What Triggers Migrant Entrepreneurs to Move to Depopulated Areas?

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Abstract

This study aims to clarify the factors that determine migrant entrepreneurs' decision to migrate to depopulated areas. According to Florida [1], the aggregation of individuals possessing creative talents catalyzes enhancing the overall creativity within a region. In this study, authors focus on the "trigger" for migrants to move to rural areas, that is, the motivation of migrants. To extract the factors that lead respondents to migrate, this study adopted semi-structured interviews with six respondents, asking them to tell their life stories about how they migrated and started their businesses. The authors adopted a co-occurrence network method using KH Coder (KHC) text mining to find commonalities in the results of migration and starting a business. The authors found that the pivotal factor lies in the feasibility of migrant entrepreneurs to fulfill their desire. In sparsely populated areas, personal introductions from closely associated acquaintances play a significant role in the migration decision-making process.

Keywords: migrant entrepreneurs, motivation, depopulated areas, local industry

1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to clarify the factors that determine migrant entrepreneurs' decision to migrate to depopulated areas. The main cause of depopulation in Japan is the outflow of the population from rural areas to urban areas due to Japan's declining birthrate and aging population. Japan's total population is gradually decreasing. According to statistics from the Cabinet Office [2], the number of people in Japan aged 65 years old and older is 35.89 million. This is 28.4 percent of the total population. The outmigration of young people to cities and the aging of the population are shrinking local economies and creating challenges for regional revitalization. However, in recent years, there has been an increase in migration to achieve specific goals such as starting a business or pursuing a high quality of life for individuals in certain regions [3].

In a questionnaire survey conducted by the Cabinet Secretariat, 20.8% (342 people) out of 1,648 people interested in migrating answered that they wanted to start a business or want to become a sole proprietor [4]. This shows that the number of people who are interested in emigration and starting a business is increasing, but on the other hand, there are also concerns about whether they will be able to adapt to life in their new destination and how they can get a job in the area they have moved to [4]. Under these circumstances, an increasing number of people are moving to rural areas with their skills and knowledge. They are trying to establish themselves in the area through occupations that mainly involve

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handicrafts, such as cafes, wooden furniture, and pottery workshops [5]. Furthermore, the traditional image of migrants is changing as the number of people is migrating for self-fulfillment, which is separate from work, employment, and the associated pursuit of wealth. In particular, entrepreneurs who are independent managers can exist as economically independent entities and have the potential to become independent from the region. In other words, it is thought that the migration of human resources who already have skills and can create jobs could be a solution even in areas where depopulation is progressing. Therefore, in this study, the authors clarify the factors that determine the migration of migrant entrepreneurs to depopulated areas and cast a new light on the issues that depopulated areas have been facing to date.

The results of this research will not only provide an academic contribution to rural depopulation in Japan but will also suggest support measures for regions facing continued depopulation due to the declining birthrate and aging population. The perspective of this research is not limited to problems unique to Japan but can provide advanced examples in Asian countries where declining birthrates and aging populations will become a problem in the future. Therefore, it has the potential to contribute to society as well.

2   Previous Studies on the Definition of Migrants and its Motivation

Research on rural migrants has been conducted both domestically and internationally, so the authors will discuss these papers to position this research.

Simmel [6], a German sociologist, discusses the concept of "the stranger" or "the outsider" and examines the social role and position of individuals who are new to a particular social group or community. Moreover, Simmel also points out the settler nature of outsiders, who continue to play the role of migrants who bring products produced completely outside the sphere into the group when they are needed. In addition, Tokuda [7] uses Simmel's definition of an outsider to redefine it as an existence that combines the characteristics of a migrant cultivated outside a social group and the characteristics of a settler. Therefore, previous research on migrants has pointed out that the involvement of people with different cultures and backgrounds in existing communities is a factor that increases urban creativity [8]. Furthermore, according to Florida [1], the gathering of individuals with creative abilities is a factor that increases the creativity of the entire region. His research shows that regions with creative industries and human resources become more creative and vibrant regions. Furthermore, Wenger et al. [9] point out that local communities are communities of practice and play an important role in knowledge creation. Their research shows that local communities play a central role in the process of sharing knowledge and creating new knowledge through interaction and cooperation among their communities. As is clear from these previous studies, research has pointed out that the accumulation of creative people and the function of local communities are important elements for increasing the creativity of cities and regions.

Akasaka [10] points out that the presence of outsiders in Japanese folk society is seen as a "relational concept." This relational concept of outsider means that in a community that has its own rules, only those who understand those rules are recognized as members. Therefore, by distinguishing those outside the community as "outsiders," they recognize themselves as members of the community. For example, Kito [11] examines transformation or assimilation within human relationships from the perspective of local environmental movements and considers outsiders to be a phenomenon that can occur to anyone in human relationships.

In relation to these studies, Shikida [12] analyzes products brought from outside the region as follows. Shikida suggests that "products brought from outside the region" can be classified into five categories: transfer of technology and knowledge to the region, triggering and stimulating local creativity, support for the expression of local knowledge, promotion of regional (and

organizational) transformation, and unfettered position. From the perspective of previous research, outsiders can be thought of as beings who bring in something from the outside, introducing technology and knowledge that does not exist in the region, and expanding the creativity of the region. So why do migrants decide to leave cities and move to depopulated areas? Even though previous studies have discussed the characteristics of migrants and their expected impact on the region, it seems that research results regarding the motivations for migration are not sufficient. In addition, as previous research has pointed out that the skills of migrants have a positive impact on the region, this study purposely focuses on migrant entrepreneurs and clarifies their motivation for migration. It is thought that this perspective can fill the gap between this research and other previous studies.

3 Method

3.1 Overview of the Survey Area

Higashikawa Town, Hokkaido, is geographically located in the center of Hokkaido, approximately 13 km from the center of Asahikawa City. The population peaked at 10,754 in 1950, but the population continued to decline after that, dropping to 6,973 in March 1993. The number of migrants has increased since 1994, reaching 8,600 in 2023. This means that the number of people has increased by 1,700 (about 20%) over 30 years. The main reason for this population increase is the increase in migration. The ratio of residents to all residents moving in is as high as 56.6%. The majority of these are migrants who have moved in within the past 25 years [13].
Among the major industries in Higashikawa Town, the core industry is agriculture. However, furniture and equipment manufacturing industries are clustered in a specific area, with 28 small- scale furniture and equipment, clothing, handicraft, pottery, dyeing and weaving, and leather goods manufacturing businesses. This area is known as the "Craft Road" as a local tourism resource.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

In order to extract the factors that lead respondents to migrate, this study adopted semi- structured interviews with respondents, asking them to tell their life stories about how they migrated and started their businesses[13].

Table 1: Schedule of interviews with survey respondents

Date and time	Main business details of the survey target
2021/03/26 10:00-12:30	A: Manufacture and sale of wooden furniture, etc.
2021/03/26 15:00-16:00	B: Manufacture and sale of wooden furniture, toys, accessories, etc.
2021/03/27 15:00-16:00	C: Manufacture and sale of wooden furniture, etc.
2021/03/28 10:00-11:30	D: Manufacture and sale of wooden furniture, etc.
2021/03/29 15:00-16:00	E: Manufacture and sale of wooden furniture, etc.
2021/03/30 16:30-18:30	F: Production and sales of pottery and pottery classes

Interviews were conducted with six survey participants on the following schedule. In previous studies, migrants tend to be seen as actors who are products brought in from outside that result in

regional revitalization. However, in this study, we test the hypothesis that individual migrants choose to migrate to fulfill their dreams rather than to contribute to the local community.

Table 2: A life story about how I started my business after migrating to Japan

| keywords	Narrators	life stories
Introduction	A	I moved from Asahikawa City in 1980. The reason I moved here was because an acquaintance introduced me. At the time I bought the land, it was a lonely place with no trees or forests, although it was in the mountains.
Purchase	B	I moved from Kamifurano Town in 1987. When I was working as the manager of a cutlery shop at a department store in Asahikawa, I met. F and learned of the existence of a vacant lot in Higashikawa Town. I bought the place to move to. In addition, the former owner of the land was close to A and supported the work of a woodworker from another town, which is why I decided to move here.
Ruins	C	In 2000, through the introduction of a friend, I purchased land on the site of a former factory in Asahikawa City. My home is in Asahikawa City, but I would like to move to Higashikawa Town if there is a better place. I am from Yamagata Prefecture. After graduating from Tokai University, I got a job at a furniture parts manufacturing company in Asahikawa City. After that, my company went bankrupt, so at the age of 36, I opened my own business on the site of a former factory in Higashikawa Town.
Opening of business	D	I took over the current location from the original owner in 2005 and opened the business. I am originally from Biei Town, but I currently live in Asahikawa City.
Cheap and large	E	I am from Kochi Prefecture and moved there after purchasing land in 1991. I built my current home and studio between 2008 and 2011. I lived in New York and Spain for 10 years, and have lived in various places in Japan. I felt that the main island of Japan was small. For this reason, I wanted land that was inexpensive and would allow me to plant trees on my land.
Close to hometown	F	I bought land and moved there in 1980. I am from Asahikawa, and before coming to Higashikawa Town, I lived in Kyoto Prefecture for five years and apprenticed to a potter. For one year, I also attended a training school in Kyoto. After that, I studied under a pottery teacher at the Osaka University of Arts and went independent in Higashikawa Town, a town close to my hometown.

In this study, authors adopted a co-occurrence network method using KH Coder (KHC) text

mining to find commonalities in the results of migration and starting a business. KH Coder (KHC) is an open-source text mining software for analyzing Japanese text data. Among them, a co-occurrence network is one of the functions for visualizing co-occurrence relationships between words and terms in a document. Since this survey focuses on the "trigger" for migration, data that could be a "trigger" was extracted from the respondents' life stories and then analyzed.

4   Results

Based on the results of the co-occurrence network obtained through text mining, five keywords can be cited as triggers for migration: "introduction," "purchase," "year," "land," and "Asahikawa (place name)." These suggest the motives and means of migration. Additionally, all of the six people surveyed in this study are migrants, of which four are from within Hokkaido and two are from outside Hokkaido. Some people from outside Hokkaido also lived in Asahikawa City before starting their businesses in Higashikawa Town. This fact is important in understanding the background and history of migrants. Furthermore, based on the results of the co-occurrence network, "ruins," "company," 'starting a business," and "Higashikawa (place name)" are listed as being related to "acquaintance." This suggests that social networks and the business environment play an important role in migration.

Figure 1: Results of interview survey of migrant entrepreneurs using co-occurrence network
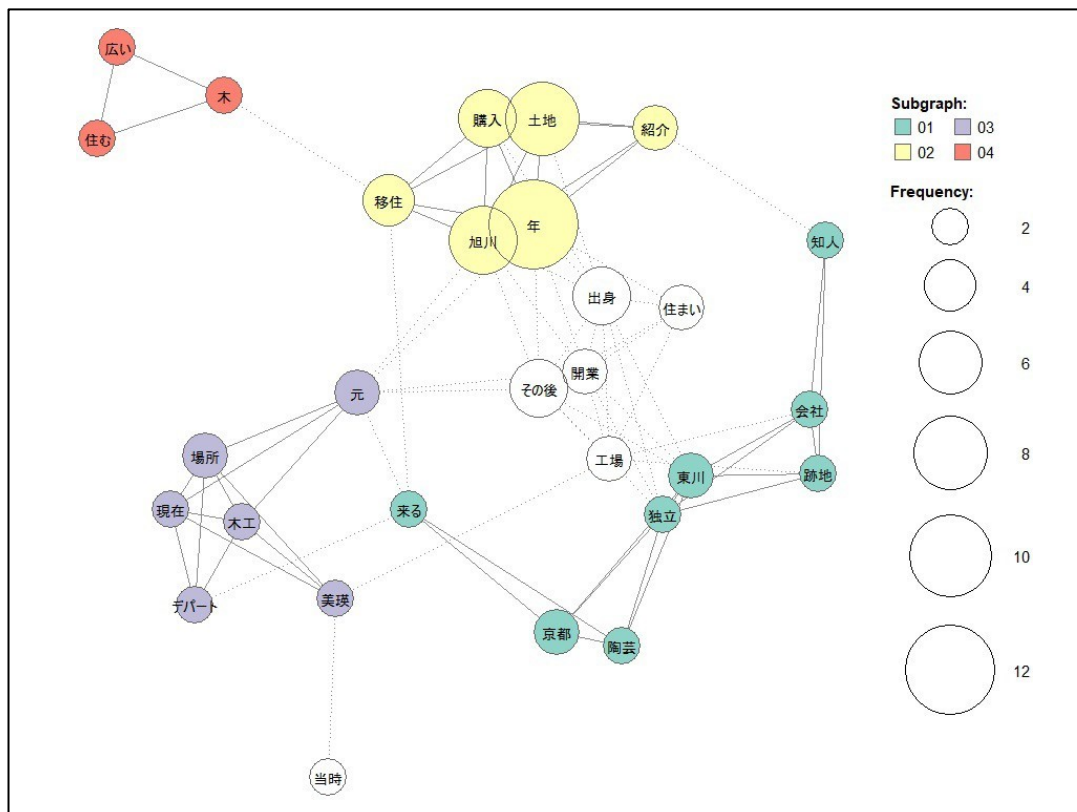
Since the target of the research was furniture and equipment manufacturers, a related keyword such as "wood" was cited. Keywords such as "living" and "spacious" indicate the relationship between migration and the living environment. These keywords are thought to reflect the elements and values that migrants use when starting a new life or job.

Table 3: key words translations of Figure 1

Japanese	Japanese Pronunciation	English
移住	*ijū*	migration
知人	*chijin*	acquaintance
土地	*tochi*	land
購入	*kōnyū*	purchase
紹介	*shōkai*	introduction
年	*toshi*	year
旭川（地名）	*Asahikawa*	Asahikawa City
東川（地名）	*Higashikawa*	Higashikawa Town
京都（地名）	*Kyōto*	Kyoto
跡地	*atochi*	ruins
会社	*kaisha*	company
独立	*dokuritsu*	starting business
開業	*kaigyō*	opening of business
木	*ki*	wood
陶芸	*tōgei*	pottery
出身	*shusshin*	birthplace
住まい／住む	*sumai/sumu*	residence
広い	*hiroi*	large
来る	*kuru*	come
その後	*sonogo*	after that

Note: Only keywords related to "trigger" are extracted in the table.

5   Discussion

In previous studies examining the impact of migration on regions, the focus has primarily been on the overall effects of migration. However, this study delves deeper into the specific catalysts that drive migrants to relocate to rural areas, honing in on the motivations behind their decisions. Through the utilization of co-occurrence networks of text-mining, the authors scrutinized six respondents and unearthed that their migration was fueled by a desire to fulfill personal needs, particularly in terms of entrepreneurial endeavors. These findings underscore the innate entrepreneurial spirit among migrant populations and shed light on the significance of facilitating avenues for their success.

Within the context of Higashikawa Town, the subject area of this research, agriculture stands as the primary industry. Yet, it's noteworthy that the manufacturing sector boasts the largest workforce, thus presenting an opportune environment for individuals involved in manufacturing activities. The clustering of furniture and equipment manufacturing industries in specific locales can be attributed to the unique regional attributes that attract a pool of skilled labor. Additionally, the pivotal role played by key individuals who serve as bridges between migrants and the region cannot be overstated. Many of the respondents cited acquaintances as crucial influencers in their decision-making process regarding migration, highlighting the significant role played by social networks in facilitating migration. Leveraging these personal connections not only eases the transition for migrants but also fosters a sense of community and support post-relocation.

While the sample size of this survey was limited to six individuals, it's noteworthy that a majority of respondents mentioned their ties to Asahikawa City. Therefore, the influence of

acquaintances might entail a certain degree of information constraint. To effectively bolster migrant numbers, it becomes imperative to proactively cultivate relationships with prospective migrants. By fostering stronger ties and actively engaging with individuals contemplating migration, the potential for expanding the migrant population can be realized. This underscores the importance of community outreach and relationship-building initiatives in the context of migration dynamics.

6   Conclusion

This study investigated the factors that influence migrant entrepreneurs to consider moving to depopulated areas. As a result of our research, the authors found that the most important factor is whether migrant entrepreneurs can realize their inherent desires in depopulated areas. Since the target of this survey is a manufacturer of furniture and equipment, an area with ideal wood procurement was selected. It has become clear that sources of information such as introductions from acquaintances who are closely related to the target person are important in making the actual decision to migrate. Therefore, in making a decision to migrate to a depopulated area, it is thought that building relationships with those considering migration is one of the key factors.

On the other hand, the difficulty of migrants adapting to the local society is often cited as an issue with regional migration. For example, if local cultures, customs, languages, and community relationships are different, migrants may experience social isolation and difficulty adjusting. To solve these problems and get used to the environment of moving to a depopulated area as quickly as possible, it is thought that being able to demonstrate one's ideals and abilities to the fullest and meeting the expectations of the local side will make the relationship between both groups more flexible.

The results of this research point out the importance of an "ideal-fulfilling environment" and "information from acquaintances" as triggers for migrant entrepreneurs to migrate, but there are some limitations in this study. The target area of this study is one area, and only six people were surveyed. In addition, many of the respondents are related to specific regions within Hokkaido, so it is difficult to generalize the results of this study. Furthermore, it is essential to discuss the decision-making process of migrant entrepreneurs when they migrate to depopulated areas in future research.

Acknowledgment

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