

# Current State and Problems of Local Newcomers in Japan: A Case Study of Tôno City, Iwate Prefecture

Yosinobu Misuda\*

## Abstract

This paper examined the current state and characteristics of local newcomers in Tôno City, Iwate Prefecture, Tôhoku region, Japan. In Japan, the increase of the newcomer resident population is anticipated with the expansion of interest to rural life. But there are not so many studies about local newcomers (new rural residents) with the exception of those done by government agencies. In addition, there are very few attitude surveys of the accepting end of the newcomer resident population which is using such a large survey population. Considering these research situations, I focused on not only local newcomers but also the accepting end (including heads of wards in Tôno City). The research conclusions are as follows: Heads of wards are not against newcomers, but they think it is difficult to accept them positively. Not all newcomers come from urban areas and have interest in rural life. As there is a variety of different cases, if I want to promote newcomers settlement, I have to recognize that the newcomers have individual personalities, and that the excessive expectations of the city government might cause repulsion among them. Furthermore, I should know that there exist some difficulties for newcomers to become leading figures of farming, although they are still important additions to rural life. More will be needed to be done by the accepting end to welcome newcomers better. Therefore, it is important for a mediator between the newcomers and the accepting end to know the local area well.

## Key words

Local Newcomer, U-turn, I-turn, Heads of Wards, Tôno City

## 1. Introduction

### a) Purpose and Method of the Study

Recently in Japan, the significant drop in the number of people who are engaged in farming has been becoming an urgent issue with the declining birth rate. However, the lifestyle that is described as “slow life” or “LOHAS (lifestyles of health and sustainability)” in agricultural villages has been gaining reappraisal. Examined in this report are researches

conducted on social conditions required for promoting mutual understanding and coexistence between newcomers and local inhabitants.

The research area was Tôno City, which is located in Iwate Prefecture in the north-eastern region of Japan. The main researches were held from 2006 through 2008 and additional research was conducted in 2012 to grasp the drastic change of situations after the Great East Japan Earthquake.<sup>1)</sup>

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\* Morioka Junior College, Iwate Prefectural University 152-52, Sugo, Takizawa, Iwate, 020-0693, Japan

In Japan, the increase of the newcomer resident population is anticipated with the expansion of interest in rural life and the coming retirement of “the baby boomers”. There have been many studies for agricultural newcomers as leading figures (*Ninaite* in Japanese) for agriculture. But, there are few studies about local newcomers (new rural residents)<sup>2)</sup> with the exception of studies by government agencies, and especially few researches focusing on some particular municipalities. Also, there are very few attitude surveys of the accepting end which uses a sizable number of data.

Considering these research situations, I focus the current state, problems and characteristics of local newcomers in Tōno City, Iwate Prefecture, Tōhoku region, Japan. I target not only agricultural newcomers but also local newcomers as leading figures for rural areas. What is more, I target not only newcomers but also the accepting end (e.g., heads of wards, and mediators). My research method is using questionnaires for the whole area of Tōno City.

## b) Overview of advanced researches

In Japanese rural studies, the importance of the mediator has been discussed concerning the agricultural newcomers settlement (Uchiyama, 1999). In relation to that, the trust and the norm from the hamlet plays an important and multiple role for solid settlement (Kakizaki, 1962, Misuda, 2015). But these researches are specialized in farmers, which means leading figures of agriculture, so I could not know the circumstances of the rural resident population including non-farmers. That is why I target the accepting end.

As mentioned above, there were some studies by government agencies, and one of the national-scale large-quantities questionnaire

around the same time was carried out by Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (Tiiki no Hito e no Yūti·Idō no Sokusin ni kansuru Kenkyūkai, 2007). I considered this research as a complementary version focusing on Tōno City.

## c) Overall condition of Japan and research field

There are no statistics on the national level about the real number of new rural residents (=“U&I-turn”), but there exists an estimated population from the fifth “population movement investigation” in year 2001 by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research. People of “U-turn” (people who left their hometowns but returned) are about 8 million (6.4%), and people of “I-turn” (newcomers to the town from other areas) are 22,900,000 (18.0%) (Tiiki no Hito e no Yūti·Idō no Sokusin ni kansuru Kenkyūkai, 2007). They are gradually increasing in recent years.

In Tōno City, the city government and NPO are active in inviting newcomers, and there have been a sizable number of newcomers. The organization named “*de·kurasu Tōno*”, whose administration is based in Tōno City government office was established in 2006, dealing with the new rural resident population. The NPO, “Network for village, mountain, and daily-life in Tōno” supports new rural residents. In case of Tōno City, they also allow public-private collaboration. Besides the NPO, a private real estate company also supports newcomers with rental contracts.<sup>3)</sup>

The general description of Tōno City is as follows. It is located 70km from Morioka, the prefectural capital, and it takes about two hours to get to Tōno City from Morioka by car. Trains also go to Tōno City from Morioka. It is famous

as a sightseeing spot on the domestic level (the number of visitors: 2,062,692 people in the year 2010). It cannot be said that Tôno City is a lifeless city, but it is hard to describe it as a vigorous city either. Tôno City merged with Miyamori Village in 2005. Its population is about 29,000 (in 2010), and within this, the peasant population is about 10,365 (in 2010). There is a sizable cultivation abandonment area in Tôno City, which is more than 10% of the total area of cultivable land of Tôno City. There are 90 wards (*Ku*: an administrative section) in Tôno City after the merger, and there is a headperson in each ward.<sup>4)</sup>

## 2. Attitude survey of the accepting end in Tôno City

### a) Outline of questionnaire

In this chapter, I will describe the outline and results of the attitude survey of the heads of wards. Questionnaires were sent out to 79 headpersons of wards in October 2006. The parent population is 90 people. The valid response rate is 87.8%. Some parts of the results are reported below.

### b) Results of questionnaire

#### i) The profile of heads of wards and population of wards

Regarding the age of heads of wards, more than half are in their 60's. When I add the number of people in their 70's, it is close to 90%. 85% of them were born in Tôno City.

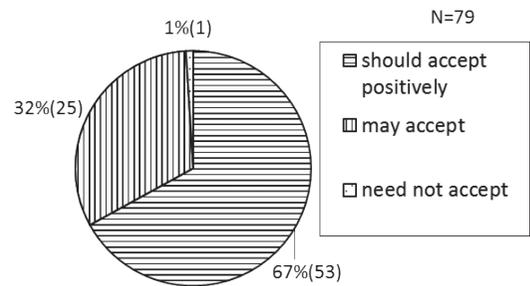
Approximately 50% of the wards have a population of 100 - 300, and 80% of the wards have a population under 500 people.

#### ii) Consciousness for acceptance, relations with the area

67% of head of wards think that they

should accept newcomers positively as a city, 32% of head of wards think that they may accept newcomers positively, and only 1% of head of wards think that they need not accept newcomers (Figure 1). This means almost all heads of wards show understanding for acceptance of newcomers as a city.

Figure 1 Answers to the question "Should we accept newcomers (as a city)?"



Heads of wards point out the following as the city's problems when newcomers settle down: "the poor bases of income (83.5%)", "cold winter climate (78.5%)", "the inconvenience of hospital location (54.5%)", etc. Heads of wards worry about the income level of newcomers and the adequacy of infrastructure for them in Tôno City.

Table 1 City's problems for newcomers (from heads of wards)

	number	%
the poor bases of income	66	83.5
the cold winter climate	62	78.5
the inconvenience of hospital location	43	54.4
the inconvenience of traffic	38	48.1
the inconvenience of shopping	22	27.8
the darkness of the night	9	11.4
new comers are not welcomed	9	11.4
the inconvenience of the elementary and junior high schools location	7	8.9
no agency for real estate	6	7.5
many local traditions	6	7.5
difficult to understand local language	2	2.5
difficult to get or borrow land	1	1.3
other	7	8.9

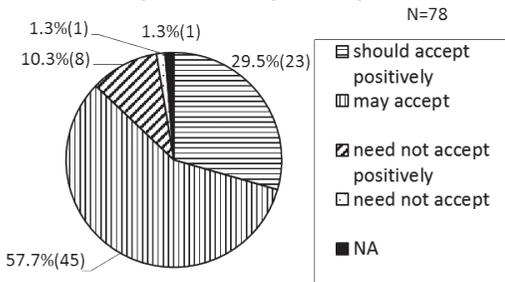
\*N=79 for each response

The percentage points of heads of wards with answers "difficult to get or borrow land

(1.3%)” and “many local traditions (7.6%)” are low. Heads of wards don’t think that the difficulty of getting or borrowing land or how to get along with the area as serious city problems. Only 11.4% of heads of wards think that “newcomers are not welcomed” is a problem (Table 1).

When we compare the acceptance of the newcomers as a ward and as Tōno City, we can see results as follows. 29.5% of heads of wards indicate “we should accept positively (as a ward)”, and 67% indicate “we should accept positively (as a city)” (Figure 2). This means that the attitudes of wards regarding the acceptance of newcomers are slightly negative.

Figure 2 Answers to the question “Should we accept newcomers (as a ward)?”



iii) Merits and demerits of having newcomers in the wards

When I pick up some merits and demerits from the viewpoints of heads of wards, merits are as follows: “increase of the local population (81%)”, “vitalization of wards’ activities (60.8%)”, “increase in the number of children (51.9%)” (Table 2). In addition, heads of wards expect newcomers’ strata to be the generation that requires child care (31%) and the senior generation (18%).

Demerits or problems are as follows: “Non-participation in the ward (43.0%)”, “Different lifestyles which do not fit in with neighbors

Table 2 Merits for wards

	number	%
the increase of the local population	64	81.0
the vitalization of wards' activity	48	60.8
the increase the number of children	41	51.9
the increase of communications	32	40.5
economic effects (shopping etc.)	28	35.4
the decrease of the deserted arable land	22	27.8
landscape restorations by the decrease of abandoned houses	18	22.8
acquire the actor for traditional events	18	22.8
the introducing new lifestyles	13	16.5
other	2	2.5

\*N=79 for each response

(30.4%)”, “Indifference to local events (30.4%)” (Table 3).

Table 3 Demerits or problems for wards

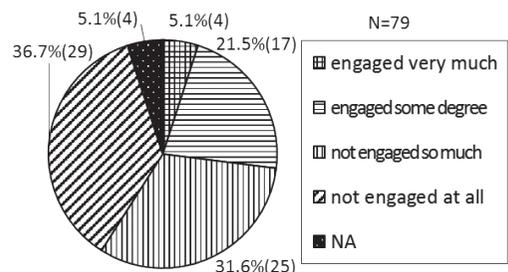
	number	%
the non-participation in the ward	34	43.0
different lifestyles which do not fit in with neighbors	24	30.4
the indifference to local events	24	30.4
cause frictions by strong self-assertions	21	26.6
the unclarity of habitations	21	26.6
make closed relationships among new comers	2	2.5
the trouble about life environments (noise etc.)	1	1.3
the trouble about real estates	0	0.0
other	5	6.3

\*N=79 for each response

iv) Local activities conducted for the newcomers

The percentage of heads of wards regarding their thoughts on local activities conducted for the newcomers’ settlement are as follows: both “engaged very much” and “engaged to some degree” are 26.6%, “not engaged so much” is 31.6%, “not engaged at all” is 36.7%. Concerning

Figure 3 Local activities conducted for the newcomers



these figures, there are differences according to each ward (Figure 3).

**c) Conclusion of attitude survey of the accepting end**

From this questionnaire, 99% of heads of wards are approving the city's acceptance of newcomers, but the figure decreases when it is about acceptance as a ward (88%). That means, there are such attitudes like generally agreeing for the acceptance of newcomers, but specifically against it when it is regarding the own wards of the heads.

The percentage of almost no local activities by ward is 36%. This means local people do not consider newcomers as their own problems. I am presuming that the logic underlying the mindset of the locals is as follows: When newcomers come, there are surely some merits such as the increase of population, the vitalization of wards' activities, etc., but there also arise demerits such as difficulties for job employment. There may be some struggle for the small "pie of work" between newcomers and existing residents. In addition, locals think that newcomers may have difficulties like the cold winter weather, inconvenience of the hospital location, etc. Such problems, to the locals are beyond the control of the wards.

**3. Attitude survey of local newcomers (new rural residents) in Tôno City**

**a) Outline of questionnaire**

Questionnaires were also sent out to local newcomers in Tôno City. The selection criteria are the people who immigrated within the last 10 years, and the newcomers whom we could make contact with.

Two kinds of questionnaires were sent out in November 2008: one is for heads of

households (out of 111 distributed, 87 were collected. The valid response rate is 78%), and the other is for spouses of heads of households (out of 63 distributed, 45 were collected.<sup>5)</sup> The valid response rate is 71%).

**b) Results of questionnaires for heads of households**

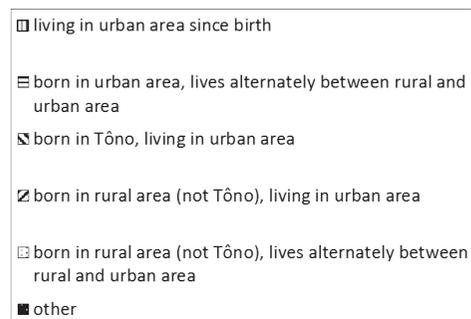
**i) Attribute of newcomers**

In 87 respondents of heads of households, 74 are "I-turn", 13 are "U-turn". Attributes of respondents are as follows: Male: 79%, Female: 21%. Under 30's: 24%, 40's: 17%, 50's: 16%, 60's: 29%, 70's:14%. The percentage of elderly people is rather high.

**ii) Birthplace and habitation history**

The percentage of people born in Iwate is 36.8% (32 people), accounting for the largest portion. The percentage of people born in Tôkyô is 16.1% (14 people), accounting for the next largest portion. If I consider the capital

**Figure 4 Habitation history**



region (=Tôkyô + 3 prefectures: Saitama, Tiba, Kanagawa), it is 35.6% (31 people). This figure means many “I-turn” people are from the capital region.

But I have to take note of other figures. “U-turn” people from Tôno City account for 15.5% (=13 people). “I&U-turn” people from rural areas account for 22.6%. In contrast, 60.8% are from urban areas. This means that not all “I-turn” people are from urban areas (Figure 4).

### iii) Reason for settlement

The reasons why newcomers come to Tôno City are as follows (Table 4). The largest portion of responses is “yearning for rural nature (40.2%)”. Next comes “realization for healthy diet (21.3%)”, “for retirement (20.2%)”, “motivation for agriculture (19.5%)”, and “for leisure (18.4%)”. The reason “other” is nearly 40% of responses. Therefore we can understand that there are various reasons for coming to Tôno City.

**Table 4 Reasons for settlement**

	number	%
yearning for rural nature	35	40.2
did not match with hard labor	11	12.6
exhausted from human relationship	8	9.2
originarily born in rural	8	9.2
the motivation for agriculture	17	19.5
the realization for healthy diet	19	21.8
for educational environment	10	11.5
for childrens' health	10	11.5
for leisure	16	18.4
for retirement	18	20.7
to take care of parents	7	8.0
the succession of agriculture	0	0.0
the succession of family business	0	0.0
to prevent empty house	3	3.4
have difficulty finding employment	0	0.0
other	34	39.1

\*N=87 for each response

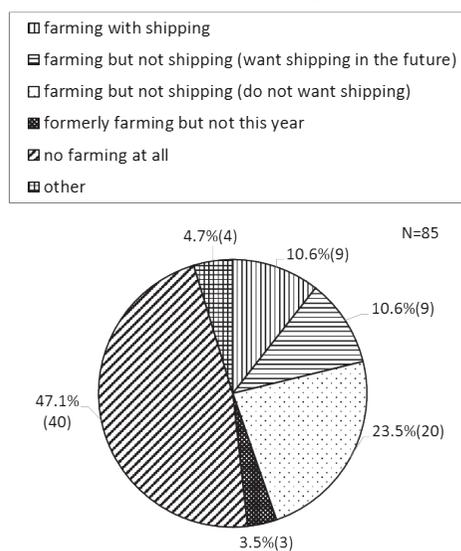
### iv) Employment state and farming of the head of a household

Among the newcomers, heads of households who are working account for 51.7%

(employment income earner: 37.9%, self-employed without farming: 13.8%). Heads of households who are not working account for 40.2% (disemployment by retirement at the age limit: 23%, disemployment not by retirement at the age limit: 11.5%, no employment experience: 5.7%, N=87). This means heads of households living only by farming is less than 10%.

The percentage of heads of households engaged in some kind of farming is 44.7%. But the percentage of “farming with shipping” is 10.6%, “not shipping now but want to ship in the future” is 10.6%. This means 21% will get an agriculture income in the future. From these figures, I can see that it is difficult for newcomers to become leading figures of farming. But it is worth paying attention to the situation that half of newcomers engage in agriculture (Figure 5).

**Figure 5 On farming**

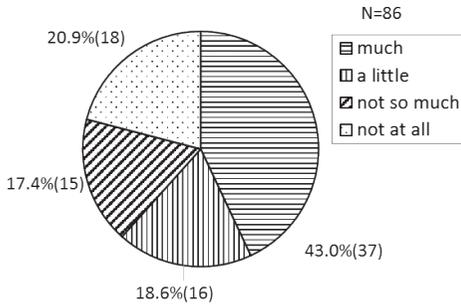


### v) Interest in rural area

I see that 38.3% of newcomers do not have interest in rural area (much interest: 43.0%, a little interest: 18.6%, not much interest: 17.4%, no interest at all: 20.9%). This figure is rather

surprising. I have to become aware that there are a wide variety of reasons for settling in a rural area (Figure 6).

Figure 6 Interest in rural area



vi) Human relationships at local area

When I look at human relationships, 53.6% of responses is “good” and 33.3% of responses is “good to some degree” (Table 5).

Table 5 Human relationships

	number	%
good	45	53.6
good to some degree	28	33.3
not so good	3	3.6
DN because of indifference	7	8.3
other	1	1.2
<b>total</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>100.0</b>

How about the nuisance factors in rural life? First comes rumors (39.1%), second is a local post as an obligation, and third is ceremonial functions and community events, fourth is participation in the ward (Table.6).

Table 6 Nuisance factor

	number	%
rumors	34	39.1
local post as an obligation	31	35.6
ceremonial functions and community events	23	26.4
participation in the ward	17	19.5
treated like an outsider	14	16.1
neighboring interference	13	14.9
real estate trouble	7	8.0
questioned about one's career	7	8.0
other	21	24.1

\*N=89 for each response

I may say that there are almost no problems about human relationships on the

surface, but actually there are many nuisance factors with varying levels of acceptance.

vii) Problems of Tôno City from newcomers

Problems from newcomers are as follows: cold winter climate: 46.0%, cannot do anything without cars: 32.2%, the poor bases of income: 31.0%, the inconvenience of traffic: 28.7%, the inconvenience of hospital locations: 28.7%. These results are almost the same as the responses of heads of wards as previously mentioned (Table 7).

Table 7 City's problems for newcomers (from newcomers)

	number	%
the cold winter climate	40	46.0
cannot do anything without cars	28	32.2
the poor bases of income	27	31.0
the inconvenience of hospital location	25	28.7
the inconvenience of traffic	25	28.7
the inconvenience of shopping	16	18.4
the darkness of the night	12	13.8
no agency for real estate	11	12.6
new comers are not welcomed	10	11.5
many local traditions	10	11.5
very few restaurants	8	9.2
the inconvenience of locations of elementary and junior high schools	5	5.7
very few convenience stores	4	4.6
difficult to understand local language	3	3.4
straggling hamlets	2	2.3
difficult to get or borrow land	1	1.1
other	4	4.9

\*N=87 for each response

viii) Expectations of newcomers with regard to local residents

About expectations of newcomers with regard to local residents, “introduction to empty houses” is 46.0%, “information about local

Table 8 Expectations with regard to local residents

	number	%
introductions to empty houses	40	46.0
information about local customs like ceremonial functions	31	35.6
the technical guidance of agriculture	16	18.4
communication place settings with local residents	13	14.9
advice about everyday life	8	9.2
mediation real estates	6	6.9
other	10	11.5

\*N=87 for each response

customs like ceremonial functions” is 35.6%. I can see a strong need for information which only local residents might know, like housing or local customs (Table 8).

**c) Conclusion of attitude survey of local newcomers**

We can see that not all “I-turn” people are from an urban area. A certain number of newcomers do not have interest in rural life. I have to understand that there are a wide variety of reasons for settling in a rural area.

Only 20% will ship agricultural products. It may be difficult for newcomers to become leading figures of farming, although it is important that half of newcomers do engage in agriculture.

Relationships with local residents are almost good. But there are strong needs for information which only local residents might know well.

**4. Conclusion**

**a) Current state and problems of local newcomers**

I would like to summarize the current state and problems of local newcomers in Tôno City.

For heads of wards, there are attitudes like generally agreeing to settle newcomers warmly, but specifically against newcomers in their wards. In other words, they are not against newcomers, but they think it is difficult to accept them positively. In having these attitudes, they are assuming that there are two main strata of newcomers, the senior generation and the generation that requires child care.

As observed that newcomers to Tôno City from other parts of Iwate (≠not urban) account for 36.8% (see chapter 3, b, ii), not all newcomers are coming from urban areas. In addition, not all newcomers have interest in

rural life. Moreover, newcomers have various expectations of the city government. Many are regarding information services about housing, jobs, advice about everyday life, and local customs.

As there are many varieties of cases, if we want to promote newcomers settlement, we have to recognize that there are wide varieties in the characteristics of newcomers, and that the excessive expectation of the roles of newcomers might cause repulsion among them. Furthermore, we should know that there exist some difficulties for newcomers to become leading figures of farming, although they are still important supporters of rural life.

Therefore, for promoting newcomers’ settlement, we need to think of the local membership to the community as having different levels, from newcomers to gradually becoming a local. Besides, the accepting end will have to treat newcomers without set expectations or prejudice. Therefore, it is important for a mediator between newcomers and the accepting end to know the local area well.

**b) Some findings after the compilation of this questionnaire, and changes after the big earthquake**

I want to add some information regarding updates after the compilation of this questionnaire. I have done additional research on some informants and the city government after the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred on March 11, 2011.

**Table 9 Newcomers using “de・kurasu Tôno”**

year	2006	07	08	09	10	11	total
Household	4	5	4	8	3	8	32
People	6	10	9	18	5	18	66

source:de・kurasu Tôno

I can see that there are a constant number of newcomers for several years (Table 9). We have to know that not all newcomers have settled. Approximately 20% of them have left Tôno City. I also must note that there are other newcomers besides those in this table's data. It is said that actual figures of newcomers are said to be 2-3 times more than the figures in this table (and the figures in this table include earthquake refugees).

I can see two characteristics of newcomer's trends. First is a change around the time of the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers. Around 2009, elderly applicants for settlement decreased, in contrast young applicants (20's) increased. The logic behind this might be an optimistic feeling of the newcomers that they can take care of their lives if they come to the countryside.

Second is that applicants have remarkably increased after the earthquake. 186 people consulted with the city and NPO (50-100 were average year figures). The first factor is the need for temporary housing for refugees from coastal areas. The second factor is the need for lodgings for construction workers. The third factor is the need to borrow or buy a house to take care of parents living in the coastal areas. It may take several years to judge whether these applicants will settle down in Tôno City or not.

As there were many applicants, there grew much demand to real estate, but the opportunistic price hike did not occur. About 20 properties were offered for rental or sale after the earthquake. Before the earthquake, it was less than 10 properties per year.

These trends may be a temporary situation and because of the specific characteristic of Tôno City as being located near the coastal area.

So I would like to think about another factor, the radioactive factor. There is only one case where a newcomer came from Fukushima to avoid the radioactivity. In contrast, there are some cases where newcomers who had settled before the earthquake left Tôno City worrying about radioactive contamination. This implies that the radioactive factor causes either a pushing or pulling effect for newcomers, and as newcomers have fewer ties, they are more flexible than local residents.

## Acknowledgements

The research conducted for this paper was performed in collaboration with NPO (Network for village, mountain, and daily-life in Tôno), Iwate Prefectural University Yoshino Hideki Laboratory and Tôno City government. And it was supported by Grant-in-Aid for Sanriku Fund (Research concerning Problems and Methods for the Promotion of Newcomer Residents' Settlement). A portion of this paper was presented at the XIII World Congress of Rural Sociology (at Lisbon, Portugal, on August 4, 2012). This paper is written by Misuda, who takes all the responsibility.

## Notes

- 1) The data used in this paper are collected until 2012. The total research becomes the report (Iwate Prefectural University Yoshino Hideki Laboratory ed.,2009).
- 2) I define the new rural resident as "Person who moved from outside Tôno City on his/her will within 10 years, and lives in the place almost the whole year." This definition includes person of U-turn.
- 3) In this research, newcomers include both "U-turn" and "I-turn" people.
- 4) The ward and the hamlet (*Buraku* or

*Syûraku*) are not same exactly, but most are overlapped.

- 5) In this paper, I could not discuss the latter questionnaires sent out to the spouses because of the lack of space.

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## 岩手県遠野市における新規定住の現状と課題

三須田 善暢

**要 旨** 本研究は岩手県遠野市における農村部への新規定住者の現状と課題を調べたものである。日本では田舎暮らしへの興味の拡大やその他の事情から、新規定住者の増大が見込まれていた。市町村内での新規定住者全体についての調査は、これまで行政による量的調査が若干実施されていた程度であり、受け入れ側についてのある程度の数の事例にもとづく態度調査はほとんどおこなわれていなかった。そこで本研究では、新規定住者のみならず受け入れ側（区長等）をも調査対象とした。調査の結果、次のようなことが分かった。区長は新規定住に反対ではないものの、区として積極的に受け入れることは難しいとする。全ての新規定住者が都市部から来ているのではなく、また農村生活に興味があるわけでもない。このように定住者には多様な形態があるため、定住を積極的に推進しようとするならば定住者の個性を理解する必要があり、行政の過度な期待は反発を生みかねない。また、新規定住者は農業経営の担い手としては限界があるものの、農村生活の担い手としては重要である。受け入れ側による多面的継続的な支援が必要であり、それゆえ、地元の事情を知悉している媒介者の役割が重要となる。

**キーワード** 農村部への新規定住者、Uターン、Iターン、区長、遠野市