and Vitalizing Local Economy 2020” [Mati-Hito-Shigoto sousei sougou senryaku 2020 kaiteiban (in Japanese)]; <https://www.chisou.go.jp/sousei/info/pdf/r02-12-21-senryaku2020.pdf>
- [2] Forest Service Industry Promotion Joint Venture, “Survey on Lifestyle and Tourism around Forest Areas in the New Daily Life under COVID-19” [Atarashi nitijyou ni okeru shinrin kata you no Nishiki you (in Japanese)], Forestry Agency, Emergency Measures Project for “Forest Service Industry 2020,” 2020; <https://prtimes.jp/main/html/rd/p/000000001.000063944.html>
- [3] Kanto Bureau of Economy, Trade, and Industry, “Results of Survey on Trends Related to Regional Relocation Summary Version” [Tihou iten ni kansuru doukou tyousa (in Japanese)], 2021; https://www.kanto.meti.go.jp/press/data/20210421chihoiten_chousa_gaiyouban.pdf
- [4] Teikoku Databank, “Special Report: Metropolitan Area, Head Office Relocation Trends Survey” [Tokubetu kikau: Syutokenn, Honsya iten doukou chosa (in Japanese)], 2021; <https://www.tdb.co.jp/report/watching/press/pdf/p220911.pdf>

- [5] Headquarters for Overcoming Population Decline and Vitalizing Local Economy in Japan, “Nearly Half of Tokyo Residents Interested in Living in Regional Areas: Report on Survey Project to Develop and Implement Public Relations Strategies to Increase Migration, etc.” [Toukyouken zaijuusya no yaku hansuu ga tihouken no kurashi ni kanshin ari (in Japanese)], 2020; https://www.chisou.go.jp/sousei/pdf/ijuu_chousa_houkokusho_0515.pdf
- [6] A. Uchikoshi, “Considering the Conditions for Regional Revitalization: Fieldwork in Seminars as a Material” [Chiiki kasseika no jyouken wo kangaeru: Zeminaru ni okeru fuidowaku wo sozai ni (in Japanese)], *Seijo Hogaku*, vol. 85, 2017, pp. 299-326.
- [7] Cabinet Office, “Proceedings of the Eleventh Meeting of the “Choosing the Future” Committee,” 2014; <https://www5.cao.go.jp/keizai-shimon/kaigi/special/future/1017/gijiyoushi.pdf>
- [8] Y. Takatori and L. Sasaki, “Development of Rural Tourism by Relocating Rural Entrepreneurs: A Case Study of Synergistic Entrepreneurial Activities in Tokachi District, Hokkaido,” *Proc. General Meeting of the Association of Japanese Geographers*, 2014, pp. 100-131.
- [9] M. Sasaki, A. Shikida, Y. Kawaida, M. Hagiwara, “Urban and Rural Communities in Creative Society” [Souzou syakai no toshi to nouson (in Japanese)], *Suiyosha*, 2019, p. 320.
- [10] M. Nagayama, “Regional Platform to Promote Entrepreneurship: On the Practice of 'Business Start-up Fostering Project'” [Antorepurenashippu wo unagasu chiikipurattofuomu: “Chiho kiun josei jigyo” no jissen ni atatte (in Japanese)], *Japan Finance Corporation*, vol. 53, 2021, pp. 21-53.
- [11] A. Shikida, “A Study on the Possibility of Regional Development in Collaboration with Strangers” [Yosomono to kyodo suru chiikizukuri no kanosei ni kansuru kenkyu (in Japanese)], *Enuma no Kuni*, vol. 50, 2005, pp. 74-85.
- [12] A. Shikida, “The Role of Outsiders in the Community Development Process,” *The Journal of International Media, Communication, and Tourism Studies*, vol. 9, 2009, pp. 79-100.
- [13] G. Simmel, “Soziologie: Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung,” *Georg Simmel Gesamtausgabe*, Bd.11, Suhrkamp, 1922, p. 1051.
- [14] T. Tokuda, “The Problematic of the Stranger Concept: On the “Specialist’s Eyes” and the “Immigrant’s Eyes,”” *Sociology*, vol. 49, 2005, pp. 3-18.
- [15] T. Tokuda, “Sociological Takumi of the Concept of a Stranger: Focusing on G. Simmel’s Conceptual Stipulation (Special Issue: Contemporary Sociology of Culture and Community),” *Journal of Sociology*, vol. 24, 2007, pp. 97-111.
- [16] A. Schutz, *Collected Papers II: Studies in Social Theory*, Martinus Nijhoff, 1976, p. 300.
- [17] T. Tokuda, “Yosomono/The Sociology of Strangers” [Yosomono/sutorenja no shakaigaku (in Japanese)], *Koyoshobo*, 2020, 208p.

- [18] R. Cantillon, “Essai sur la Nature du Commerce en Général,” Traduit de l’Anglois. A Londres, chez Fletcher Gyles, dans Holborn, 1755, p. 430.
- [19] J. A. Schumpeter, *Theorie der wirtschaftlichen Entwicklung*, Duncker und Humblot, 1926, p. 369.
- [20] P. Drucker, *Innovation and Entrepreneurship: Practice and Principle*, Harper Collins, 1985, p. 277.
- [21] N. Matsuda and Y. Matsuo, “An Empirical Analysis of Entrepreneurial Success Factors” [Kigyoka no seikoyoin ni kansuru bunseki (in Japanese)], RIETI Discussion Paper, 13-J-064, 2013, pp. 1-32.
- [22] Osamu Nakajima, “Community Settlement of Migrant Entrepreneurs: Case Study of “Sakawa Invention Lab”,” 『Business Management and Decision Science』 Vol. 4, 2024, 12p.
- [23] N. Akasaka, *Yosomono Theory: An Introduction* [Ijinron josetsu (in Japanese)], Chikuma Shobo, 1992, p. 357.
- [24] S. Kito, “The YOSOMONO (Outsider) Concept in The Study of Environmental Movements: Through the Cases of Nature-Rights Movements in Isahaya and Amami,” *Journal of Environmental Sociology*, vol. 4, 1998, pp. 44-59.
- [25] C. Landry, *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators*, Earthscan Publications Ltd., 2008, p. 299.
- [26] R. Florida, *Who’s Your City?: How the Creative Economy is Making Where to Live the Most Important Decision of Your Life*, Earthscan Publications Ltd, 2008, p. 374.
- [27] M. Sasaki, Y. Kawaida, and M. Hagiwara, “Creative Rural Communities: Strategies for Living Creatively in Depopulation” [Sozo nosen: Kaso wo kurieiteibu ni ikiru senryaku (in Japanese)], Gakugei Shuppansha, 2014, p. 272.
- [28] A. Shikida, M. Morishige, S. Nakamura, “The Role of Intermediary for Community Platform and its Structural Analysis” *The Journal of International Media, Communication, and Tourism Studies*, vol. 14, 2012, pp. 23-42.
- [29] O. Nakajima, “Factors contributing to the establishment of migrant entrepreneurs in local communities: Furniture and maintenance goods manufacturing industry in Higashikawa Town,” [Ijū kigyōka no chiiki shakai e no teichaku yōin: Higashikawachō no kagu seibi-hin seizō-gyō], Japan Association for cultural economics, 2023, vol. 20, no.1, pp.23-32.
- [30] Note by Shinichiro Kuranuki in the 2020-4-5, Higashikawa Town History Editor. https://note.com/sinichiro_kuran/n/nba8f384e7743
- [31] Hokkaido Research Organization (2019) “Why Do Migrant Entrepreneurs Take Root in Higashikawa? Clarifying the Factors Affecting the Movement of Migrant Entrepreneurs in Small Municipalities in Hokkaido: Annual Report of the Building Research Institute.” 2019; https://www.hro.or.jp/upload/22946/H30_poster9.pdf