

Hyogo & Wakayama

JAPN 311

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March 17, 2016

There are various problems that affect Japan in a nationwide manner. Many of these issues are widely discussed in the world as international news, such as depopulation and the Fukushima earthquake crisis. Within each prefecture in Japan there are specific issues that create a greater problem for the nation as a whole. In Hyogo prefecture there are a great deal of people who are still living in emergency housing from the 1995 Hyogo earthquake. These houses were meant as a temporary option to allow time for those affected to find a new place to live. However there was a clause in the agreement that meant the occupants could only stay in the housing for up to 20 years. In Wakayama prefecture there is a not so similar issue with the dolphin hunting which has caused a great deal of controversy worldwide.

Kobe is one of the most important ports in Japan as it is connected to the Hanshin Industrial area. Hyogo prefecture Residents of public housing built after the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake are now being asked to move out after. More than 4,000 households are still living in housing the Hyogo Prefectural Government and about 60 percent of the residents are 65 or older. Like much of Japan, rural Hyogo is also dealing with the issue of an aging population and a loss of youth to bigger cities. When the earthquake struck Kobe, it hit a population not only of elderly but also minorities. The severity of the earthquake prevented these individuals from recovering their things, as the housing many were living had been built before World War II. This type of housing was very weak because it was built of wood that was not prepared for a natural disaster of this level. The narrow lanes also contributed to the death and destruction as their narrowness prevented entrance of emergency vehicles and there was much loss of life from being crushed. The issue with moving the tenants out of the emergency housing is that many of these tenants are over 65. In Hyogo as in many other prefectures in Japan, there is a depopulation issue where

younger, more financially stable generations have fled their home towns for urban city centers where reliable well paying work is more plentiful. More often than not, these individuals do not return in order to revitalize their hometown with their new skills and money.

In Wakayama there is a more unique issue occurring. There is still an issue of depopulation where younger people are leaving this isolated area for bigger cities to receive education. After completion of a program usually these generations do not return to their isolated birthplaces. 76.8 percents of the Hyogo area is covered mountains, as a result, most of the population lives along the coastal borders of the prefecture. The Japanese are deeply connected to their culture and traditional arts, this creates a desire to continue practicing even the most seemingly outdated or irrelevant practices continue on. In Taiji there is still the practice of dolphins hunting, where they are driven into a cove where they are killed. In 2009 a movie was produced showing the way these dolphins are hunted as per local tradition but it is portrayed as a senseless bloody hunt for sport rather than for sustenance. Locals claim that the dolphin hunting is actually a harvesting of a natural resource in order to sustain the local economy and they consider the dolphin a natural resource. September to March is the hunting season in which fisherman are allowed to hunt up to 2000 dolphins and porpoises for meat and other sales. This 17th century tradition is considered just as sacred as any other tradition found in other prefectures in Japan though animal activists argue that the hunting activities are actually driven by high bids for live animals. Activists focus on evidence that these dolphins are sold alive to the highest bidder, sometimes national museums or private buyers. A pack of dead dolphin meat can sell for 500-600 US dollars while a live dolphin can go for at the lowest 100,000 US dollars.

Japan is a country that is seemingly homogenous but still shares many similar social issues with the rest of the world. Popular issues that transcend international borders can give us insight into what the country must struggle with daily and annually but there are many different aspects of the country that still remain undiscovered until looked upon more carefully. In Hyogo, Kobe was affected by a disastrous 7.3 earthquake in 2005 which not only affected the older population but also a great deal of minorities. There were relief efforts launched to rebuild schools and other governmental institutions and programs but also programs for those who do not speak Japanese, programs offered in multiple languages for those seeking assistance. Similarly in Wakayama, Taiji is a city flanked by mountains so there is not a lot of space to have an extensive resources from agriculture. This leaves the ocean as the next closest resource for sustenance and injecting life into the local economy. Dolphin hunting is a tradition from the 17th century through which fisherman used tools relevant to that period to fish, which made the tasks a bit tougher than present day. Today these same fisherman have the advantage of many technological advances to assist them in driving the dolphins into the cover they have been fishing them out of for 400 years. This new benefit is a worry along with many others in the minds of activists for animal rights. The dolphins seem to be more than just a resource now and perhaps are more for monetary gain, which contradicts the argument that the people of Taiji simply want to keep their traditions and people alive with the gains from dolphin and porpoise hunting.

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