Population: Population Shrinkage, Rural Depopulation, Aging Society

Introduction to Japanese Society Week 2
Philip Seaton

Population of Japan, 1872-2018

- Now dropping about 200,000 people a year.

Population Pyramid

- Source: "Statistical Handbook of Japan 2019" by Statistics Bureau, Japan

Changes in the Population Pyramid

- Source: "Statistical Handbook of Japan 2019" by Statistics Bureau, Japan

Proportion of Elderly Population

- Source: "Statistical Handbook of Japan 2019" by Statistics Bureau, Japan

Implications of an Aging Society

- Increased costs of pensions, care, medical treatment.
- Economic opportunities created by a genki, “leisure” class.
- Read the article by: Muramatsu & Akiyama, “Japan: Super-Aging Society Preparing for the Future.”
Natural Population Change

- Encourage fertility.
- Prevent mortality.
- Immigration of the young; migration of the old.
- Don’t worry, be happy!
- Seek out the “depopulation dividend”.

Japan’s Options

- Peter Matanle, “Towards an Asia-Pacific ‘Depopulation Dividend’ in the 21st Century”.
- National vs Regional vs Metropolitan depopulation.
- Japan’s urban hubs as population magnets.
- Why are we obsessed with growth, including population growth? Why aren’t we celebrating shrinkage?

The Depopulation Dividend

- The end of demographic growth = the end of economic growth? But who needs growth?
- GDP as a silly measure of well-being or happiness in society.
- Let’s hear a talk by Kate Raworth, a visionary economic thinker.
- Video: “A Healthy Economy Should Be Designed To Thrive, not Grow” (16 mins).

Doughnut Economics

- Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist, p. 11.

The Doughnut

- The Yubari Story
Hokkaido & Sapporo Populations

Hokkaido Peak: in 1997 at 5.7 million. Now shrinking.
Sapporo’s relentless rise (over 1.955 million in 2019).

A coal mining town in the mountains …
… famous for melons …

… and film …

The Yellow Handkerchief of Happiness
Locations are still a tourist site in Yubari

2007 Hollywood remake

… and population collapse.

Population of Yubari

Developing coal town
Postwar boom
War: coal a key resource
1959: From coal to oil
1995: From coal to oil
1997: Peak
What to do?
... and population collapse.

- Population of Yubari
- Prewar boom
- Developing coal town
- War coal a key resource
- 1950s: From coal to oil
- 1980s: "from mines to tourism"
- 2009: "from mines to tourism"

Tourism Strategy

- 1959: From coal to oil
- 1980s: "from mines to tourism"
- 2006: Financial collapse

Tourism Strategy

- Financial Folly

Financial Folly

- 2009: While crowds flock to the new Hanabatake Bokujo raw caramel factory ...

The Limits of Tourism

- ... the area around the Coal Mining Museum is almost deserted.

Financial Collapse
Financial Collapse

• Underlying causes:
  1. Depopulation, aging population: increased demand for services on a reduced tax base.

Yubari Strikes Back!

• A young, energetic mayor.
• A “compact city plan”.
• Shutting down wasteful sites.
• Attracting new business.
• Relocating the population to nearer the city centre.
• But, debt will continue for years … with a population of 50% over 65 years old (since May 2017).

Next time

• Multicultural Japan – minorities, urban vs rural, prefectural characteristics.
• Suggested Reading: Handbook Chapter 2; Sugimoto Chapters 1, 3, 7; Hendry Chapter 4; Kingston Chapters 16, 19.