

Recent Trends in Rural to Urban Migration in Japan: the problem of Depopulation

著者	KAKIUCHI George, H., HASEGAWA Masami
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Recent Trends in Rural to Urban Migration in Japan: the Problem of Depopulation

George H. KAKIUCHI* and Masami HASEGAWA**

Introduction

The large-scale out-migration of Japan's rural population into the cities became very noticeable during and after the latter half of the 1950's, causing some serious social and economic problems. Most of those leaving the rural areas have gone to the larger cities of the Pacific Coast Manufacturing Belt, stretching narrowly for some 600 miles along the coast from the Kanto plain through the Inland Sea to northern Kyushu (Map 1). In fact, in 1968, almost half of the migrants went to the two metropolitan areas centering on Tokyo and Osaka.¹⁾ The population concentration has been such that the Pacific Coast Manufacturing Belt, with only 22.9% of the total land area of Japan, accounted for 55.8% of the total population and 71.0% of the manufacturing by value in 1975.²⁾ Once the migrants have left their rural villages, very few return. This has created severe problems associated with overcrowding within the highly industrialized and urbanized Belt, while in many of the outlying rural areas critical problems related to underpopulation have arisen. The out-migration of labor and population from the villages is undoubtedly strongly influenced by the large differences in income levels between the prefectures located in the Pacific Coast Manufacturing Belt and the prefectures in the outlying regions (Table 1).³⁾ It is important to note that in the years between 1955 and the early 1970's, Japan's gross national product grew at an unprecedented rate of 10% (in real terms) per year, and much of this growth had occurred in the aforemen-

* University of Washington, Seattle, Washington

** Bellevue Community College, Bellevue, Washington

- 1) In 1968, of those leaving the rural areas, 69.5% went to the large cities. Of this amount 31.9% went to the Tokyo-Yokohama (Keihin) area and 18.3% went to the Osaka-Kobe (Hanshin) area. *Understanding Japan: Postwar Japanese Agriculture, Bulletin 30*, Tokyo: International Society for Educational Information, Inc., 1973, p. 98.
- 2) *Nihon kokusei zue* (A Charted Survey of Japan) (Tokyo: Kokusei-sha, 1978), 328-29. Furthermore, although the three metropolitan areas of Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya occupy only 1% of the nation's land, they accounted for about 34% of the total population. Ouchi, H. (1972) "Nihon retto kaizo-ron no genso (The Vision of the Plan for Remodeling the Japanese Archipelago)", *Ekonomisto*, July 25, 14-21.
- 3) It might be noted that nationally the income of an average farm worker was 48% that of the average industrial worker in 1966. *Understanding Japan: Postwar Japanese Agriculture, op. cit.*, p. 98.

HOKKAIDO

1. Hokkaido

TOHOKU

2. Aomori
3. Iwate
4. Miyagi
5. Akita
6. Yamagata
7. Fukushima
15. Niigata

KANTO

8. Ibaraki
9. Tochigi
10. Gunma
11. Saitama
12. Chiba
13. Tokyo
14. Kanagawa
19. Yamanashi
20. Nagano

HOKURIKU

16. Toyama
17. Ishikawa
18. Fukui

TOKAI

21. Gifu
22. Shizuoka
23. Aichi
24. Mie

KINKI

25. Shiga
26. Kyoto
27. Osaka
28. Hyogo
29. Nara
30. Wakayama

CHUGOKUSan'in

31. Tottori
32. Shimane

Sanyo

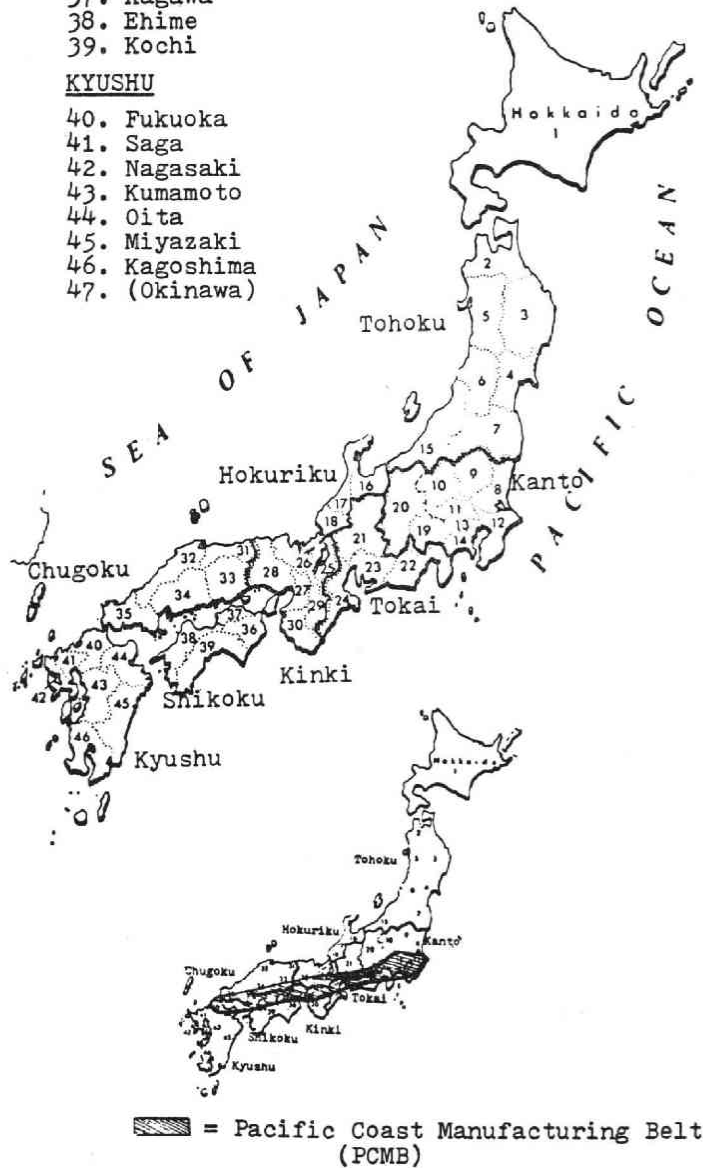
33. Okayama
34. Hiroshima
35. Yamaguchi

SHIKOKU

36. Tokushima
37. Kagawa
38. Ehime
39. Kochi

KYUSHU

40. Fukuoka
41. Saga
42. Nagasaki
43. Kumamoto
44. Oita
45. Miyazaki
46. Kagoshima
47. (Okinawa)



Map 1 Prefectures and major regions of Japan

Table 1 Per Capita income level by prefecture (1964 & 1974)
(Tokyo=100)

	1964	1974		1964	1974
<i>PCMB Prefectures</i>					
Tokyo	100	100	Osaka	87.2	85.0
Kanagawa	81.5	77.3	Aichi	68.8	73.1
<i>Rural Prefectures</i>					
Hokkaido	47.9	59.7	Aomori	39.3	45.8
Iwate	39.8	49.1	Akita	41.7	55.2
Fukushima	39.6	53.9	Yamagata	43.0	53.2
Tottori	38.5	54.1	Shimane	39.6	50.6
Tokushima	43.3	57.3	Kochi	43.2	54.9
Ehime	44.5	59.0	Nagasaki	39.3	52.5
Miyazaki	38.5	48.9	Kagoshima	32.0	44.3
Saga	40.1	52.9	Oita	40.1	52.9
Kumamoto	41.4	50.1			

Source: *Nihon kokusei zue*, 1977 p. 92

tioned Belt.⁴⁾ The government had embarked upon a series of income-doubling plans, the export industries boomed and the internal markets expanded.

The rapid growth of the manufacturing, construction and service industries after 1955 created a demand for a great number of workers; consequently the out-migration from the rural regions accelerated and reached serious proportions, especially in the isolated and poorer areas of such outlying regions as Kyushu, Shikoku, Chugoku, Hokuriku, Tohoku and Hokkaido (Map 1). The deterioration in the socio-economic conditions was such that the worst off of the municipalities (cities, town, and village administrative units) were recognized as and designated as "depopulated" areas (*kaso chiiki*) and became eligible for government aid. Local means of livelihood worsened or disappeared and many of the essential services could no longer be adequately maintained.

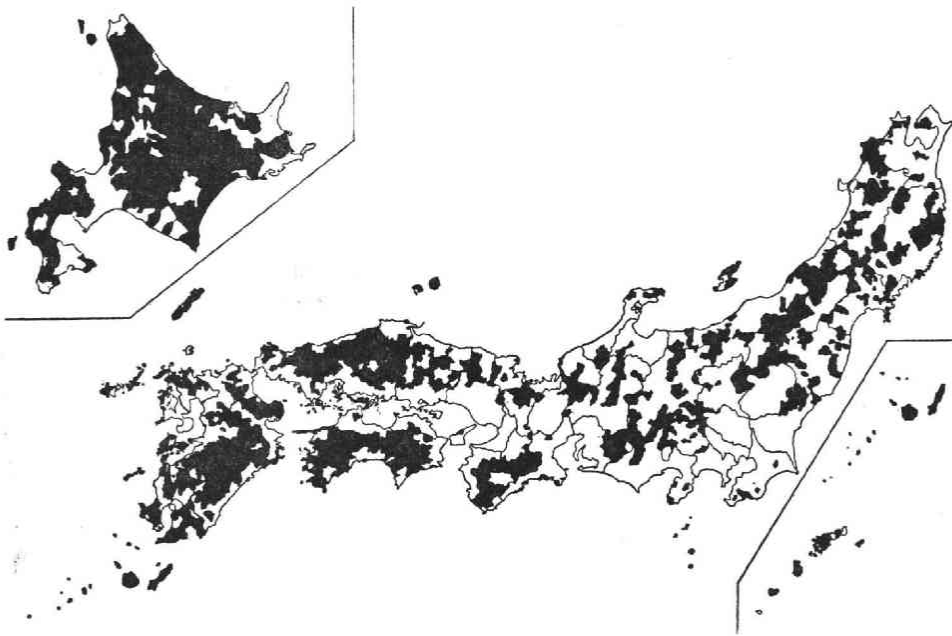
Characteristics and trends associated with depopulated areas

During the summer of 1975, it was observed in many of the more remote mountain areas that farms were being completely abandoned, evidenced by deserted homes and croplands. Such instances were seen in the mountains of Ishikawa Prefecture in Hokuriku, Yamagata Prefecture in Tohoku, Ehime Prefecture in Shikoku, and Hiroshima Prefecture in Chugoku (Map 1). Many areas of these and other regions have been experiencing serious out-migration and have had a large number of municipalities designated as depopulated (Map 2). In some of the more

4) Hall Robert B. Jr. (1976): *Japan: Industrial Power*. New York: D. Van Nostrand Co., p. 3

remote mountain areas, small hamlets have completely disappeared.⁵⁾

Most of the people who have left or are leaving the rural areas are the young, many having just graduated from the junior high or senior high schools. For example, of those graduating these schools in 1955, some 20% had remained on the farm, but in recent years the percentage has fallen to about 5%.⁶⁾ The population pyramids clearly indicate the aforementioned phenomenon, showing deeper indentations in the lower middle age groups and a higher percentage of older people, when compared to the pyramids for the nation (Fig. 1).



Map 2 Distribution of depopulated areas

■ = Depopulated area

Source: *Japan Report*. 20(1) p 4

In all of the depopulated communities, the people have become increasingly worried about the lack of services, such as schools, medical and dental facilities, and the paucity of cultural and social opportunities. There were a few instances where children were not only being bussed long distances but some had to board away at schools. In Ehime Prefecture, it was mentioned a community in an

5) Field studies were conducted by George H. Kakiuchi during the summer of 1975 under a grant from the Social Science Research Council.

6) *Understanding Japan: Postwar Japanese Agriculture, op. cit.*, p. 98.

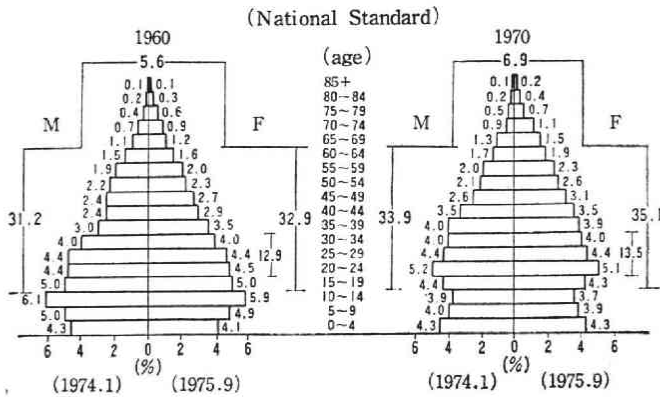
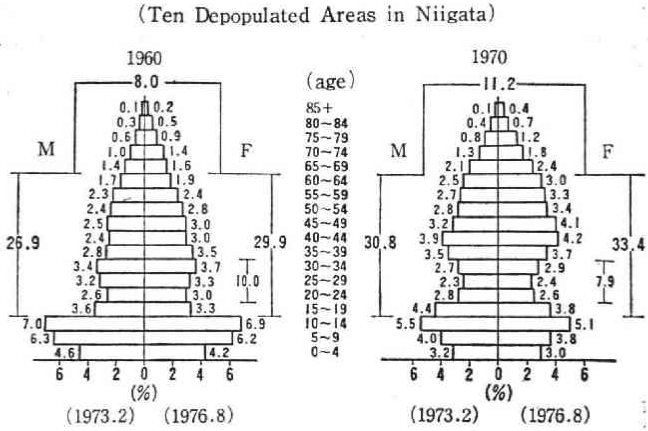
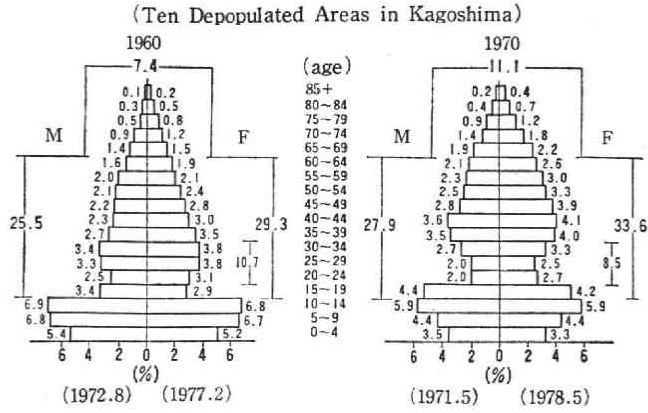


Fig. 1 Population pyramids of depopulated areas
 Source: *Nihon no kaso mondai*, 110-111

an isolated area had to contract for a doctor from Taiwan, as no Japanese doctor would come, even if a clinic was built and substantial financial rewards were offered. In a mountain area of Hiroshima Prefecture, it was said a dentist had been brought over from South Korea.⁷⁾ Then, too, a report of the 11th Farmer's Health Conference held in Iwate Prefecture on January 29, 1970, indicated even though health clinics were built, no doctors would come. In a similar context, the prefectural government had given scholarships to medical students with the understanding they would return to the rural areas when their training was completed. But very few did so, preferring to refund the scholarship money. It was also said that in Toka-machi, located in an isolated mountain valley of the Shinano River, of Niigata Prefecture, the nearest clinic was located 30 minutes away by car. In winter, it took more than two hours by foot due to deep snows.⁸⁾ The young people, in particular, complained about the lack of social amenities, such as coffee shops and recreational opportunities.

Often in talking with the older folks, they spoke of the better times of years before or of government help to revitalize their local economy. Building of good roads to improve accessibility was often mentioned, perhaps hoping to attract new industries into the local area. They felt if the local economy could somehow be improved their children would stay or even return from the cities. Improvement of agricultural production was seldom mentioned, for, in many instances, the environment was usually too poor for good cropping and the farms too small. Many, who had left, had been part-time farmers, traditionally working in the forests or deriving part of their income selling firewood and charcoal. But these sources of income had largely disappeared with the increased substitution of petroleum products, natural gas, brickettes, *etc.*, for the traditional fuels. The forestry industry, too, had declined as imports increased (between 1960 and 1970, the number of employed in the forestry industry declined by 200,000).⁹⁾ By the late 1960's the situation in many of the depopulated areas had become so serious there was growing pressure on the government to do something about the problems causing and arising out of severe out-migration.

In the past, it was the "surplus" population which had left the rural regions,

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- 7) Field study (Kakiuchi), *op. cit.* Some communities in Aomori Prefecture also have contracted for doctors from Taiwan. In 1969, reports indicated there were nine clinics administered by Chinese doctors in Japan. Yuki, S. (1970): *Kamitsu-kaso: yugamareta Nihon retto* (Overpopulation-Depopulation: Distorted Japanese Archipelago), Tokyo: San'ichi Shobo p. 174.
- 8) Sum Kong-sut (1977): "Socio-Economic Changes in Japan's Rural Areas-Evidence of Material Wealth", *Sci. Repts. Tohoku Univ. 7th Ser. (Geogr.)* 27(1) 18-19
- 9) Sugano, S. (1976): "Sanson keizai no senzen to sengo (Mountain Village Economy in the Prewar and Postwar Periods)," *Kaso no jissyo bunseki* (Actual Analysis of Depopulation), Tokyo: Hosei University Press, p. 24

often the younger brothers. Thus the number of farm households had remained quite stable, around six million households. Even as late as 1960, they had numbered 6,057,000. But by 1970, the number had decreased to 5,342,000 and by 1977 it had dropped to 4,835,000.¹⁰⁾

The magnitude of the depopulation problem is more clearly revealed in that, as of April 1975, out of a total of 3,203 municipalities in Japan (Okinawa is excluded), 1,093 were classified as depopulated and economically depressed (Table 2). This amounted to 34% of the total and included 44.1% of the total national land area.¹¹⁾

Table 2 Profile of the depopulated municipalities* (1976)

	Number of Municipalities			Population (in thousands)			Area (km ²)		
	Total	D.M.	%	Total	D.M.	%	Total	D.M.	%
Hokkaido	212	149	70.3	5,338	1,247	23.4	83,513	55,341	66.3
Tohoku	518	166	32.0	11,625	1,385	11.9	78,034	28,877	37.0
Kanto	647	102	15.8	35,637	555	1.6	49,697	11,653	23.4
Tokai	332	44	13.3	12,726	229	1.8	28,806	6,443	22.4
Hokuriku	111	20	18.0	2,914	108	3.7	12,637	2,406	19.0
Kinki	327	53	16.2	18,831	310	1.6	27,265	6,973	25.6
Chugoku	319	162	50.8	7,366	988	13.4	31,748	17,024	53.6
Shikoku	216	111	51.4	4,040	815	20.2	18,795	11,561	61.5
Kyushu	521	286	54.9	12,417	2,786	22.4	41,354	25,261	61.1
National Total	3,203	1,093	34.1	110,894	8,423	7.6	375,289	165,539	44.1

* Okinawa Prefecture excluded

D.M.: Depopulated Municipalities

Source: *Kaso taisaku no genkyo*, p. 3

The problem of depopulation, logically, is most acute in the more outlying or isolated regions. For example, in Hokkaido, 70.3% of the municipalities were designated as depopulated, accounting for 66.3% of the area; in Kyushu the percentages were 54.9% and 61.1% respectively; and in Shikoku, 51.4% of the municipalities were classified as depopulated, accounting for 61.5% of the total land area. It should be noted that the prefecture with the highest percentage of municipalities classified as depopulated was Kagoshima, located at the extreme southern tip of Kyushu, with 74% (1975).¹²⁾ Those with the lowest percentages

10) The farm population decreased from 37,670,000 to 22,562,000 between 1950 and 1977. *Nihon kokusei zue, op. cit.*, 205-06.

11) **Office of the Prime Minister** (1976): *Kaso taisaku no genkyo* (Present Situation on Countermeasures to Depopulation), Tokyo: Kaso Chiiki Mondai Chosa-kai, p. 3

12) *Ibid.*, p. 172.

are, of course, in the Pacific Coast Manufacturing Belt, such as the Tokai region with only 13.3% of its municipalities designated as depopulated and accounting for 22.4% of the region (Table 2). The Kanto region, understandably, also has low percentages.

Tohoku, which has traditionally been viewed as an economically depressed region, surprisingly has relatively low percentages with only 32% of its municipalities designated as depopulated and accounting for 37% of the regional area. The reason for this is probably related to the practice of *dekasegi* or seasonal migration of workers, whereby the farmers continue to maintain their permanent residence in their villages but go out to work in the metropolitan areas for a period of several months (one is classified as a *dekasegi* worker if he or she is gone for more than one month but less than a year). It is believed eventually Tohoku will also see serious losses in population, similarly to the other outlying regions.

In terms of population, the percentage living in the designated depopulated municipalities only amounts to 7.6% of the national total, but in terms of numbers it is quite significant, amounting to some 8.4 million people. Again, the percentages are much higher in the outlying regions. In Hokkaido, 23.4% lived in the depopulated areas, in Kyushu the percentage was 22.4%, and in Shikoku it was 20.2% (Table 2).¹³⁾ In the isolated prefecture of Kagoshima, fully 42% lived in the designated depopulated areas.¹⁴⁾

A few of the major reasons for the out-migration from rural areas have been given. Two prefectural surveys seem to bear them out. A survey conducted in Wakayama Prefecture revealed that 34.9% of those questioned mentioned low income as the main reason for out-migration, another 16.4% indicated the lack of education facilities, another 8.1% poor social environment, and another 8.4% mentioned poor transportation facilities. Another survey carried out in Okayama Prefecture showed similar results (Fig. 2). The survey in Wakayama also checked with those people who had gone to the urban centers to see how they felt about their move. Approximately 85% of those surveyed stated they were generally satisfied with their new environment and living conditions; only 2.4% regretted having moved.¹⁵⁾ The growing pessimism about living in the outlying isolated areas is clearly seen in a study conducted in 1970 by the town of Oguni in Yamagata Prefecture. The study was made in the village of Taki, a part of Oguni,

13) The average population density (1973) would be obviously low in the depopulated areas, averaging 58 per sq. kilometer, compared to 438 per sq. kilometer in the non-depopulated areas. "White Paper on Depopulation Reviews Assistance Measures Taken in 1972", *Japan Report*, XX(1), January 1974, p. 4.

14) *Kaso taisaku no genkyo. op. cit.*, p. 172.

15) **Fusuki, K.** (1972): "Kaso chiiki ni okeru rison to jumin no iko (Out-Migration in Depopulated Areas and Its Meaning) (II). *Chiri* (Geography), 17(11) p. 6

and it showed that 89% of the villagers did not foresee any improvement in the conditions of their community, especially for their children.¹⁶⁾ Such pessimistic attitudes are not rare in the depopulated districts of Japan. It is not surprising, then, the parents are reluctant to discourage their children from seeking better opportunities in the large urban centers of the Pacific Coast Manufacturing Belt. In many cases the parents, too, have followed them out, indicated by the declining number of farm households.

There are some who argue depopulation of the aforementioned regions is a natural and historical consequence in the process of industrialization, and therefore it should be allowed to proceed without government interference. They would allow the remote settlements to be abandoned and revert back to forest. But for

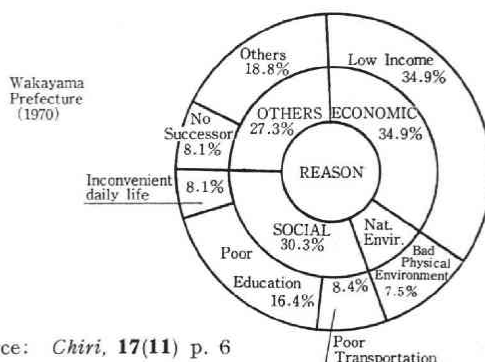
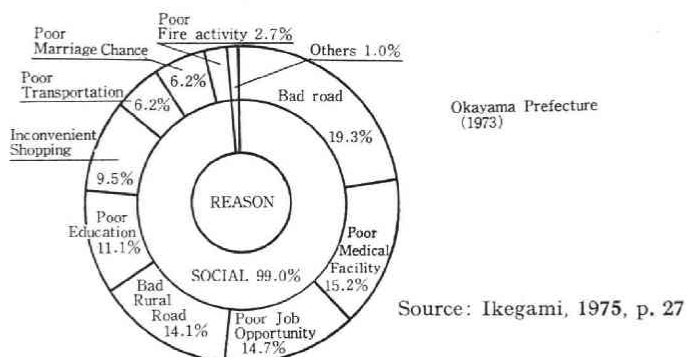


Fig. 2 Reasons for out-migration in Okayama and Wakayama Prefecture

16) Funaba, M. (1972): "Shuraku hensei wa nani o motarasuka (What Can Rural Community Consolidation Bring About). *Asahi Janaru* (Asahi Journal), March 3, p. 40

the near future, this approach does not seem acceptable for the 8.4 million people presently living in the depopulated and economically depressed regions nor to the national, prefectural and local governments.

Efforts to counter depopulation

In the past few years, the national government has passed a number of legislative measures to improve the deteriorating economy and declining social and health services in the depopulated areas. By doing so, it is hoped the outflow of the people to the cities will be halted or even reversed.

The earlier measures were addressed more to the general concern of regional underdevelopment rather than to the problems of depopulation. In this context, the Remote Island Promotion Act (*Rito shinko-ho*) of 1953 was one of the first of such measures. A few of the other similar measures to be passed were the Temporary Act for the Promotion of Coal Producing Areas (*Santan chiiki shinko rinji sochi-ho*) (1961), the Three Measures for the Development of Tohoku (*Tohoku kaihatsu sanpo*) (1959), Special Policy for Heavy Snow Areas (*Gosetsu chitai taisaku tokubetsu sochi-ho*) (1962), and the Mountain Village Promotion Act (*Sanson shinko-ho*) (1965).¹⁷⁾ These laws do, indeed, indicate the growing concern for the declining economic conditions in the rural areas resulting from isolation, poverty of local resources, climatic disadvantages, or declining industries — usually a combination of these factors. These measures, however, were generally under-financed and did not directly address the problems associated with the deteriorating social and demographic conditions, which were contributing to the out-migration from the rural areas.

The first legislation addressed directly to the problems of depopulation on a national scale was the Emergency Act for the Improvement of Depopulated Areas (*Kaso chiiki taisaku kinkyu sochi-ho*), passed in 1970. The Act covered a period of ten years. For the first time, a law was passed which not only approached the problem of depopulation comprehensively but also provided substantial funds. Under the provisions of the Act, a municipality could qualify for financial and other forms of aid if its population had declined by ten percent or more during the five years between 1960 and 1965 and the "index of financial strength" (the ratio of self-financed expenses — such as revenue from the inhabitants' taxes — to total expenditures) averaged less than 0.4 in the three years from 1966 to 1968.¹⁸⁾ As

17) Ouchi, H. "Kaso taisaku no tenkai to honshitsu (Essential Qualities of the Anti-Depopulation Policies)". *Kaso no jisho bunseki, op. cit.*, 61-63

18) "White Paper on Depopulation Reviews Assistance Measures Taken in 1972". *op. cit.*, p. 4. Ikegami, Akira, *Nihon no kaso mondai* (The Problem of Depopulation in Japan). Tokyo: Toyo Keizai Shimpo-sha, 1975, 53-54.

mentioned earlier, as of April 1975, 34% of the total municipalities were officially designated as depopulated, having increased from 23.7% in 1970.¹⁹⁾

The Emergency Act for the Improvement of Depopulated Areas provided subsidies and other forms of financial aid for the construction of roads and highways to improve accessibility to and from local communities, for the development of local resources, and for such construction projects as school facilities made necessary by the merger of public primary and lower secondary schools (between 1970 and 1975, 854 schools were consolidated), medical facilities, welfare facilities for children and old people, health centers for mothers and children, facilities for the modernization of agricultural, forestry and fishery management, and facilities for tourist and recreational industries. Hundreds of school busses and medical vehicles were also provided to local communities.

In the construction of public facilities, the State subsidy could be as high as two-thirds of the costs in the depopulated areas. In other projects, costs could be financed by floating "depopulation bonds" which are completely underwritten by the Government. Financial incentives were also provided for the promotion of industries in the local communities, such as low cost loans and tax relief.²⁰⁾ The government efforts undoubtedly reflect a change from the policy of high economic growth that had been followed since World War Two to one focused also on national welfare. The government had been accused of sacrificing the social, mental and health welfare of the people for material economic growth. Financial and other forms of aid to counter the out-migration were also made available by the prefectural and local governments.

One of the more unique provisions of the 1970 Act is that funds were made available to consolidate severely depopulated communities. One such effort took place in Yamagata Prefecture in the municipality of Oguni, which was comprised of 117 smaller communities, of which 25 were classified as severely depopulated. These 25 communities were given the opportunity to move into the centrally located town of Oguni. Many of them did decide to move, but the project, in general, ended in failure, even though much money and effort had been expended. Many of the resettled people moved out of Oguni to the larger cities, even beyond the prefectural borders. For example, Taki, a community of 36 households, was one of those which elected to relocate into Oguni, but eventually 23 households left because they could not find suitable jobs. It might be of interest to note the municipality of Oguni is located in the mountainous western part of Yamagata Prefecture and 77% of the communities within it had less than 30 households. Also,

19) *Nihon no kaso mondai. op. cit.*, p. 100

20) "White Paper on Depopulation Reviews Assistance Measures Taken in 1972". *op. cit.*, 4-5. Also *Kaso taisaku no genkyo, op. cit.*, 36-38.

a so-called developmental center was built at great expense in the town of Oguni. 50% of the cost was subsidized by the national government, 25% by the prefectural government, and the rest came from local sources. It housed a huge meeting room, five conference rooms, a gymnasium, a library, a restaurant, a senior citizens' club, swimming pool, etc. The purpose was to provide a center for entertainment and recreation and to function as headquarters for the redevelopment of the area.²¹⁾ But it was said to be far underutilized. The aforementioned kind of situation must have been repeated in many other municipalities, for between 1970 and 1975, 375 municipalities were designated for consolidation, involving 2,284 households, under the Emergency Act for the Improvement of Depopulated Areas.²²⁾ Several hundreds more were to be consolidated during the next five years.

Oftentimes, the local communities attempted to keep the young from out-migrating. For example, the town of Nakatomi in Yamanashi Prefecture passed an ordinance in 1970, providing funds to encourage the youths to remain in their communities.²³⁾ In the municipality of Taisa in Okayama Prefecture, an ordinance was passed to establish a "Bride-Groom Bank" for the purpose of providing an inventory of persons of marriageable age, listing detailed information of the individuals. If requested, a meeting between the prospective bride and groom would be arranged.²⁴⁾ Of course, it was hoped if they married locally they would tend to stay.

On a more grandiose scale, and in the spirit of the times, the much heralded Tanaka Plan came out in 1972 and was described in the book, *Building a New Japan: A Plan for the Remodeling the Japanese Archipelago*.²⁵⁾ The overall purpose of the plan was to disperse the concentrated population and industries in the Pacific Coast Manufacturing Belt into the more outlying regions of Japan and to connect the new industrial centers and all of Japan with efficient transportation and communication systems. If the plan succeeds, there would be a better distribution of the national wealth and a more equitable and higher standard of living throughout the nation. Logically, in the process, the problems of severe depopulation and of economic distress in the outlying regions and the problems associated with overpopulation, congestion and pollution within the Manufacturing Belt would be alleviated. The Plan attracted and undoubtedly influenced the thinking of the

21) *Asahi Janaru. op. cit.*, p. 38

22) *Kaso taisaku no genkyo. op. cit.*, 36-38

23) **Fusuki, K.** (1973): "Kaso taisaku - Yamanashi-ken Nakatomi-cho no rei (Anti-Depopulation Measures: An Example of the Town of Nakatomi, Yamanashi Prefecture). *Chiri* 18(1) p. 6

24) *Kaso taisaku no genkyo. op. cit.*, p. 87

25) **Tanaka, K.** (1973): *Building a New Japan: A Plan for Remodeling the Japanese Archipelago*. Tokyo: The Simul Press

Japanese people in the government, in business and amongst the general populace. It, however, also raised a whole host of complicating problems. For instance, local communities got into some serious arguments whether the relocating of industries into their village or town would be beneficial. Many worried about the disruptions they would bring to past ways of life and values. Also there would unquestionably be skyrocketing land prices. Concern was also expressed for the potential of creating undesirable levels of pollution and congestion, as they had in the Pacific Coast Manufacturing Belt, especially if heavy industries were to relocate. Such was the case in Rokkasho, a small village on the northern shores of Aomori Prefecture.²⁶⁾

Summary

It is always difficult to evaluate and measure the success or failure of any large-scale programs, namely, in this case, the rejuvenation of the severely depopulated and economically depressed areas of Japan. The passage of the Emergency Act for the Improvement of the Depopulated Areas in 1970 pointed to and indicated the seriousness of the problems and concerns. Large amounts of money and effort have been expended at the national, prefectural and local levels, and although there has been some success, overall results have, as yet, not been too encouraging. The building of access roads does not appear to have brought about the desired interaction between the depopulated communities and the nearby cities and areas. In fact, in many instances, it may have made it easier to out-migrate. Industries have not moved into the isolated settlements in any significant numbers. And services related to schools, health and social welfare have continued to be less than satisfactory, as they have been increasingly consolidated in more central locations.²⁷⁾ The resettlement of the severely depopulated communities has shown to be far more complex and difficult than anticipated.

However, statistics do indicate there has been a slowdown in out-migration into the highly industrialized and urbanized regions of Japan. For example, the population in the three metropolitan regions of Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya had increased by 12.8% during the five-year period between 1965 and 1970, whereas in the following five-year period, the population increase was 10.3%. Also, it has been noted that in 1970, twenty prefectures had a net loss of population, whereas in 1975, only five had a net loss, and these five, interestingly, were all located in the most isolated or outlying areas of Japan, namely Akita, Yamagata, Shimane, Saga and Kagoshima (Map 1). In terms of the total number of municipalities, during

26) "The Battle of Rokkasho Village". *Newsweek*, January 29, 1973, 32-33

27) "Kaso taisaku no tenkai to honshitsu". *op. cit.*, 60-67

the 1965 to 1970 period, 71.5% had net losses in population, whereas between 1970 and 1975 some 56.2% had lost population. The reasons for this slowdown may have resulted from national and local efforts. Others state there have been changes in the people's attitude toward urban life due to the severe congestion and pollution of the urbanized regions. But perhaps more important, as a factor, may be the stagnation in Japan's economy after the "Oil Shock" of 1973, when suddenly the prices for imported oil rose sharply.²⁸⁾ It also may be the slowdown is due to the fact that the reservoir of potential out-migrants has become depleted. Most likely, it is the result of the combined effects of all these factors and others.

There has been much discussion in recent years of what appears to be an increase in the amount of return migration taking place from the highly concentrated population centers of the Pacific Coast Manufacturing Belt to the rural regions.²⁹⁾ At present it seems more likely that these people have been returning not to their points of origin, the small villages, but to the larger cities, such as prefectural capitals, in the outlying regions.³⁰⁾ More studies and information are needed, however, before the impact of this return migration upon the rural regions can be properly evaluated.

The fact remains, the problems associated with the depopulated areas are still realities and will continue to persist for the foreseeable future. Therefore, the policies and efforts outlined in the Emergency Act for the Improvement of Depopulated Areas will undoubtedly be pursued. In terms of priority, the construction and improvement of roads and other transportation systems will continue to receive attention in the hopes that the improved accessibility would attract industries into the local areas or perhaps aid in the development of locally based industries. An enterprise which has received considerable attention is the recreational and tourist industries. The reason for this is that many of the depopulated areas, although lacking in good farm lands, are blessed with various kinds of natural beauty, such as mountains, seascapes, and lakes. Such was the case in the isolated upper reaches of the Tadori river in Ishikawa Prefecture, where ski resorts have been built and hiking and camping have become popular in the Hakusan (Mt. Haku) National Park. Many local people have come to take

28) *Kaso taisaku no genkyo. op. cit.*, 4-7.

29) This return migration is sometimes referred to as the "U-Turn Phenomenon". For a discussion of the usage of the term "U-Turn", however, see Wiltshire, R. (1979): "Research on Reverse Migration in Japan: (I) Reverse Migration and the Concept of 'U-Turn'", *Sci. Repts. Tohoku Univ. 7th Ser. (Geogr.)* 29 (1), 63-68.

30) **Okada, M.** (1976): *Jinko U-Taan to Nihon no Shakai* (Population U-Turn and Japanese Society), Tokyo: Taimeido, 90-92. Okada also cites a study, however, which shows that return migration has also been taking place to small villages, at least in Yamagata Prefecture. *ibid.*, p. 158.

advantage of the increased number of tourists by setting up different kinds of recreationally oriented enterprises. The area had been one of the poorest in the prefecture.

Wherever possible, specialized farm enterprises and crops will be encouraged. Such examples might be dairying in the mountainlands of central Japan and Tohoku, the growing of greenhouse vegetables along the warm coasts of Shikoku and Kyushu, and mushroom cultivation in the forestlands. It is hoped that with improved accessibility and market structure, local and regional specialization of agricultural production will develop more fully in certain favorable locations. But the potential for developing agricultural enterprises seems limited by the poorness of the environment.

The most rational development would seem to be the establishment of or relocating of manufacturing industries in the outlying regions. However, the construction of the factories most likely will be centered on the larger of the regional cities. Thus out-migration will continue from the more isolated areas of the regions and nation, if not to the Pacific Coast Manufacturing Belt, into the larger regional centers.