

The Impact of Amenities on Population Trends in Rural Areas in Kyushu, Japan

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the influence of lifestyle entrepreneurs and amenity movers on population trends in the rural West of the United States has been striking and well-documented¹⁾. The rural “rebound” seen in these areas has been mainly due to positive net migration (the number of people moving in minus the number moving out), rather than through natural increase (births minus deaths), which had been the only factor for sustaining the populations in rural areas before the 1970s. And although the world’s population is still increasing by some 80 million people each year, the pace of that increase has been steadily declining, most dramatically in more developed countries²⁾. Among these developed countries, Japan is often cited in demographic studies due to the combination of its low birth rate and high life expectancy. In recent years, population growth in Japan has come to an almost standstill, mainly due to a natural increase rate that has dropped close to zero. And as Japan’s low birth rate and high number of deaths (due to an aging population) cause the natural increase rate to eventually turn negative in the coming years, this will cause the population to steadily decline for the unforeseeable future. This in turn might bring rise to many economic and social problematic issues, such as funding of the national pension system and the further depopulation of rural areas that are already in crisis.

The purpose of this paper is to first look in depth at recent population changes in Japan at both the national and prefectural levels, with a particular focus on how rural areas have been hurt by the ongoing trend of people moving to large cities to find employment. This will then be followed by looking at population trends in Japan on the city/town level, while emphasizing how amenities have played a role in helping certain rural areas thrive. Case studies done on Ishigaki City in Okinawa Prefecture and Nishihara Village in Kumamoto Prefecture will be presented to see what lessons can be learned from their successes. Ishigaki City was chosen as a case study due to the large amount of net migration that the area has been experiencing in recent years. The extraordinary population gains seen there have been shown to be linked closely with the amenities that Ishigaki Island has to offer. In the case of Nishihara Village, it was chosen as a case study due to it having the highest population percentage gain of all cities/towns in Kumamoto Prefecture during the period from 1995 to 2000. In order to get a better grasp of the root cause of this exceptional gain in population, as well as to find out the views of residents regarding several different issues, an in-depth survey was designed and carried out on the Takayu District of Nishihara Village, which has been experiencing the highest percentage gain in

population among all the districts in the village in recent years. The results of the survey will be introduced to show the impact that amenities are having on inducing people to migrate there.

In the following section, the connection of Japan's new economy to lifestyle entrepreneurs and amenities in Japan will be explored, along with a real-life example of a married couple who left city life behind to move to a rural area in Oita Prefecture and become lifestyle entrepreneurs.

In the final section, several potential issues of conflict that might arise from the development of rural areas, along with measures to deal with them, will be analyzed and discussed. These include such issues as the trouble of valuing unquantifiable amenities (such as scenery, good weather, etc.), the opportunity costs related to the irreversibility of the development of natural environments (including the issues of the destruction of nature and over-development and/or development at too fast a pace), and the possible friction caused by the difference in value systems between old and new residents. This section will then be followed by a summary of the author's findings.

2. Recent population trends in Japan

a. National/prefectural level

As mentioned in the introduction, the rate of population growth in Japan has been steadily declining for the past 30 years, and this trend shows no signs of reversing in the foreseeable future (Table 1). In fact, the combination of decreased mortality rates, which have contributed to Japan's high life expectancy rates ³⁾, and a very low fertility rate ⁴⁾ will cause Japan's population to start decreasing in the near future. According to the Population Reference Bureau, Japan's population of 127.6 million (10th highest in the world) is projected to decrease to 121.1 million by 2025, and even further to 100.6 million in by 2050 ⁵⁾.

Table 1: Population of Japan

year	population	5-year change	Average yearly change
1970	104,665,171	n/a	n/a
1975	111,939,643	6.95%	1.35%
1980	117,060,396	4.57%	0.90%
1985	121,048,923	3.41%	0.67%
1990	123,611,167	2.12%	0.42%
1995	125,570,246	1.58%	0.31%
2000	126,925,843	1.08%	0.21%

Source: Minryoku CD-ROM 2003 (Fujitsu Learning Media)

These staggering predicted losses in population will have a significant impact on public and social policy in the future. Japan's aging society will strain its national pension plan, which has already started to show signs of trouble because of the large number of people who are refusing to pay into the system

(including government politicians), which has recently been a hot topic of public debate. It will also put pressure on health budgets because of higher health care costs for the elderly. In addition, a possible lack of working-age people might mean a greater need for immigrants in the future, another touchy political and social issue for such a homogenous society as Japan.

Even as the overall population of Japan managed to increase 21.3 percent over the 1970 to 2000 period (a compounded average yearly increase of 0.65 percent), there were clearly certain parts of the country that gained more than others. According to the most recently available census data for Japan, the prefectures surrounding (but not including) the Tokyo Metropolitan Area and Osaka had yearly population gains that were well above the national average (Figure 1), thus giving credence to the idea that the trend of people in Japan moving to areas near urban city centers to find employment is still alive and well.

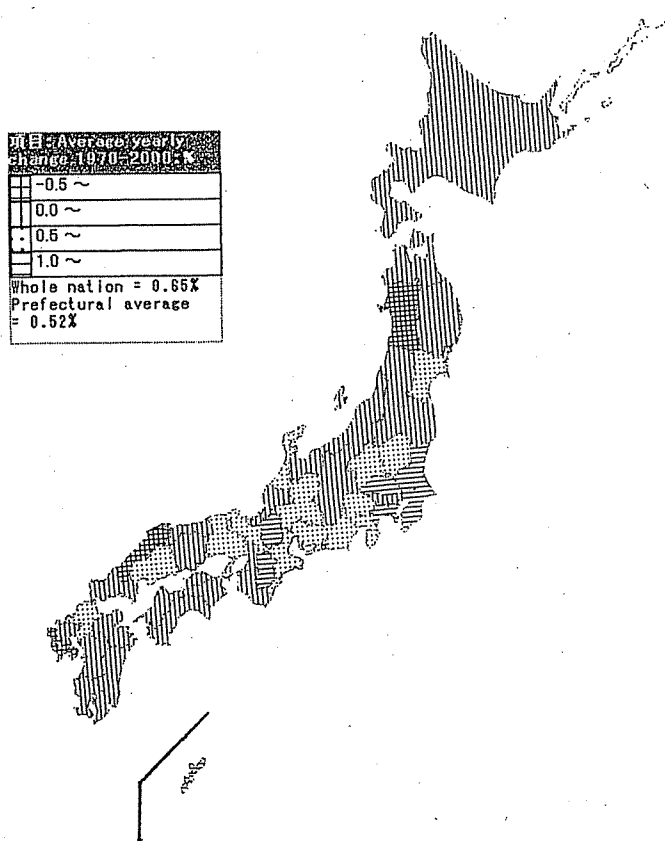


Figure 1: Average yearly population change 1970-2000 (unit: percent)

Source: Minryoku CD-ROM 2003 (Fujitsu Learning Media)

However, it should be noted that Tokyo itself only had a yearly average gain of 0.19 percent, while three prefectures surrounding it had the highest three population growth rates in the country. Those prefectures were Saitama (1.97 percent), Chiba (1.90 percent) and Kanagawa (1.48 percent). These statistics show that although the heart of economic business in Japan is in Tokyo, most people do not

settle there, but rather choose to commute into Tokyo from surrounding prefectures. Although it is Japan's extensive and smooth-running transportation system that makes this possible, it is quite likely that people are living outside of Tokyo mainly because of its high cost of living.

Almost all of the other prefectures that experienced above-average gains between 1970 to 2000 were either those containing a large urban city center (such as Nagoya City in Aichi Prefecture and Fukuoka City and Kita-Kyushu City in Fukuoka Prefecture), or those surrounding the metropolitan areas of Tokyo and Osaka. Okinawa prefecture is a special case that will be discussed in the next section of this paper during an overview of the recent population trends of Ishigaki City.

More recent population trends in Japan for the 1995 to 2000 time period are shown in Figure 2. As evidence to the rapidly decreasing population growth rate in Japan, the most striking difference between Figures 1 and 2 is the dramatic increase in the number of prefectures that experienced negative population growth in the 1995 to 2000 period (21 prefectures) versus the 1970 to 2000 period (3 prefectures). And although Japan's population as a whole gained 0.22 percent per year during this 5-year period⁹⁾, the prefectural average was a paltry 0.08 percent. This suggests that most of the gains were seen in the most populous prefectures, while the populations of almost all of the remaining prefectures were either stagnant or decreased.

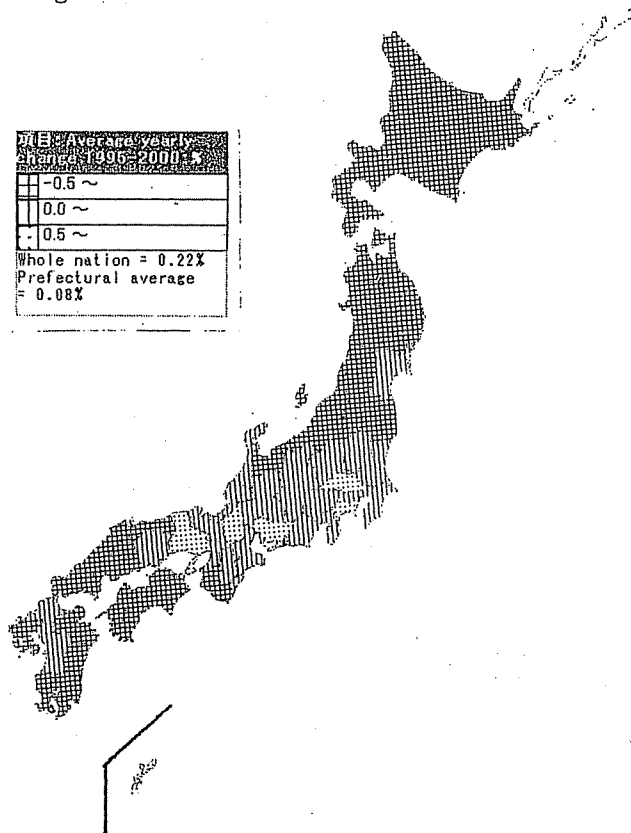


Figure 2: Average yearly population change 1995-2000 (unit: percent)

Source: Minryoku CD-ROM 2003 (Fujitsu Learning Media)

It can be inferred from these statistics that as the overall population of Japan levels off and eventually starts to decrease, the populations of more isolated prefectures will further continue to decline. It is only a question of by how much, which as historical trends have shown will largely be dependent on how many people are drawn to prefectures that contain or are near large urban centers. The following section will analyze a few specific areas in Kyushu in order to get a better grasp of how many smaller cities and rural areas are coping with Japan's changing population structure due to its low fertility rate.

b. City/town level

(1) Ishigaki City, Okinawa Prefecture

Traveling to the far southwestern end of Japan, one will encounter Okinawa Prefecture. Okinawa has traditionally been well-known in Japan for its laid-back atmosphere, tropical climate, and the longevity of its citizens. But recently, it has been gaining national attention for its high population growth rate, which was the highest among all prefectures in Japan in 2001 at 0.70 percent⁷⁾, outpacing traditional population growth powerhouses Saitama, Chiba, and Kanagawa prefectures. Most all of that 0.70

Table 2a: Population of Ishigaki City (Okinawa)

year	population	5-year change	Average yearly change	All Okinawa city/town average yearly change
1980	38,819	n/a	n/a	n/a
1985	41,177	6.07%	1.19%	0.61%
1990	41,245	0.17%	0.03%	0.10%
1995	41,777	1.29%	0.26%	0.69%
2000	43,302	3.65%	0.72%	0.43%

Source: Minryoku CD-ROM 2003 (Fujitsu Learning Media)

Table 2b: Population of Okinawa

year	population	5-year change	Average yearly change
1970	945,111	n/a	n/a
1975	1,042,572	10.31%	1.98%
1980	1,106,559	6.14%	1.20%
1985	1,179,097	6.56%	1.28%
1990	1,222,398	3.67%	0.72%
1995	1,273,440	4.18%	0.82%
2000	1,318,220	3.52%	0.69%

Source: Minryoku CD-ROM 2003 (Fujitsu Learning Media)

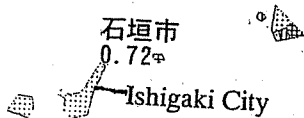
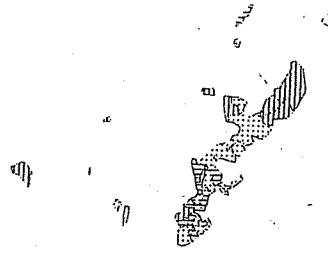
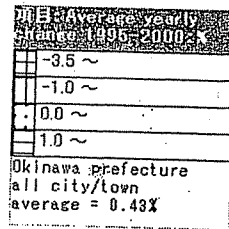


Figure 3: Okinawa prefecture average yearly population change 1995-2000 (unit: percent)

Source: Minryoku CD-ROM 2003 (Fujitsu Learning Media)

percent growth (0.69 percent) was due to natural increase (the number of births minus deaths), with very little net migration (0.01 percent) seen in the prefecture as a whole. However, among the many places scattered about Okinawa prefecture, Ishigaki City located on Ishigaki Island⁹⁾ has stood out over the past few years for its high rate of net migration.

As the statistics in Tables 2a and 2b show, the populations of both Ishigaki City and Okinawa Prefecture as a whole have been increasing since 1980, although the rate of increase for the latter has been gradually slowing. Ishigaki City's population fell below 35,000 in 1975, but has steadily rebounded since then to 43,302 in the most recent population census taken in 2000. In addition, its average yearly population gain of 0.72% was quite a bit higher than the overall Okinawa prefectural city/town average of 0.43% (Table 2a and Figure 3).

Further population gains due to a mix of natural increase and net migration in the three and a half years since the census taken in 2000 have put its population at 45,865 as of June 2004, which is a 5.92 percent increase over the 2000 figure (a yearly compounded average gain of 1.66 percent). Furthermore, detailed statistics for the year 2002 shed light on the astonishing net migration trend occurring in Ishigaki City. Out of a total of 394 new citizens that year, a total of 214 (54.3 percent) were added through natural increase, while 180 (45.7 percent) were added through net migration (Kumamoto Nichinichi Newspaper, 12/13/2004).

The influx of new residents is certainly helping Ishigaki City to prosper and thrive, but then again, so is the high number of tourists that visit Ishigaki Island every year. For a long time, the number of visitors per year had stayed constant around 600,000. However, this number was expected to top the 700,000 mark in 2003 due to various promotional campaigns for Okinawa, including a popular TV drama called "Chura" that was shot on location in Okinawa. The high number of visitors to Ishigaki Island can do nothing but help the local economy, which is heavily reliant on tourism.

Although it is obvious that Ishigaki City is attracting more than its fair share of new residents, the question then becomes why so many more people have decided to start migrating there recently. According to Mr. Akihiko Ochiai, who is in charge of the migration department of a real estate agency in Ishigaki City, most of the migrants to Ishigaki City can be divided into three distinct categories. Those being: 1) Young people who are drawn in by nature and are usually freelance part-time workers. Their way of thinking is quite flexible and they can quickly adapt to an island way of life. 2) Relatively well-off retired people who do not change the values they have lived with up until now in life. Thus they are the most prone to cause a bit of trouble amongst the locals. 3) Middle-aged people, some of who have quit their jobs or retired early due to the prolonged economic downturn that Japan has been experiencing since the collapse of its economic bubble in 1992. In recent years, the number of this type of migrant has increased the most of the three types (Kumamoto Nichinichi Newspaper, 12/03/2004).

So although it is quite difficult to speculate on the reasons so many people are migrating to Ishigaki City due to the various types of people who are moving there, it is clear that the main factors drawing in new residents are its warm year-round climate, laid back lifestyle, and natural amenities, such as the ocean and nature. And if the economic downturn in Japan continues on as it has for over a decade now, it can naturally be expected that an increasing number of people will choose to relocate to Ishigaki Island as an alternative lifestyle choice to the hustle and bustle of big city life.

(2) Nishihara Village, Kumamoto Prefecture

Kumamoto prefecture, located in the heart of Kyushu Island in the southern part of Japan, had seen its population increase at a healthy clip until 1995. However, in the 5 years from 1995 to 2000, its population essentially remained unchanged (Table 3).

As is the case with many other prefectures in Japan, most of the population growth in Kumamoto prefecture over the past twenty years has occurred either in Kumamoto City itself or in the cities/towns that are directly surrounding it on all sides (Figure 4).

Taking a closer look at recent population figures for the 5-year time period from 1995 to 2000, a period when Kumamoto prefecture's population growth rate was essentially zero, 70 out of 90 cities/towns actually experienced population declines (Figure 5). Furthermore, 26 cities/towns had average population growth rates of below minus one percent per year.

Table 3: Population of Kumamoto

year	population	5-year change	Average yearly change
1970	1,700,229	n/a	n/a
1975	1,715,273	0.88%	0.18%
1980	1,790,327	4.38%	0.86%
1985	1,837,747	2.65%	0.52%
1990	1,840,326	0.14%	0.03%
1995	1,859,793	1.06%	0.21%
2000	1,859,344	-0.02%	0.00%

Source: Minryoku CD-ROM 2003 (Fujitsu Learning Media)

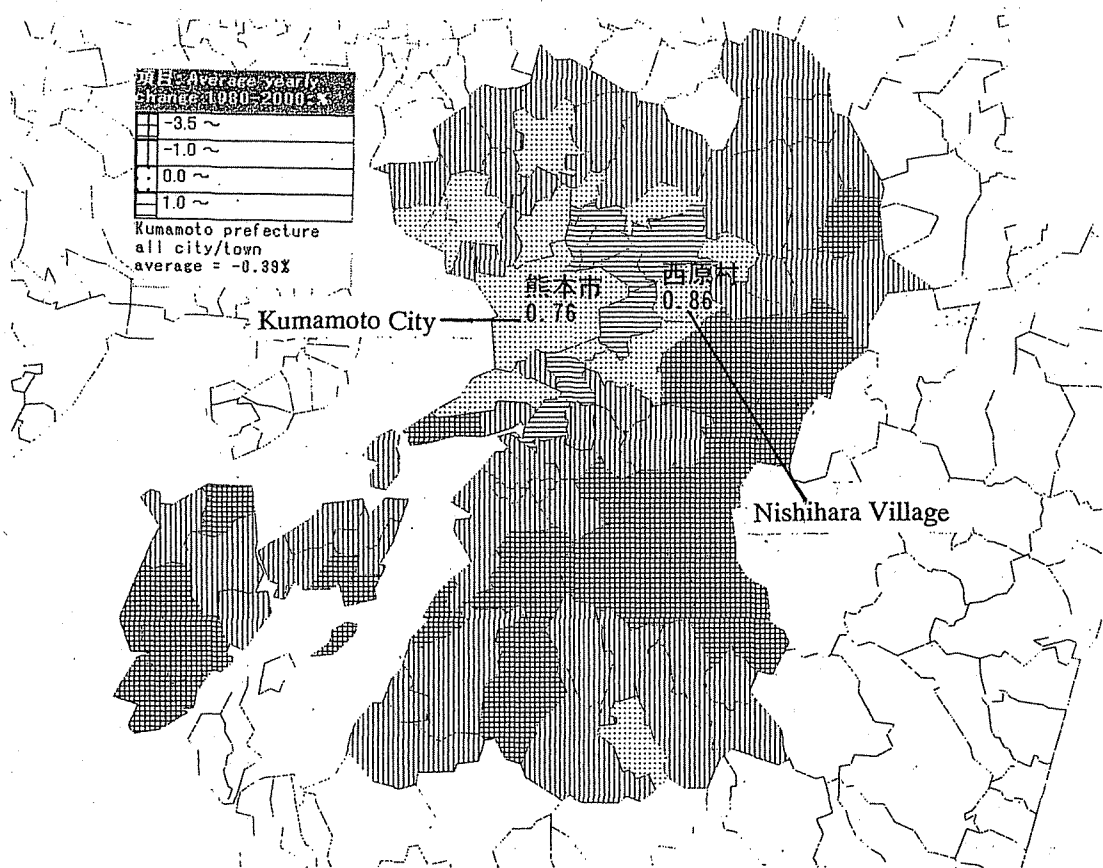


Figure 4: Kumamoto prefecture average yearly population change 1980-2000 (unit percent)

Source: Minryoku CD-ROM 2003 (Fujitsu Learning Media)

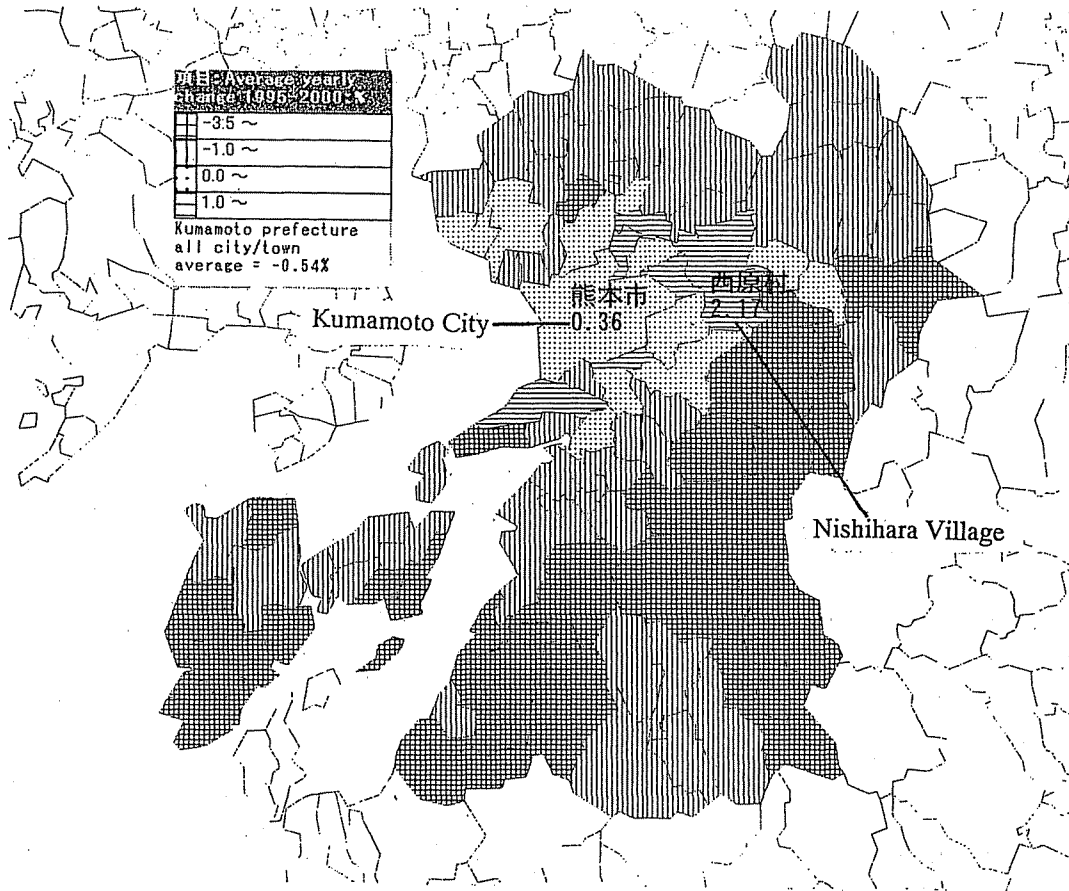


Figure 5: Kumamoto prefecture average yearly population change 1995-2000 (unit percent)

Source: Minryoku CD-ROM 2003 (Fujitsu Learning Media)

The city/town average yearly population growth rate during this 5-year period was minus 0.54 percent across the whole prefecture. Kumamoto prefecture thus managed to keep its population essentially flat through population gains made in Kumamoto City and the cities/towns directly surrounding it. One of these areas, Nishihara Village, stands out not only because it had the highest population growth rate (2.17 percent) among all cities/towns during this period, but also because of its proximity to Kumamoto Airport and central Kumamoto City, as well as its abundance of natural amenities. In addition, most of Nishihara Village's tremendous population gains were made through net migration versus the traditional way of natural increase (Table 4 and Figure 6).

Table 4: Population of Nishihara Village (Kumamoto)

year	population	5-year change	Average yearly change	All Kumamoto city/town average yearly change
1980	4,824	n/a	n/a	n/a
1985	4,921	2.01%	0.40%	-0.05%
1990	5,024	2.09%	0.42%	-0.55%
1995	5,144	2.39%	0.47%	-0.41%
2000	5,728	11.35%	2.17%	-0.54%

Source: Minryoku CD-ROM 2003 (Fujitsu Learning Media)

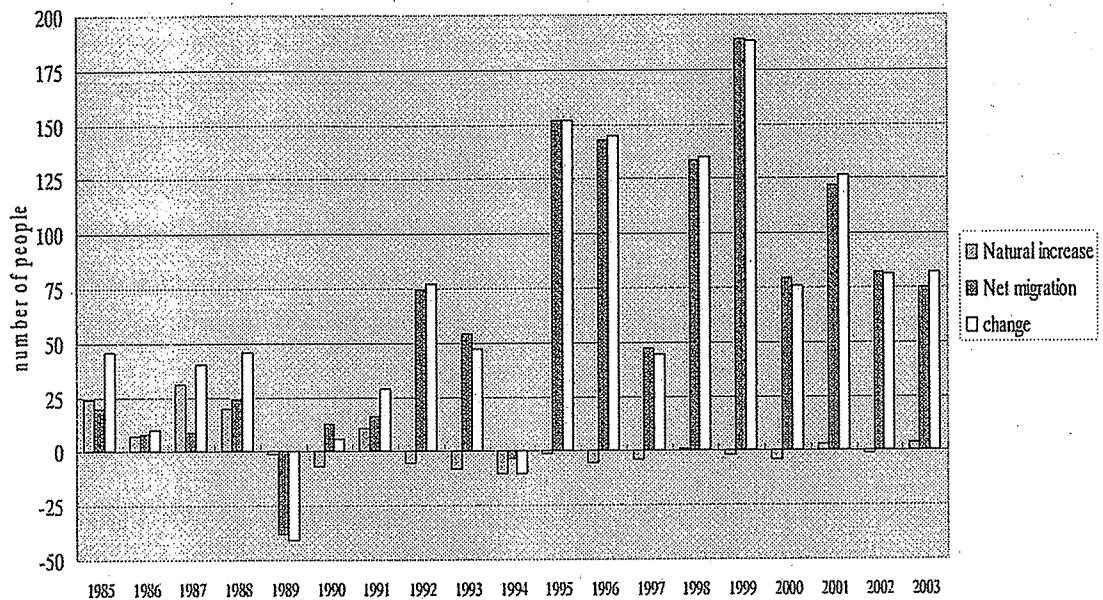


Figure 6: Nishihara Village population trends

Source: Nishihara Village Town Office

In order to find out in more detail what was behind this extraordinary population growth, a survey was conducted by the author on 500 residents of Nishihara Village's Takayu District during a two-week period in July 2004. The reason why only residents of the Takayu District were surveyed was because that area's population grew by a remarkable 50 percent from 1995 to 2000, which accounted for most all of Nishihara Village's population growth for the period. The author wanted to get a sense of the reasons behind this phenomenal growth by asking for residents' thoughts on Nishihara Village versus their previous place of residence, as well as their thoughts on possible further expansion and what problems might arise with such expansion. Another purpose of the survey was to determine the number of people who had made a U-turn or I-turn to Nishihara Village and what had originally motivated them to make their U-turn or I-turn.

Looking at the results of the survey as a whole, it appears that Nishihara Village has been attracting many new residents because of its abundance of natural amenities and its proximity to both Kumamoto City and Kumamoto Airport. The former was confirmed by the responses to several key questions in which the amenities (natural surroundings, drinking water, parks/green space, etc.) of Nishihara Village got very high marks from survey respondents. An overwhelming 96.2 percent of survey respondents thought the natural surroundings of Nishihara Village were better than their previous place of residence. Furthermore, "wanting to live in/among nature" was chosen by 42.0 percent of respondents when questioned about why they chose to make their U-turn or I-turn to Nishihara Village. Finally, when asked what local resources they thought should be made use of when promoting the development of industry and boosting town development, 92.4 percent selected the natural environment. In addition, the transportation network in Nishihara Village has been positively affected by new access roads that have been built in the past decade and that has made commuting times shorter for those who work in Kumamoto City and its surrounding suburbs. As has been the case in recent years with many rural areas in America, proximity to a large urban center and a well-constructed transportation infrastructure have both been key elements in attracting and retaining residents for Nishihara Village.

Although residents did express several concerns throughout the survey, such as the inconvenience of having to go outside of the village to shop for certain items, the lack of a bank, and the bad smell caused by domestic livestock excrement, these are all issues that can be addressed and remedied with the joint cooperation of town officials and residents.

It is clear that as more and more Japanese seek alternative lifestyles or try to find sanctuary from the hectic pace of city life in Japan, the popularity of selected rural areas that are seen as great places to live because of their high level of amenities and convenience will continue to thrive. Nishihara Village appears to be one of those special rural areas in Japan that has the right mix of natural beauty and closeness in proximity to an urban area. So as long as local officials continue to work together with residents to solve problematic issues, while at the same time find ways to build new residential areas without large, irreversible negative consequences for the environment, the future of Nishihara Village will continue to look quite bright indeed.

As the above examples of Ishigaki City and Nishihara Village have stressed, certain rural areas in Japan are finding success in their own unique way by utilizing amenities particular to their location. Unfortunately, these types of success stories are few and far between when all of the nation's rural areas are considered. According to the Rural Depopulation Research Association (RDRA), "There are probably a lot of people who would like to move to the countryside if the conditions were right, but it's difficult to see how the number could increase with the present situation. The local communities need to maximize their areas' resources" (McNicol, 2004). So it seems evident that although the U-turn and I-turn movements have been around since the 1980s, the obstacle of possibly not being able to find employment is still discouraging many from moving to rural areas. For those that have already relocated to rural areas, a recent survey conduct by the RDRA in 2000 showed that company work is

the most popular choice for these people, mainly because they can avoid the shortage of work in these areas by commuting to the city. Other types of common employment for people who have made a U-turn or I-turn are tourism and traditional crafts (McNicol, 2004). One example of the positive influence that traditional crafts can have on revitalizing village communities is the Thai Government initiative OTOP (One Tambon [Village], One Product), which was launched in 2001 to identify and promote unique products made by village communities, such as wickerwork and wooden craft. OTOP products are available both for export and for purchase by visitors to participating village communities. The government's hope is that the initiative will expand the country's domestic and international trade, while at the same time increasing the income of villagers (Time, 09/26/2004).

As these facts suggest, many more people might be lured into relocating to rural areas if either there was a sufficient transportation infrastructure in place to make commuting to surrounding urban areas convenient, or if tourism (or the manufacturing of other local products) can manage to create new jobs through bringing in new visitors.

3. Japan's new economy and its connection to lifestyle entrepreneurs and amenity movers

Many of the population declines seen in rural areas in America have been caused by the large number of people who relocate to urban areas for better employment and/or educational opportunities. The situation in Japan has certainly been no different. However, just as more and more Americans have been making U-turns back to rural areas (or I-turns as the case may be) in recent decades as lifestyle entrepreneurs and/or amenity movers (Norman, 2004), there is hope on the horizon for rural areas in Japan. This hope, however, is stemming more and more from economic necessity, a somewhat unexpected reason for many people. This is because until the burst of Japan's economic bubble in 1992, for most of the post-World War II period incomes in Japan had gradually risen, with virtually lifetime employment guaranteed for white-collar workers at large companies. In return for their devotion to the company shown through very long work hours, incomes usually were in the range of 7 to 8 million yen a year⁹, a very comfortable living by the standard of any country. However, according to Takuro Morinaga in his recent work "Economics for Surviving in an Age of Annual Incomes of 3 million yen," he claims that "Japan is moving to an American-style system of winners and losers in which at most 10 percent will be winners with high incomes while the remaining 90 percent will see their salaries roughly halved to the global standard of 3 million yen to 4 million yen, or even have to make do with part-time or contract work for 1 million yen a year" (Ashby, 2004).

Although the picture Morinaga paints is quite grim, he sees Japan's new work system as a chance for unhappy white-collar company workers to break away from their current jobs and redefine for themselves what constitutes a truly "happy life." In a notion unheard of in Japan, he advocates a European lifestyle model in which one works hard but puts one's family and private life first. Essentially, Morinaga insists that if a worker can overcome his/her fears of a lower income and lessened job security, while also readjusting his/her economic expectations, one can easily live a decent life on only 3 million yen a year (Morinaga, 2003). Indeed, there are growing opportunities available for people

to relocate to rural areas and find new employment opportunities in tourism, traditional crafts, or even start up their own businesses using their own particular business expertise. And as the transportation and communication infrastructure keeps improving throughout the country, it is becoming easier and easier for people who want to keep their current job while commuting in from a rural area, as illustrated previously in this paper by the case study done on Nishihara Village. Although the terms “lifestyle entrepreneur” and “amenity mover” are still not commonly used in Japan, it is likely that this will change in the coming years as Japan’s economic system changes such that more and more people who are tired of the business rat race decide to go into business for themselves, and/or perhaps relocate to an amenity-rich rural area to take advantage of the lower costs of living and laidback lifestyle that many rural areas have to offer.

One such example of this type of emerging lifestyle entrepreneur trend in Japan is exemplified by Erika Kawabata and Hideyuki Hosoda, a married couple who moved from a large metropolitan city to a small rural town in Oita Prefecture, Kyushu, a few years ago. Their main motivation for making the move was to escape the never-ending hectic pace of life that they had been enduring. Since the money they were earning through agriculture was not sufficient to support their family of four, Mrs. Kawabata elected to continue her work as a writer for a weekly magazine, but now only as a part-time freelancer. Similarly, Mr. Hosoda has continued to do television directing work on a part-time basis as well. Compared to their previous hectic city lifestyle, life in the countryside has given them a chance to be closer to nature while also allowing them the time to be more involved with their community and work on personal projects that they had previously neglected. And although the couple’s annual income adds up to only 2 million yen a year, the family of four is still easily able to eat enough and have the basic necessities of life. Mrs. Kawabata herself has said the following about her situation: “I have finally been able to start living a more human life (in regards to the way time flows, the way I feel spiritually, my daily life, and how I am now able to have more interaction with people)...Although I am happy that I have a sense of purpose in life through my work [as a writer], work is not one’s only purpose in life. It is just one of them. The time when work was my whole life is over” (Morinaga 2004)¹⁰. And she also stresses that since each individual person has a different definition of what “happiness” is, it is important for everyone to find their own sense of “happiness” by looking deep inside themselves and doing what truly makes them happy, not necessarily what society expects of them. In conclusion, the example of Mrs. Kawabata and Mr. Hosoda shows that people can find new success and their own type of happiness by relocating to rural areas and becoming lifestyle entrepreneurs, even when those around them in society may not accept or understand their decision.

4. Issues regarding growth in rural areas

One of the key focal points of this paper thus far has been the positive impact that amenities, such as beautiful scenery and convenient access to a nearby urban area, are having on attracting people to relocate to select rural areas throughout Japan. However, along with the recent population gains seen in these areas comes an inevitable certain amount of development. So the question then becomes, what

is the best way to manage the natural environments in these areas in order to preserve nature while also building for the future? With this question in mind, the focus of this section will be on how to best value the amenities found on public lands (e.g. the conflict between preserving natural environments versus extracting natural resources), along with a discussion on a few other potential problematic key issues that need to be addressed when considering the development of rural areas.

a. The opportunity costs related to the irreversibility of the development of natural environments

When economic activities (e.g. land development) are carried out in any particular area, there is quite often an opportunity cost involved with the loss of amenities that would have otherwise been available had no activity taken place. Often times public lands that are the most ill-suited toward agriculture and forestation are the lands that are valued for their desert or and/or mountain scenery. But these lands might also contain mineral deposits or other sites related to extractive industries. Thus a conflict emerges between wanting to exploit the commodity resources contained in these lands and wanting to preserve the areas for their recreational amenities (Krutilla and Fisher, 1988).

The opportunity costs associated with land development in America have mostly been overlooked in research conducted until recently because up until now the amount of undeveloped wilderness area was vast in relation to the amount of land under cultivation. Since in old times wilderness areas were a resource that was quite abundant, any reduction in its size was considered inconsequential as compared with the value of goods and services that had high marginal value to society. However, now that the wildlands in America have been reduced to only approximately two percent of the total land area, there has been an emerging consensus that there should be an economic value placed on them. This is also certainly the case in Japan, where wilderness areas are in even scarcer supply than in America.

Since wilderness areas are natural environments, they cannot be reproduced by man. Thus, an increase in the demand for natural environments cannot be met by increases in the supply. And because the amount of area of such environments cannot be increased, any reductions in them are essentially irreversible and represent an opportunity cost that continues for all future time. In most cases, it is nearly impossible to put a numeric value on this opportunity cost because access fees are not usually charged to visitors to wilderness areas. Further complicating the valuation of the opportunity cost of land development is the fact that many different types of people derive benefit from preserved natural environments, such as wilderness areas, even if they do not appear directly in person to claim their "benefits." Such people include: 1) those who derive satisfaction simply from knowing that natural environments exist and are willing to pay something for their preservation, 2) those who value the option of being able to experience a particular natural environment some time in the future, for either themselves or their offspring, and 3) to a lesser extent those who may benefit from advances in medicine, agriculture, etc., made possible by the preservation of genetic information in the numerous wild species found in natural environments (Krutilla and Fisher, 1988).

In summary, the issue of the destruction of the natural environment due to development projects is something that all growing rural areas face. Too much growth at too fast a pace is not healthy for the

environment because it is simply not sustainable in the long run. The fact that changes made to natural environments are for the most part irreversible must force policy makers to think long and hard before taking action on any proposed project. Therefore rural areas need to strategically plan development projects, ideally with the joint cooperation of local officials and residents, in order to expand while also preserving the amenities that drew people to relocate to these areas in the first place.

b. Potential conflict between new and long-time residents

As the populations of attractive rural areas grow, all eventually face the issue of how to best develop their natural environments to meet the growing demand for housing and other amenities (such as shopping areas, schools, etc.), as explained in the previous section. However, there are also many other issues to consider, one of those being the potential conflict between new and long-time residents. Concerns are most often voiced by long-time residents worried about the people who relocate from big cities while bringing their “city lifestyle” mindset with them as is. A city lifestyle often can mean not wanting to associate much with the locals, a disinterest in politics and other local issues, and/or a propensity to be noisier.

However, there also appears to be a certain level of discontent amongst new residents as well, who often do not feel completely welcomed into their new home. In the survey conducted on Nishihara Village, two new residents to the area made such comments regarding this issue:

“Since there are a lot of people who have lived in Nishihara Village for a long time, there are a lot of people that will say ‘things should stay the way they are now because that’s the way we have always done it’ to everything. That might be true in some cases, but I think that in this day and age, we must also embrace ways of thinking and doing things that fit our current world. If we don’t improve on that point, I feel that Nishihara Village will just stay the same forever.”¹¹⁾

“For those of us who have made an I-turn here, our feelings of wanting to get to know this place better and have things go well is strong, so we try to go out and participate in as many meetings, workshops and lectures as possible. But I feel that we are often shunned by long-time residents. So although we know the good points of long-time residents and there are many things that we want their guidance on, there are also many regrettable things as well.”¹²⁾

To alleviate concerns for both new and long-time residents, the importance of breaking down communication barriers, through such things as town-hall style meetings and other town activities, cannot be understated. Discussion meetings sponsored by local governments are an especially effective way of alleviating the friction caused by the different ways of thinking and the different set of values held by new and old residents.

5. Conclusions

The recent trend of consolidation of rural towns and villages across Japan will most likely continue as more and more rural areas see their populations dwindle. Japan’s rural area consolidation trend lends

credence to the idea that many rural areas are suffering population losses not only because of negative natural increase (births minus deaths) rates, but also because of overall negative net migration. Because of the combination of an aging society and a very low fertility rate, Japan's natural increase rate will continue to be negative for the foreseeable future. It is quite evident that policies to increase the fertility rate in Japan need to be implemented by the government. Policies such as increasing the birth allowance given to women and creating laws preventing discrimination at the workplace toward working women who decide to have children might give women more incentive to have more children. But unfortunately with average worker salaries still decreasing and the average cost of raising children continuing to rise, it seems unlikely that women will suddenly decide to start having more children.

In order for rural areas to survive in a low-fertility rate environment, they must rely on net migration to sustain their populations. However, since the overall population of Japan will soon level off, followed by large projected decreases in the next fifty years, it is inevitable that only some rural areas will become "winners", with the rest simply fighting for their survival. And most of these winners will be determined likely not by natural increase, but rather by net migration. The number of new residents that will be attracted to any particular rural area will be heavily influenced by amenity movers, who are choosing where to relocate based on the level of amenities (e.g. the beauty of the natural environment, amount of open space, convenient roads, etc.) an area has, as well as lifestyle entrepreneurs, who are placing more importance on leading happy, self-satisfied lives than the money they could be earning from a routine business job.

Although up until now amenity movers have been clearly more numerous in Japan than lifestyle entrepreneurs (because the concept of the lifestyle entrepreneur is still in its infancy in Japan), this will likely change along with changes in societal values. With the continuing soft business environment and an ever-progressing amount of technology available, more lifestyle entrepreneurs are bound to emerge in rural areas across Japan in the coming years. Furthermore, this new brand of worker will be mainly focusing on where the best places are to open up their businesses (or side-businesses as the case might be), so the amenities found in many rural areas will definitely play a role in their decisions.

The key to rural area success, as shown by the two case studies and other illustrations presented throughout this paper, has been the enhancement of the quality of life in those areas. Of course, cooperation on the part of local governments, along with community involvement and support, is essential for successful, sustainable growth. Especially in the face of a decreasing national population, having a sustainable development strategy has become more essential for rural areas than ever before. The difference between having one versus not having one will likely decide the fate of many rural areas in Japan in the coming decades.

Endnotes

- 1) See Norman (2004): "Lifestyle Entrepreneurs, Amenity Movers, and Their Impact on Recent Population Trends in the Rural West, U.S.A."
- 2) See Ashford (2004), World Population Highlights, p.1.

- 3) According to the 2004 World Population Data Sheet, Japan's average life expectancy at birth is 82 years (78 years for men and 85 years for women), which is the highest in the world. (Population Reference Bureau 2004, p.10)
- 4) According to the World Fact Book, Japan's estimated fertility rate for 2004 is 1.38 percent, its lowest ever and one of the lowest in the world (ranked 201st out of 225 countries).
- 5) See Population Reference Bureau 2004, p.10.
- 6) This is the smallest yearly population percent increase in Japan since the end of the Second World War (The Japan Corner.com, 2002)
- 7) The national prefectural average population growth rate for 2001 was 0.17 percent. Only 9 out of 47 prefectures had population growth rates above the national average, while 26 out of 47 actually had negative growth rates. Every single one of the 26 prefectures with a negative population growth rate experienced negative net migration (equivalent to net out-migration).
- 8) Ishigaki Island is located 250 miles southwest of Okinawa Island and is the third largest island in Okinawa prefecture. Fifty percent of the island is mountainous and the coasts are covered by beautiful coral borders.
- 9) This would be approximately equal to a range of \$63,636 to \$72,727 a year, based on an exchange rate of \$1 = ¥110.
- 10) As translated by the author.
- 11) As translated by the author from "Survey of the residents of the Takayu District of Nishihara Village (Kumamoto prefecture, Japan) regarding migration, attitudes toward their living environment, and the development of industry" (Norman 2004).
- 12) Ibid.

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九州における田園アメニティが人口動向へ及ぼす影響について

ジョシュ・ノーマン

近年、ライフスタイル起業家およびアメニティ・ムーヴァのアメリカ合衆国西部ルーラル地域における人口動向への影響は、印象的で、これについてのいくつかの事例研究がある。このルーラル地域の人口の増加傾向は、単なる自然増加（出生者数－死亡者数）ではなく、純移動（転入－転出）によるものである。

しかし、日本の場合は、少子化と高齢化との進行で、自然増加率の減少をもたらし、近いうちに人口が減少に向かうことは間違いないであろう。結果として生じる人口減少の影響は、ルーラル地域が生き残るために純移動に頼るしかないという状況にある。人々は就職や高い教育を受けるために都会に移動する傾向があるため、流出による人口減少をとどめることは困難な状況にある。

本研究は、日本全体と県レベルでの近年の人口動向について、統計的な分析を試みた。そして、市町村レベルの人口動向を考慮しながら、ルーラル地域が今後、生き残るための方策として、アメニティのはたす役割の大切さについて考えてみることにした。アメニティが人々を引き付ける効果の事例として、熊本県西原村で行ったアンケート調査の結果も要約して述べることにする。

続いて、ルーラル地域の発展に伴い、いくつかの噴出してくると思われる課題についても述べる。それらは、アメニティの評価法の問題、自然環境の発展の不可逆性、旧住民と新住民の価値観の違いからくる摩擦などである。

要するに、ルーラル地域のすべては成功者になれない。地域を豊かにするためには、クオリティ・オブ・ライフ（QOL）の高まり（充実）である。それをするには、美しい自然環境、空地（オープンスペース）、レクリエーション活動や便利な交通網などのアメニティ等の効率的活用した取り組みが必要ではないだろうか。