

Florian Coulmas and Ralph Lützel (eds.): *Imploding Populations in Japan and Germany: A Comparison*
Leiden: Brill, 2011, 545 S.
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This large compilation of studies follows an even larger earlier collection from the same publisher (and the same lead editor), *The Demographic Challenge: A Handbook about Japan* (2008), which presented writings by German scholars on Japan's aging population (see PDR 34 (4): 792–793). In the present volume the focus is on the falloff in population numbers in the two countries, and there is a sprinkling of Japanese contributors (six out of the 24 chapters). Japan's government projects the country's population loss over the next half century at between 28 and 45 million, the lower 798 PDR 37(4) Book Reviews figure only if fertility partly recovers from its low ebb; Germany, allowing for some net in-migration, is expected to shrink by 12 million. These are illustrations of what the book calls population implosions—rapid declines in numbers without any apparent exogenous causes. The contents are organized in four parts, concerned with what societies with imploding populations look like, policy responses to low fertility, challenges of an aging population, and regional dimensions of population decline.

Most of the chapters focus on one or the other of the countries: only a few explicitly compare the two. The policy responses discussed mainly have to do with welfare benefits such as parental leave and childcare, gender equity, and work/life balance. No significant pronatalist effects of these policies seem to be anticipated in either country. Both remain “staunch male-breadwinner countries,” though in recent years each has sought to ease work/life conflicts in home and workplace. Pronatalism is still a sensitive issue in Germany; in Japan, one contributor links the policy weakness in this area to the lack of interest and motivation on the part of elderly male lawmakers in considering initiatives directed at young unmarried persons or young married couples making fertility decisions. A chapter on the phenomenon of healthcare migration reports on the recent partial relaxation of Japan's highly restrictive immigration rules through bilateral Economic Partnership Agreements admitting (female) caregivers from Indonesia and the Philippines as guest-workers—reinforcing “the socialization of care and the feminization of migration.” A companion piece on Germany shows its elderly also benefiting from migrant nurses, mostly from Eastern Europe. The editors are with the German Institute for Japanese Studies, Tokyo and Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Germany. Consolidated bibliography, index.—G.McN.