

Introduction



Contemporary Japan is experiencing a tri-fold dilemma comprising of decreasing birth counts per year, an aging population and an ever-increasing migration of young workers from rural areas migrating to megacities. This paper will analyze the impact of that youth movement in both the rural, urban and megacity. Further, this paper will discuss the motivating factors in why young workers choose to migrate away from their hometowns and live in big cities. Additionally, this research will discuss the global impact of such migration in relation to the countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia. Lastly, this paper will list several possible solutions to alleviate the need of support for a depleting young workforce in rural areas as well as ways in which municipalities are taking in order to gain attention of new farmers wanting to live an agricultural lifestyle.

Behind the Movement: A Youth Perspective



Why are young people leaving their hometown?

- The intangible charm or attraction of a metropolis.
- Change in values than that of older generations.
- Pursuit of affluent living and more meaningful lives.
- Prospective job security and employment opportunity.
- Japanese regulations that constrict local rural businesses in hiring more local workers.
- The pull of familial, quasi familial, friends and social groups of moving into the city.
- More advanced and readily available life necessities.
- Decreasing economic viability within the countryside.
- Delayed development of infrastructures such as sewage, roads, medical services and cultural facilities.
- Obsolete form of manual labor due to the mechanization of agricultural labor.

Japanese Perception of Living in Rural Areas

"I just love the nature and how much space there is!" – Chiharu from Kashiwa, Chiba.

Reaching out to the community, colleagues and friends a common theme that arose when living in rural areas are that they preferred the quiet and simplicity of the area. Further, they enjoyed having the luxury of open fields and less densely populated regions. However, the lack of easy access to urban goods such as luxury brand items, international food markets and latest technology made it difficult for them to have the same luxuries as if living within a megacity. Yet, the overall perception of rural side is positive due to the closeness they have with nature and the freedom that open fields provide.

The Impact of Youth Movement



- Increasing number of dependencies emerging from rural municipalities.
- A hike in cost for the nation's long term care insurance plan.
- Heavy reliance on public funding.
- Government regulations or restrictions for eligibility for long term care services for the elderly.
- A change in Japanese foreign policy allowing more leniency for international caregivers such as nurses from the Philippines and Indonesia to work and stay in Japan
- The severed connection with nature and Japaneseness.

The Realities of Rural Lifestyle



- Farming life is bleak, filled with intense physical labor, the unpleasantness of living with livestock and composting night soil.
- Periodic deprivation as crop yields are heavily reliant on weather conditions.
- Carrying the stigma or status symbol of being a farmer is viewed negatively.
- Little financial gain for the amount of hard physical labor.
- The existence of rural impoverishment, landlessness, loss of labor opportunities
- Daily concern availability of healthcare facilities and job availability
- Hyakusho carries a negative social. Connotations due to connection with hardship.

The Media's Portrayal of Rural and Agriculture My Neighbor Totoro by Hayao Miyazaki

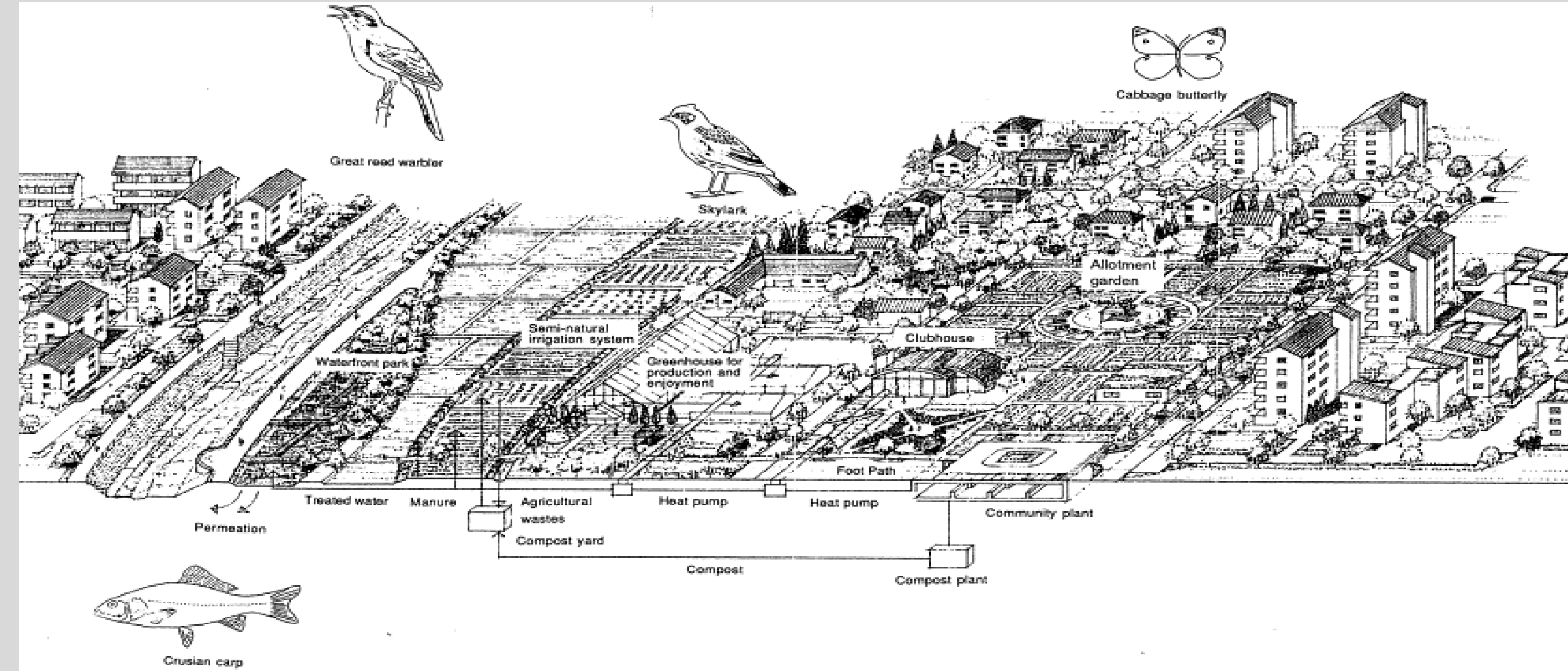
According to McGreevy, he claims that the illustrations found on movies, TV shows and documentaries paint the farm life in a light manner has had profound effect on the "awareness of the precariousness of Japanese agriculture" (McGreevy397). He claims that the idea of "connecting with nature...leading a simple, sustainable, self-sufficient lifestyle has increased the popularity of farming among people of all ages" (McGreevy 397). Such depictions made by the media of the farm lands can be found on Miyazaki's My Neighbor Totoro which depicts the close bond of the family with nature. Images below is Satsuki within the countryside.



My Neighbor Totoro is rich in highlighting the benefits of living in the countryside. McGreevy claims that families who are influenced by My Neighbor Totoro may "take up a farming life and move into the countryside" (McGreevy 397). Also, such advertisements in motion picture has proved to be effective in ushering in new generations of farmers in rural Japan. For instance, Nagano is a favored destination for new incomers...150 new independent farmers under the age of 40 come to Nagano every year for the past 10 years (McGreevy 397). To sum, films that depict a favorable view towards agricultural living are done so by showcasing the close bond between humans and nature and living a simple, self-efficient lifestyle which resonates with viewers who want to escape the drudgery of city life and be reconnected with nature and kami.

Primary Solution for Revitalizing Japanese Rural Areas: Eco-Villages

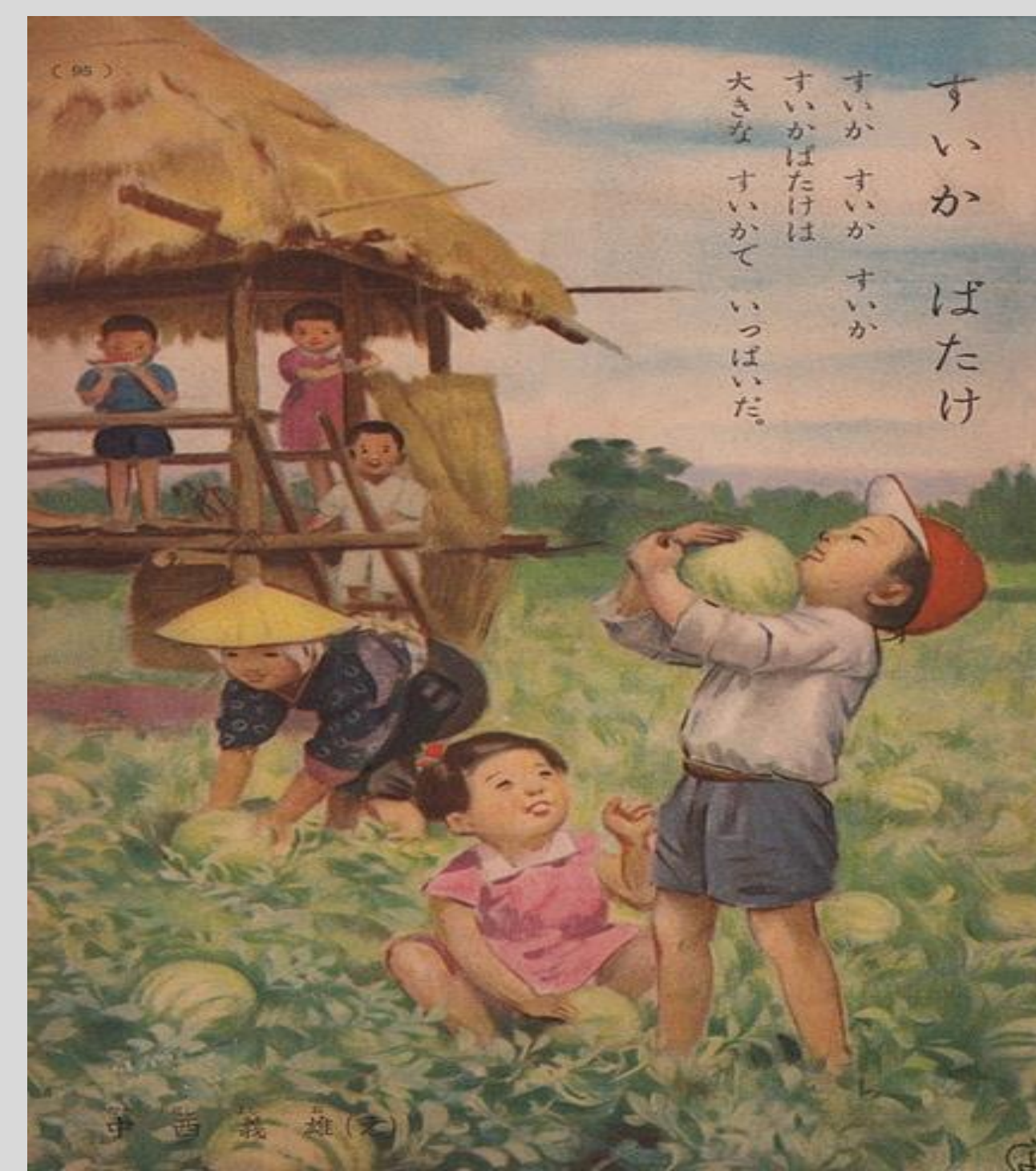
A solution to cease the rural-urban migration and reverse the flow would be the construction of eco-villages. Takeuchi proposes in order to revitalize the rural communities in Japan with an influx of young workers again is to "establish effective measures in managing and using natural environments and resources" (Takeuchi 178). In other words, a 'eco-village design'. Takeuchi defines an eco village as a "self-supporting area in which, the support of environmental conservation technologies can be realized" (Takeuchi 178). Furthermore, Takeuchi claims that upon establishing eco-villages; it will enable a uni-directional flow of migration from one prefecture to another.



Takeuchi asserts that "population flow has largely been a uni-directional flow from rural to urban areas" (Takeuchi 179). Further she argues that the creation of a "bi-directional flow between rural and urban communities" (179) is attainable through the development of transport and communication networks. In addition, Takeuchi states that by having these communication networks will be necessary for, "encouraging urbanites to stay in rural areas for medium and long periods of time, and even settle there" (Takeuchi 182). Tsuno agrees with the proposed plan as she states that the departure of young labor workers to megacities has had a "profound impact within the rural community" (Tsuno 8). The implementation of eco-villages with the end goal of uni-directional flow of migration would, according to Tsuno, "lessen the impact of the loss of future labor" (Tsuno 8). A benefit of uni-directional flow is the formation of relationship among urban neighbors in the form of exchanging goods (Tsuno 8). These assertions made by Tsuno in combination with Takeuchi's proposal enables a close bond and a greater sense of community amongst rural dwellers as well as alleviate the problem of losing young workers.

Secondary Solution: Rediscovering Japan and the Inner Japanese

In order for Japan to repopulate and sustain their rural areas, the municipalities must advertise the countryside of Japan as inviting as those done in the megacities. In order to attract more city dwellers back into rural areas; advertisements of 'Discovering Japan' were implemented (Dustinberre 309). This resulted in, "millions of young city dwellers traveling to rural parts of Japan to (re)discover and to have a sense of Japanese identity (Dustinberre 309). The image provided is one of Re-Discovering the Inner Japanese AD. It says, "Watermelons fields."



Tertiary Solution: Kurokawa Field Science Center

Secondary schools such as those in Kawasaki, near Tokyo reintroduce the concept of farming using state of the art technology as means of attracting future farmers. Image provided is the exhibition greenhouse which students can plant and harvest a variety of produce throughout the year. See video for more details regarding New Generational Farming.



Manga and Video Games as Media Representatives for Continued Agricultural Practice

Manga is very popular among the Japanese and so another method of popularizing the rural and agricultural life would be to include such lifestyle in a Japanese manga setting. Schwartz and Rubinstein claim that manga can be used as a tool to reflect Japanese rural communities. The message of reconnecting to old roots such as one's hometown can be accomplished through the use of manga. Schwartz and Rubinstein state that integrating the lifestyle of rural and agriculture through artistic drawings and an immersive storyline would establish a connection to Japanese readers that were originally from the countryside

Natsuko no Sake by Akira Oze



Silver Spoon by Hiromu Arakawa



Harvest Moon: Back to Nature



Conclusion

Youth migration in Japan from rural side to megacities is a phenomenon that has impacted Japan in a number of ways. The migration gave insight into Japan's shrinking work force within the rural area. Further, it highlighted a significant problem within the future regarding elderly care. Also, the youth migration challenges Japan's foreign policy in allowing more foreign workers into Japan. To add, it also challenges Japan's economic stability when knowing the decreasing work force and the aging population meant higher taxes in order to provide more healthcare benefits to the growing elderly population. Moreover, the phenomenon propagated new ideas of innovation when it comes to rural area developments and tourism such as Eco-Villages and the Re-discovering Japan AD campaign. Also, there is a reversal phenomenon in that city dwellers and re-entering the rural side in order to feel more connected with nature, get away from the city and feel a reconnection with their inner Japanese. This reversal movement is done in part due to Japan's use of media in movies, anime, manga and games which highlight the joys and simplicity of agricultural lifestyle. Overall, this project's goal was to focus on the crisis of youth migration in Japan but upon doing further research, it showed that there are a lot more works involved with one's decision where to live. Also, whether that young adult chooses to live in either rural or megacity; has the potential to impact not only his or her family but as well as the community, Japan as a nation and the world.

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Images of My Neighbor Totoro
<http://www.esficy.com/my-neighbor-totoro-wallpapers.html>

Images for Natsuko no Sake & Silver Spoon
<http://modernfarmer.com/2014/10/live-mangas-will-make-know-food-better/>

Image of Harvest Moon
<https://www.topbestalternatives.com/harvest-moon-back-to-nature/>