The Problem of Severe Rural Depopulation in Japan : from Retrospective Countermeasure to a Forward Looking Rural Policy

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For the last quarter-century the Japanese government has attempted to stem the flow of rural out-migration and alleviate the problems experienced in areas of severe rural depopulation by implementation of a series of **kaso** countermeasures. This paper demonstrates the failure of many of these schemes, insofar as village abandonment remains a real threat in many parts of the rural area. The mechanism of the kaso phenomenon is explored with reference to an actual case-study, and suggestions put forward for the possible direction of a more effective rural policy.

キーワード：いなかの人口、過疎対策、いなかの定義、集落の調査、いなかの政策
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Introduction

The problem of an ever widening imbalance in Japan's population distribution has been the central issue recognized in each of a series of Comprehensive National Development Plans formulated since the 1960s. The 'rural exodus', which had begun in the mid-fifties and continued through the decade of 'national income doubling', threatened Japan with severe loss of population in an area covering almost half the total land surface. Moreover, it brought about rapid and excessive concentration of population in a small number of major metropolitan districts centred, in particular, on Tokyo and Osaka. This state of affairs was clearly intolerable in a nation constantly reminded of the 'scarcity' of its resources and of its relative lack of adequate social infrastructure facilities.

By 1970 the terms **kamitsu** (urban overcrowding), and **kaso** (severe rural depopulation)[1] had been coined in the Japanese language, reflecting the perceived seriousness of the situation, and measures had been drawn up to cope with the problems. In May, 1970 the Diet promulgated the "Emergency Measures Law for Countermeasures in **Kaso** Districts". Although there was no precise counterpart legislation for districts suffering the effects of urban overcrowding, a number of laws had been, or were in the process of being formulated for the alleviation of specific related problems such as pollution, industrial relocation, and improvements to urban social infrastructure. Apparently disparate in nature, these laws in fact shared a common vision and set of guiding principles, eloquently embodied in former Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei's popular plan for "Building a New Japan : A Plan for Remodelling the Japanese Archipelago" (1972). In outline, his vision was to restore a more balanced regional distribution of Japan's population (and, by extension, wealth) by greatly improving transportation links across the country and by encouraging manufacturing industry to relocate outside the congested metropolitan centres. New regional metropolitan centres could thereby be created, attracting 'return' migrants from the overcrowded urban areas, and encouraging potential rural out-

migrants to stay where they were. The problems of **kamitsu** and **kaso** would be solved 'in a single stroke'.

The '**Kaso** Law' of 1970 allocated central government funds for spending programmes aimed at arresting further population decline in just over one thousand officially designated **kaso** districts. In line with Tanaka's vision for building a new Japan, almost three-quarters of this budget was to be spent on transportation improvements and the promotion of industry in the rural area. The original 'ten-year plan' has been subsequently renewed twice and, despite some modifications to the law, and the fact that the total budget allocated for **kaso** countermeasures has increased more than fourfold, these same two items still account for some 70% of all expenditure. Yet it remains an incontrovertible fact that in the great majority of officially designated **kaso** districts depopulation continues, apparently unabated. Of the 1,199 municipalities in Japan which currently hold this designation, (and which have ever been termed **kaso** districts), only 68 (5.7%) now report an increase in population. All others still experience population decline, and 10% of all **kaso** districts now have populations less than half the level they had been in 1965 (Kokudo-cho, 1995).

This paper considers in depth the impact of **kaso** countermeasures on population change in areas which experienced the 'rural exodus' of the 1950s and 1960s. Having already noted that most of these areas still suffer population decline, this consideration will inevitably raise questions against the appropriateness of the countermeasures originally adopted, and against those in operation now. It questions in particular the notion that, by adoption of an all-encompassing policy for 'comprehensive national development', the twin problems of **kamitsu** and **kaso** can be solved simultaneously. By implication, it questions whether or not the mechanisms of the depopulation process in rural areas were ever fully understood in the first place by the lawmakers in government. In an attempt to cast light on these issues, by studying the actions and reactions of villagers involved in and affected by the exodus, it becomes apparent that **kaso** countermeasures were introduced too late to halt the decline already well under way. Moreover, it appears too late now to continue these same countermeasures in the hope that rural depopulation will eventually be arrested. Instead of countermeasure, the only way forward to a viable future for these areas, still covering almost half the total land surface of Japan, is to devise a forward-looking rural policy which aims at population stability coupled with local area sustainability. The target for such a policy has to be the young people still left in **kaso** districts. A little over one quarter of the total population of **kaso** districts is currently under the age of 25, compared to 57% in 1960 (Kokudo-cho, 1995; 39). There is still time, therefore, for the goal of rural area sustainability to be achieved, but this time is running short, and the time for rethinking future strategy is now.

The Rural Exodus

The rural exodus of the 1950s and 1960s was so intense and effects so far-reaching that it has been described as "the great movement of a nation" (Imai, 1968; 17). Although it is not possible to quantify precisely the number involved, records derived from the Basic Population Registers suggest that the number of inter-municipality migrants increased steadily each year from 4.8 million in 1956 to an all-time peak of 8.54 million in 1973. The great majority of these migrants left rural homes to live in the cities. Sometimes a whole class of school leavers would depart the village together, waved off by their parents and neighbours. Envious younger siblings did not have long to wait for their turn to come. For the great majority of these young migrants the move was one-way only. They would not return to the village for the rest of their working lives. Only time will tell if retirement eventually entices them back to their ancestral roots - their **furusato**. The inclusion of farm inheritors (**atotsugi**) in the exodus crippled the ability of villages to replace these lost generations. Now, inhabited mainly by old people, these villages still suffer population decline, though death rather than out-migration has become the main agent of loss. Unless the **kaso** problem can be solved, many of these villages will face the real possibility of total abandonment in the near future.

The first official recognition of the negative impacts of this outflow on the rural areas was in 1967 at a meeting of the Forum for Economic Co-operation (Imai, 1968; 8). Within the next two years the issue was considered serious enough to be brought to the attention of the national legislature, and in May, 1970 the first '**Kaso** Law' was promulgated. The original **kaso** plan had been envisaged to operate over ten years, from 1970 to 1979. The definition of 'areas suffering severe rural depopulation' was based at the level of the municipality (**shi-cho-son**). Those which had suffered population decline greater than 10% in the previous 5 year inter-censal period (or, according to the results of forthcoming census counts in 1970 and 1975), and which met required fiscal criteria, were awarded official designation as '**kaso chitai**'. As such they became eligible for a share of the JPY7.9 trillion package made available by central government for the promotion of local industries and the improvement of local social infrastructures. That the problems of rural exodus had

not been overcome, however, despite publication of various population indicators suggesting the contrary[2], was brought to the attention of central government by various concerned local authorities and regional organizations in the late 1970s. The response by government was effectively to extend the period of the plan, at the same time relaxing the criteria for designation as **kaso chitai**, and greatly increasing the funding available for appropriate 'countermeasures'. That funding continues to be available to this day when, currently, a total of just under JPY35 trillion has been made available under the 'third **Kaso** Law', operational from 1990 to 1999, for the alleviation of severe rural depopulation in 1,199 designated municipalities. Despite the enormous sums of money involved, a total of only 68 **kaso** municipalities have reached the point of turnaround where they are now experiencing modest increases in population.

Kaso Countermeasures:

1. Transport and Communications.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of various **kaso** countermeasures it is necessary to review the ways in which money budgeted for this purpose has been spent (Table 1). In the budgets for all three ten-year phases of the '**Kaso** Law' the dominant item has been transport and communications improvements. While this includes provisions for such as the dissemination of radio and other communications technology, the overwhelming bulk of expenditure has been on road construction or road widening. In the first twenty years after 1970 this item consistently accounted for just under one half of total expenditure, although the proportion is expected to drop to just over one third of total expenditure in the period 1995 to 1999. Nevertheless it remains the largest single item of government expenditure on **kaso** countermeasures.

That one of the greatest needs for the improvement of quality of life in depopulating rural districts was the improvement of local accessibility is beyond doubt (Irving, 1984). In 1975, one fifth of all agricultural settlements in Japan still had unsurfaced roads (Nogyo Shuraku Kenkyukai, 1977; 241). Typically, the worst roads were found in the most remote areas. The same survey reveals that compared to 37% of agricultural settlements which were located within 30 minutes travelling time from the nearest DID, 27.8% were located more than one hours travelling time away. Yet, while only 13% of the settlements closest to Densely Inhabited Districts had completely unsurfaced roads, the figure was 29% for the more isolated group of

Table 1 : Budget allocations for kaso countermeasures 1970-1999

	1970-1979	1980-1984	1985-1989	1990-1994	1995-1999
Promotion of industry	17524	22988	25269	43394	56889
	22.2	27.8	27.8	30.1	27.8
Transport and Communications facilities	39197	39292	46650	58146	71619
	49.6	47.6	51.3	40.3	35
Improving the living environment	8945	8857	9126	20098	42807
	11.3	10.7	10	13.9	21
Welfare for the elderly	0	0	0	4140	7360
	0	0	0	2.9	3.6
Health facilities	953	1333	1124	2122	3665
	1.2	1.6	1.2	1.5	1.8
Promotion of education and culture	9470	9289	7796	13552	17340
	12	11.2	8.6	9.4	8.5
Village improvements	190	96	316	235	1508
	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.7
Other	2739	780	754	2469	3237
	3.5	1	0.8	1.7	1.6
Total	79018	82636	91033	144056	204425
	100	100	100	100	100

Unit : JPY hundred million, percent
Source : Kokudo-cho, 1995

settlements. The problems associated with remoteness and poor roads were highlighted in one of the earliest detailed studies of the **kaso** problem, by Adachi, in 1973. One village he surveyed, in Yasaka-mura, Shimane Prefecture, was situated seven kilometres from the municipal offices and, since the road was neither suitably paved nor wide enough, there was no inter-connecting bus service. In fact, parts of the road were impassable even to cars. This meant that services could not be delivered directly, and daily newspapers and mail, for example, had to be collected from the next village, normally by children on their way home from school. Needless to say, the difficulty of transporting bulky essential items such as propane gas cylinders caused major problems, especially for old people. Similarly, emergency services could not gain ready access to the village centre and if, for instance, a fire broke out, villagers had to be left to their own resources. It was this degree of inaccessibility which contributed above all else to severe depopulation in the village (Adachi, 1973).

Although no precise figures seem to exist on the number of settlements inaccessible by car, either before or following the enactment of **kaso** countermeasures, there is no doubt the general situation of access to such places has improved considerably since 1970. In 1993 alone, for example, over 87 km of new local roads were built by municipal (shi-cho-son) authorities in **kaso** districts and a further 1,322 km of municipal roads were 'improved', while 1,625 km of pedestrian paving were constructed (Kokudo-cho, 1995, 144). The total amount available for expenditure by municipal authorities on local roads in 1993, however, is little more than half that available to prefectural authorities under the present phase of the **kaso** law for the improvement of trunk roads and national highways[3]. In other words, the main emphasis has been in recent years to improve the wider network linking remote rural areas to major cities, rather than to focus on local road network improvements (ibid., 146-7). This is reflected in the fact that for all classes of roads the rates of improvements (ie. the percentage of total lengths of roads which have been improved) are considerably higher for non-**kaso** districts than for **kaso** districts (ibid., 104). Moreover, measures of accessibility including the time taken travelling from **kaso** districts to the nearest urban centre, or to the prefectural office in the prefectural capital, show that between 1985 and 1994 the greatest degree of improvement occurred in those districts already closest to these urban centres (ibid., 106).

There are a number of possible conclusions one can draw from all this. It could be argued, for example, that since the density of the road network is likely to be higher in areas closest to urban centres than in areas further away, the actual expenditure on road improvements is bound to be greater. But this ignores the fact that the huge amounts of money spent on these improvements have been earmarked specifically as the main element of the **kaso** countermeasures budget. The rationale would seem to be, therefore, that the quality of life in **kaso** districts will be improved if speed of access to major urban centres is improved. This may indeed be so for farmers who wish to commute on a daily basis to full-time work off the farm, and it may make regular shopping trips to the cities a little easier, but is quality of life improved to such an extent that population levels begin to stabilize? Except for cases where **kaso** districts have repopulated due to suburban developments made possible by these road improvements, the answer is surely no - since it is already known that the great majority of **kaso** districts are continuing to depopulate.

Reference to an actual example may help clarify why this is the case. Route 1, a Kyoto prefectural trunk road, links the urban centre of Ayabe with the severely depopulating rural district of Kanbayashi[4], about 35 minutes away by car, and continues on to the city of Obama, in Fukui Prefecture, about 50 minutes away from Kanbayashi. Over the last ten years a number of sections of this road have been improved, generally by widening, recambering, and by adding a pedestrian pavement. Much of this work has been carried out in conjunction with large scale replotment of the rice fields which lie on either side of the highway. The programme of improvements continues at this time of writing, but comparatively narrow stretches of road remain unaltered where the physical terrain makes widening difficult and, more significantly, where the road is effectively the main street passing through the centre of some of the larger villages en route, and where the houses and shops front directly on to the street.

Leaving aside the problem of halting at roadworks, and the necessary delays thus incurred, there is no doubt that the drive to Ayabe is generally much smoother than previously. On a typical day, most drivers probably also notice a faster journey time than before, though only by a few minutes at most. Since the actual line of the road has not been altered, and there has been no reduction in the number of traffic lights or other obstacles, the faster travelling time can only have been achieved through greater average speed of journey. Better opportunities for overtaking slower vehicles must be one explanation for this, but it does not alter the fact that vehicles are travelling most sections at faster speeds than before the 'improvements'. The road is therefore noisier than previously, and certainly more dangerous to elderly local pedestrians who, regardless of the provision of a pedestrian pavement, have to cross the

road frequently. Particular danger points are at the approaches to, and on, the narrower stretches of road, especially where it passes through village centres.

Whether or not a direct consequence of the road improvements, another change has been the great increase in volume of traffic along the road, particularly through-traffic (including ever larger and ever faster haulage trucks). Ironically, this, together with the increased speeds of vehicles, has been observed to have increased the feeling of isolation of some villagers. As cars and trucks speed by without stopping, bringing nothing whatsoever of benefit to the villagers, the road may be perceived as a kind of barrier between them and the 'outside world' rather than as a means to integrate more effectively into the wider community.

Weighed against the advantage of slightly faster access time to the nearest urban centre, the negative aspects of road improvement, at least as far as villagers along the wayside are concerned, seem sufficient to draw a question mark against the appropriateness of spending such a large proportion of the **kaso** countermeasures budget in this fashion. This is especially so when it is considered that an increasingly large proportion of villagers in **kaso** districts are disqualified from driving themselves because of old age and infirmity. Young people not yet old enough to drive also have to rely on public transport, often on a daily basis in order to get to high school. In the case of villagers living in Kanbayashi, road improvements have produced no noticeable difference to the bus service on which they rely to get to Ayabe. The economics of rural bus services dictate that routes tend to be served infrequently, and that they are expensive - and so it is the case here. The return trip costs JPY2,000, adding up to JPY10,000-12,000 per week for high school students. Even after purchase of a student concessionary season ticket, the cost still amounts to JPY100,000 per semester, or about one-quarter the level of a typical monthly salary. As one rueful villager, who had two children at high school, expressed: "It'd cost less to send them all the way to Kyoto". Although not strictly accurate, this statement is closer to the reality of the **kaso** phenomenon than planners who believe that 'road widening is the solution to all problems' may care to realise.

2. The Promotion of Industry in Rural Areas.

Improved accessibility should not be viewed solely from the perspective of the villager wishing to get to the nearest urban place more easily, however. Crucial to Tanaka Kakuei's plan, for example, was the notion that to achieve a more balanced regional distribution of people and resources there should be better access from the cities to surrounding rural areas. Specifically, Tanaka envisaged a grand movement of light and medium scale manufacturing enterprises out of the heavily congested and polluted cities into the countryside where land was cheap and plentiful, and labour was in abundance. Quite simply, if rural people could be provided with alternative employment prospects, rural depopulation would cease. This notion has been the basic rationale behind all four subsequent Comprehensive National Development Plans and, not surprisingly, the 'promotion of industry' in **kaso** districts has consistently been a major item of expenditure in the **kaso** countermeasures budget (Table 1).

Notwithstanding these intentions, the primary target for 'promotion of industry' expenditure has been to strengthen the existing, traditional economic base in **kaso** districts, namely primary sector industries. In 1990-95, as much as 92.8% of the prefectural budget for this item was allocated for improvements in agriculture, forestry and fisheries (Kokudo-cho, 1995; 137). As far as agriculture is concerned, much of this allocation has been spent on the timely, but extremely expensive operation of field replotment (see Latz, 1989). The realignment and consolidation of rice paddies makes cultivation easier and more profitable for farmers by increasing the efficiency of farm mechanization. Although production may be halted for a year whilst replotment takes place, most farmers doubtless feel their well-being has improved in the final outcome. The problem is, given the current background in Japan of rice production cutbacks; the small scale of average landholdings; and the greatly reduced labour requirement in rice cultivation following the widespread adoption of mechanization in the 1970s, most farms can be operated by a single individual, often only at weekends. The agricultural labour force in Japan today is dominated by people in their sixties and older, that is, the generation who chose not to, or could not, join the rural exodus. Their sons, daughters, and grandchildren have no place in agriculture simply because there is no room for them. These are the generations which need to be targeted in the **kaso** countermeasures programme, so it stands to reason that emphasis needs to be placed on providing non-agricultural, alternative employment opportunities if these people are to remain in the rural area.

It would be quite wrong, however, to suggest that little attempt has been, or is being made to attract other industrial sectors into the rural area. By September,1994 a total of 442 industrial estates had been established in **kaso** districts throughout the country (approximately one for every three **kaso** municipalities), with an average available ground floor space of 116,000 square metres (Kokudo-cho, 1995; 76). The number of new establishments in **kaso** districts rose steadily each

year, from 139 in 1975 to 298 in 1987, before surging to 596 in 1990 - the peak year of the so-called 'bubble economy'. After the 'bubble' burst in 1991, the number fell to 271 in 1993 (ibid., 77). Not all these new establishments were engaged in manufacturing, however, and of particular interest is the fact that the proportion of non-manufacturing establishments has maintained a constant increase through these years, from 13.9% in 1975 to 36.9% in 1993. This may be in part due to the fact that manufacturing firms are, in general, less flexible in their choice of new location (because of their reliance on sub-contracting in the manufacturing process and the need to locate near customers under the 'just-in-time' system of delivery), or it could be because the nature of the labour pool in rural areas has changed over the years, especially with regard to educational qualifications[5]. Worthy of note here, however, is the fact that, whereas the number of people in **kaso** districts employed in the primary sector decreased by almost 1.5 million between 1970 and 1990, the number employed in secondary sector industries actually increased by 233,000 over the same period (ibid., 58).

There has to be a feeling of encouragement derived from these figures, for they seem to point a way towards a future for **kaso** districts. At the same time, cautionary questions need to be asked. Where exactly are these investments in new manufacturing enterprise located, and what exactly is the scale and type of operation? To what extent is location limited to areas immediately adjacent to established metropolitan centres? Are they simply another manifestation of the 'doughnutization' phenomenon? Are manufacturing establishments really prepared to locate in the most remote, severely depopulating parts of the Japanese countryside? Answers to these questions require further research and, even at that stage, interpretation of results may still be fraught with difficulty. **Kaso** districts have a higher than national average proportion of small-scale enterprises (Kokudo-cho, 1995; 73), many of which are family based operations based on traditional crafts. Such operations can be the easiest to register, and to de-register. They can also be the most susceptible to collapse in times of economic recession, or, they can prove to be the most resilient. In the latter case, collapse may eventually come with the retirement, or death, of the operators - if they have failed to secure succession of the enterprise - although at this point in time, only time itself can tell, for many operations continue to be run by elderly people. The point is that published statistics in this field do not elaborate on the exact nature of the enterprises concerned. The unanswered question is: "To what extent is the manufacturing sector moving into **kaso** districts to the degree that population outflow is halted and, if possible, reversed?". The best indication available at this time of writing is from a survey of the 68 out of 1199 **kaso** municipalities which are now experiencing population increase. In a multiple answer questionnaire, only 8.8% of responses suggested that the reason for reversal from the **kaso** situation was the establishment in the municipality of new manufacturing enterprises (ibid., 124).

The same survey indicates that the most common reason given for the change from depopulation to population increase was the construction of 'new towns' and public housing estates (32.4%), and 'dormitory town' developments as part of the suburbanization process around major cities (20.6%). Another major reason given, however, seems to have affected **kaso** districts rather more remote from urban areas. This was 'resort' development and the promotion of tourism related industries (30.9%). **Kaso** municipalities around the country have long recognized that remoteness and relative inaccessibility, and, in many areas, heavy snow in winter, are not conducive to the promotion of modern manufacturing industry. Rather, the emphasis should be placed on the exploitation of these 'disadvantages', by viewing them as a valuable natural resource which has the potential to attract urban capital. Improved standards of living nationally, and an increase in available leisure time have created a boom time in the tourist industry, so it seems that all **kaso** districts have had to do is construct appropriate facilities and advertise the charms of their area. From rather tentative beginnings in the 1970s, when attractions were aimed towards hikers and other sportsmen and women (especially golf, skiing, and fishing), the range has now broadened as more and more money from the **kaso** countermeasures budget is directed towards tourist promotion. In the current phase of the **kaso** plan, this is now the largest single item for local government expenditure under the heading 'promotion of industry' (Kokudo-cho, 1995; 143), and has been matched by a reported increase in the number of visitors to **kaso** districts from 271 million in 1985 to 359 million in 1993 (ibid., 79).

In terms of numbers of individual projects initiated, sports related facilities still dominate, with camping and skiing at the head of the list of local government sponsored projects. Closely related are projects to establish public parks (often theme parks), nature trails through protected woodland, and hiking and cycling trails. More recently, there has been a remarkable boom in the numbers of museums and art galleries opened, and in the number of sites selected for historical preservation. All these developments have had the spin-off effect of encouraging private investment in the opening of more than 13,000 hotels and **minshuku** in

kaso municipalities (Kokudo-cho, 1995; 82).

There is no doubt that all these developments are a major boon to all Japanese people, providing not only a vastly increased choice of how to spend leisure time (and thus possibly relieving some of the pressure on the traditionally more popular sites), but also increasing awareness of the natural environment and of Japans cultural heritage. The specific impact on **kaso** districts has to be considered very carefully, however. First, there is the danger of 'spreading out' the potential gains from tourism too thinly. Tourists may become 'spoilt for choice' and thus, because of time and economic considerations, prefer to go to nearer places (to the cities) than to those in more remote places. The way round this problem has been for **kaso** municipalities to try to think of something unique to their area, for which there is no competition for tourists elsewhere. The range of attractions on offer, therefore, includes many which must be praised as innovative, and others which are, frankly, bizarre. A case in point is Nakatosa-cho, in Kochi Prefecture, a **kaso** municipality which "using a grant of JPY100 million from the central government" manufactured a solid-gold fish (a bonito) "as a tourist attraction". The scheme clearly did not meet up to expectations, for the town sold it to the Prefecture the following year for JPY70 million (The Daily Yomiuri, 14 Sept. 1995).

The second difficulty relates to misguided estimates of the potential number of tourists to each project site. Over-confidence in the drawing potential of many sites has resulted in the construction of some very grand facilities, using all the money made available from central government. Provision for maintenance of these facilities, however, is entirely dependent on visitor numbers. If these are lower than anticipated, adequate maintenance cannot be continued and, worse still, other operating expenses such as staffing cannot be met on a regular, year-round basis. The result is partial closure of the facility, or conversion to another use - either of which further reduces the attractive potential to tourists. Before long the municipality finds itself 'feeding a white elephant' - something which does nothing to improve the population situation in **kaso** districts, rather, rates of depopulation are likely to worsen.

The third point relates to the nature of tourist visits. The only practical value of attracting 'visitors' lies in encouraging them to spend money in the rural area. Entrance fees, meal and beverage provision, and souvenir purchases are the most common means to do this, but the propensity for spending is significantly increased if visitors can be encouraged to spend at least one night in local accommodation. Unfortunately, only one in every five or six visitors stops over as a 'guest' for the night in **kaso** districts, and these people usually in 'resort' areas centred around special facilities such as ski-slopes and hot springs. Moreover, the total money spent by day-trippers has not increased at the same rate as the number of day-trips actually made (Kokudo-cho, 1995; 79-80), indicating that visitors have either become more frugal over time, or that they plan visits to a number of facilities in different municipalities during the course of a single trip.

Thus, the overall benefits of tourist promotion in **kaso** districts are likely to be somewhat lop-sided. In a few municipalities, particularly those blessed with an exceptionally good natural environment (eg. good snow conditions, or natural hot springs), the development of tourist facilities will encourage a regular influx of overnight stayers who spend sufficient to provide for a significant increase in employment opportunities, to the extent that local population levels stabilize, or even begin to increase. Such is the case in one of the communities studied by Moon in Gunma Prefecture, where a particularly strong contrast is drawn between the village which opted for ski-resort development, and a neighbouring community which deliberately chose not to, with the consequence of continued population decline (Moon, 1989)[6]. In the majority of cases, tourist promotion has likely produced at least one fine facility, of which the local villagers can be proud. It attracts sufficient visitors each year to ensure that basic operating costs can be met, thus allowing employment of a handful of full-time staff and a few more part-timers. These jobs are welcome, and timely, but there are not enough created to have any positive effect on other villages in the same municipality which are some distance away from the facility. Here, depopulation continues as before. Finally, there are those municipalities where hopes have been high, but the planning awry. Money which could have been used in a more positive fashion has been wasted, and more good money follows. More people leave.

3. Social infrastructure improvements

The final major item of **kaso** countermeasure expenditure for consideration here encompasses virtually all the remaining categories in Table 1. In the budget allocations 'social infrastructure improvements' are a discrete category (although sub-divided in the third '**Kaso** Law' to specify expenditure for welfare provision, especially for the aged), in addition to 'health care', 'education', and 'village facilities'. Here they are all treated as one.

Rural areas are usually characterized by low population densities. Compared to urban areas the cost of social infrastructure improvements is considerably higher per individual, therefore, and investment efficiency is low. If money is insufficient to meet the

very high cost of improvements (and this is usually the case in rural areas lacking external support since the tax base - or the number in the productive workforce - is also relatively low), then improvements are not made. As a result, rural areas tend to lag behind urban areas in terms of quantity and quality of social infrastructure investment. The type of social infrastructure mentioned here includes fundamentals such as health and education, which are considered basic requirements to social well-being or an adequate quality of life (OECD, 1973). If an individual perceives that he enjoys a lower quality of life than his fellow countrymen living in another part of Japan, he may stop to ponder his constitutional right of equality, but more likely he will wish to move to that place where his anticipated quality of life is better (Irving, 1984). This is one of the most important factors underlying the rural exodus of the 1950s and 1960s - a time when central government was diverting all available support and resources to the further advancement of the urban area[7]. Of course, as rural depopulation continued, the problem of providing adequate services to the rural area worsened further.

After 1970 central government responded to the rural dilemma by making appropriate allocations in the **kaso** countermeasures budget. In effect, it was subsidizing parts of the rural area for services that could not otherwise be provided. Unfortunately, these subsidies were too little and too late. In order to prevent further depopulation the intention from the outset should have been to catch up with urban social infrastructure service levels, as quickly as possible, and thenceforth maintain a parity. The reality is that rural service provision still lags considerably behind the national average on almost all indicators (Kokudo-cho, 1995; 93), and that rural depopulation continues apace.

There are, however, valid counter-arguments to this point of view. Some may suggest, for example, that rural areas should maintain a certain degree of 'backwardness', since this is a 'charm' that may attract reverse migration by those who feel they and their children are being brought up in an 'over-urbanized' environment. Although this reasoning is not stated explicitly, it surely underlies the typical pattern of responses given in a number of nationwide surveys regarding possible future migration intentions of individuals living in metropolitan areas (eg. Kokudo-cho Keiga-Chosei-kyoku, 1982; 30-31, and 1995; 34). A second, and not entirely unrelated argument, is that some service facilities in the rural area may be better equipped than in the contemporary urban setting, and that this fact may attract reverse migration in future. A particular case in point is the provision of facilities for the elderly, an item which since 1990 has been specifically highlighted in the **kaso** countermeasures budget.

Of all the negative impacts of the rural exodus the problem of rapid ageing of rural populations is probably the most serious to date. Although ageing is recognised as a nationwide problem in Japan, with the ratio of elderly people (aged 65 and over) expected to peak around the year 2025 at just under one in four of total population, the situation in **kaso** districts is a ratio already at one in five of the population (1990) - and worsening rapidly (Kokudo-cho, 1995; 39). The reason is simple. The rural exodus removed virtually a whole generation of young people from the rural area, resulting in a sharp fall in local birth rates. The 'stayers' were people aged 25 and above in the mid 1950s, and it is this group who have now reached retirement age. With population 'balance' in **kaso** communities completely destroyed, and with the demise of the traditional three-generation household, there are not enough younger people, especially younger family members, left to look after the elderly. The solution, in fact the only viable solution, is to construct day centres and 'homes' for the elderly, and to expand community nursing services. Such programmes are now well underway in the rural area, and some fine facilities have been established. The outcome from this is a possible change in the pattern of retirement migration. In the 1970s it was not uncommon for elderly people no longer capable of looking after themselves to leave the village to live with their children or grandchildren in the cities (Irving, 1984). Now, it seems a real possibility that aged people will choose to stay in their ancestral homes and, moreover, that the children may return to the village upon their own retirement from urban occupations (Fieldwork, 1995). The provision of care facilities for their own old age must surely be a significant 'pull' factor for this kind of return migration.

The desirability of providing care facilities for the elderly cannot be denied, but it must be realised that this kind of expenditure does nothing to tackle the underlying cause of the **kaso** problem, namely, the out-migration of young people from rural areas. If anything, young people, especially 'inheritors' (**atotsugi**), may be encouraged to leave if they know that the onus of caring for elderly parents is being alleviated in this way. In this sense, the provision of welfare facilities for the aged can be said to epitomize the conceptual weakness of **kaso** 'countermeasures'. By curing the symptoms of severe rural depopulation, and not the cause, the situation can only get worse in future. This may in turn trigger the need for further 'countermeasures' to cope with the worsening problem. The very notion of employing 'countermeasures' as a reaction to an existing situation is therefore at fault. What is needed is a forward looking rural 'policy' which aims to remove or

correct the underlying causes of the **kaso** phenomenon. One reason this has not been forthcoming so far is that it seems the underlying causes and the actual mechanism of severe rural depopulation have not yet been fully comprehended.

Understanding the kaso phenomenon

The failure to understand the mechanism of the **kaso** phenomenon can be attributed almost entirely to the use of inappropriate definitions of the 'rural' area to analyze the impact of the rural exodus and the issues underlying severe rural depopulation. Although the problem of definition has been widely recognised, most analysts opt for one of a range of 'less than satisfactory' definitions of the rural area because of the ease of data collection and presentation. Unfortunately this can lead to some highly misleading conclusions being drawn. "Rural to urban migration at an end" declared one newspaper headline in 1977 (Mainichi Daily News, 23rd May, 1977). In 1985, no less a person than the Director-General of the Institute of Population Problems (Ministry of Health and Welfare) declared that, as a result of **kaso** countermeasures and other policies for rural improvement:

"These actions have proved successful .... The differences between urban and rural areas .... have disappeared, and it can be said that rural areas are actually superior in terms of housing and living conditions to urban areas" (Okazaki, 1985; 97).

In many studies of the 'problem of severe depopulation in *rural* areas', attempts are made to analyze the problem from a national, or inter-regional, perspective. Whether for reasons of ease of data collection, historical or academic precedent, administrative simplicity, or simply for the sake of brevity, analysis is based on a division of Japan into broad regions - usually about twelve. These regions are then classified as 'metropolitan' (ie. those with Tokyo, Osaka, or Nagoya as their core), and 'non-metropolitan', or 'peripheral'. By implication, at this level, Japan's rural area is taken to be anywhere and everywhere in the 'non-metropolitan' area. These regions are defined according to the boundary lines of their constituent prefectures, of which there are 47 in Japan. It goes without saying that these boundary lines, drawn up amidst much controversy, confusion, and political bitterness in the latter quarter of the 19th century, have little bearing on the urban-rural dichotomy, much less continuum, that might exist today.

The most common method, however, is to use the municipality as the basis for definition of the rural area. The 3,236 municipalities in Japan are each classified as one of three types: city (**shi**), town (**cho**), and village (**son**). Traditionally, the city municipalities have been taken to define the 'urban' area and town and village municipalities are taken as the 'rural' area. Although inadequacies have been recognised with this definition because of, for example, the incorporation of large tracts of rural land and villages into many **shi** (eg. Ayabe-shi) following the 1953 Law for the Merger of Municipalities, most researchers prefer to stick with it for administrative convenience and ease of data collection (Itoh, 1985; 130). Furthermore, it is at the municipality level that **kaso** districts are defined.

The problems with this are two-fold. First, all municipalities, whether city, town, or village, are likely to include a wide variety of settlement types - from hamlet to village to rural market town, and so on up the urban hierarchy. This greatly devalues the usefulness of aggregate statistics showing, for example, population size, and economic, social and environmental conditions for the municipality as a whole. A particularly relevant example of this problem derives from a study of 168 randomly selected village communities (**nogyo shuraku**) in Kyoto and Shiga Prefectures between 1965 and 1975. 13% of these villages were found to have suffered population decline of **kaso** proportions during this period, a figure which exactly matched the proportion of **kaso** municipalities in the two prefectures. However, only one-third of these villages were actually located in **kaso** municipalities, the rest being in municipalities which were not officially suffering severe rural depopulation (Irving, 1984; 120). In other words, a considerable quantity of significant and highly relevant data was being lost at the municipal level of data aggregation.

Second, in order to understand the underlying causes of the **kaso** phenomenon it is vitally important to consider the socio-demographic characteristics of the migrants involved. Most analysts rely on the Annual Report on Internal Migration in Japan Derived From the Basic Residential Register which provides the necessary, and very detailed, information on all migrants who move from one municipality to another. The difficulty is that the Report does not include migrants who do not cross the municipal boundary - the largest group of all migrants. Occasionally revealed in the Census of Population, carried out every five years (but not always asking consistent and appropriate questions for migration analysis), is the fact that most migrants stay within the same municipality (51% between 1975 and 1980, and 38% between 1985 and 1990); that the second largest group crosses the municipal boundary but stays within the same prefecture (25% and 32% respectively); and that the third group moves from one prefecture to another (24% and 30% respectively) (Nihon Tokei Kyokai, 1995; 120). Although the Census

provides only scant detail of migrant characteristics, one interesting observation does emerge from a comparison of the 1985 and 1990 results. That is, there is a large difference in the sex ratio between those moving within the same municipality (94.1) and those moving to other municipalities (112.0). The ratio is especially high for those crossing prefectural boundaries (131.8), indicating clearly that males are more likely to move a longer distance than females. The point is that any study of the migrant characteristics of **kaso** districts cannot be treated as entirely reliable if up to half the migrants concerned are not included in the analysis, especially when this kind of difference in migrant characteristic is known to exist. The only solution, therefore, is to conduct migration surveys at the level at which the **kaso** phenomenon has greatest significance - the level of the village community. It is the village community which is the heart of the rural area, rural society is still centred on the village, and it is at the village level that the **kaso** problem is most keenly felt.

Kusakabe

There are some 143,000 'agricultural settlements' in Japan, this being the nearest 'official' definition to the concept in English of a 'village'. Since each one is subject to a regular quinquennial census survey, a full scale study of all villages in Japan is possible, and changes over time can be observed. The Census of Agricultural Settlements provides very detailed information on the socio-economic and environmental conditions of each village, but the great drawback is that population data are only provided for households engaged in agriculture. Furthermore, even with this data, information on migrant characteristics cannot be obtained. Any such study has to be based on time consuming local fieldwork, therefore, and this means only a comparative handful of villages can be surveyed at most. This in turn leads to the inevitable questions of how representative of the rural area are the selected villages, and to what extent can any results thus obtained be applied usefully to policy formulation at the national level? This paper does not dwell on seeking answers to these questions, and merely notes the fact that this is the only way that appropriate data can be obtained, at present. The results obtained by this type of investigation are extremely valuable, however, (in fact their importance cannot be over-emphasised,) and should not be ignored as simply irrelevant or meaningless - even at the national level of policy formulation.

Kusakabe is a village of some 30 households located in Kanbayashi, Ayabe-shi, in the Tamba uplands of Kyoto Prefecture. It was one of a number of villages selected for survey by this author in 1979, as part of the work being carried out for a PhD thesis on the subject of rural depopulation in Japan (Irving, 1984). The economic base of Kusakabe was provided, in the past, by rice cultivation and firewood and charcoal production, supplemented to some extent by seasonal (winter) migration (**dekasegi**) to the cities of Kyoto and Kobe for work in the sake breweries there. By the 1970s, **dekasegi** and firewood and charcoal production had ceased, to be replaced, in a few households, by cottage industry based on textiles. Also, in line with the rest of the country, full-time farming was given up in favour of commuting to non-agricultural employment, usually in Ayabe. Although fairly remote from the urban area, Kusakabe is connected to Ayabe by a good road, and there is an hourly bus service for much of the day. There is an elementary school nearby, and a post-office and a few local shops are located about 4 kilometres away in the larger village of Teramachi.

There are 15 village communities in Kanbayashi and all have suffered severe depopulation. In Kusakabe the rate of decline has been about average for the area, worse than some, but not as bad as, say, in three of the villages where in 1995 there were no people under the age of twenty five. In one of these villages the proportion of population aged over 65 was 83% in 1995, compared to a figure of 59% in Kusakabe, and an average of 48% for all villages in Kanbayashi. The study in 1979 revealed that, at that time, exactly half the households in Kusakabe had been affected by depopulation to the extent that the traditional pattern of household inheritance had broken down. That is to say, the eldest son or daughter had left the village, married, and established a nuclear household elsewhere. If this trend were to continue Kusakabe would be on the inevitable road to eventual village desertion. There were signs, however, that not only were some 'inheritors' (**atotsugi**) choosing to stay in Kusakabe, but that others were returning to the village when the time came to assume the duties of household headship. Moreover, the one 'abandoned' household had just been taken over by a couple with no roots in Kusakabe, who had purchased the property for use as a second home with the eventual intention of permanent retirement there. All of this seemed to coincide with the materialization of **kaso** countermeasure projects in the area. In 1978 a hostel (**Yama no Ie**) had been built in Kanbayashi to promote tourism in the district, and plans were afoot for replotment of the rice paddies in the valley, as well as for widening and improving the road into Ayabe (see above); for the construction of new kindergarten facilities near Teramachi; and for an industrial estate to be built about 12 km away along the Ayabe road.[8] An opportunity was presented, therefore, to test the

impact of **kaso** countermeasures on a typical depopulating village community, and so further study trips to Kusakabe were made in 1987 and 1995. Presented here in brief account are the findings of these visits insofar as they relate to the mechanism of the **kaso** process, and to the impact of **kaso** countermeasures on population change.

In 1979 data were collected initially from the Basic Residential Registers held in Ayabe city office. Detailed statistics concerning each household could be collected in this way from records going back to 1961. In that year there was a total population of 155 in the village, living in 32 households. In seven of these households, the **atotsugi** had already left Kusakabe to live elsewhere. This, by itself, was neither unusual, nor necessarily a break with tradition - for 'temporary' migration by **atotsugi** prior to marriage and a return to the village was common practice. In fact in two households the **atotsugi** did subsequently return, and they remained in the village in 1995. The first signs of a depopulation problem would only appear after the eldest son married and set up a nuclear household outside the village. This situation was apparent by 1965, when the population structure of Kusakabe showed a much lower than expected number of children in the under-5 age group.

Between 1961 and the end of 1978 a further16 **atotsugi** left Kusakabe, together with many of their siblings. They left individually, and in a fairly constant stream throughout the period. Altogether, there was a total of 54 people who left the village in this way. They were mostly young, in their late teens or early twenties, although their median age rose steadily during the period, from 16-19 years to 20-23 years. This indicates that most leavers in the 1960s had completed junior-high school education, but that the majority of leavers in the 1970s had stayed on until completion of senior-high school. In fact an increasing proportion of these people left the village for the first time to go on to receive university education. For males, the destination of the move was invariably to large metropolitan cities such as Kyoto, Osaka, or even Tokyo. For females, destinations initially tended to be nearby urban centres, such as Ayabe, or Fukuchiyama, but later in the period they too gravitated towards the larger centres further away. In addition to all these individuals, a further twelve people were involved in moves out of the village in family groups. In one case a complete household of five individuals left and eventually sold off all their property in the village. In the other two cases only the **atotsugi** and his wife and children left, leaving the parents behind. One of these families then returned to the village two years later when the parents became ill and household headship was passed down. In all three cases, however, the move was only as far as Ayabe and, unlike individual migrants who left to enter higher education and/or to find employment, the motivation appears to have been a desire to find a more convenient living environment. By moving to a nearby destination regular contact with the village community could still be maintained and, if necessary, assistance given at weekends for farm operations.

Population movement during this period was not all 'one-way'. In the 1960s six people entered to 'marry into' the village, and two more entered between 1970 and 1979. There were also two **atotsugi** who returned to live in Kusakabe, and a couple who entered the village register in 1978 after purchasing a 'second home' for themselves. But, these numbers were insufficient to offset the losses which had occurred, with the result that, by the end of 1978, the population had fallen to 106, an overall decline of 32% of the 1961 population. Although the number of deaths had slightly exceeded births in this period, just under 90% of the loss was accounted for by net out-migration. On the positive side, however, six **atotsugi** had married and were still living in the village, and one remained unmarried. In a further three households the **atotsugi** were still at school. Of the 22 **atotsugi** who had left the village, six remained unmarried. The traditional pattern of farm inheritance, and thus future continuity, had yet to be broken, therefore, in 16 of the original 32 households.

Between 1979 and the end of 1987, despite the introduction of various **kaso** countermeasures, the pattern of decline continued as before. A further 17 people left the village, mostly young people in their early twenties, and including three **atotsugi**. This was balanced, however, by the return to Kusakabe of two **atotsugi**, one of whom had left before 1961 and who now re-entered with his wife to assume the household headship. Three children were born in this period, but ten people died. One of these deaths was the parent of another **atotsugi** who had left before 1961, but who had failed to return to the village. As a result, the number of households fell to 31. Total population meanwhile had fallen to 88 by the end of 1987, maintaining an average decline of just over 2% per year.

From 1988 until December, 1995 depopulation has continued at much the same pace, although the mechanism of change has altered somewhat. As in the previous period, three children were born, and ten people died. In this case, however, death resulted in the demise of four more households so that now there are just 27 in the village. Although no **atotsugi** returned to Kusakabe, one female entered for marriage to an **atotsugi** and subsequently bore three children. These were the only births in the village since 1987. On the other hand, one other **atotsugi** left Kusakabe, together with his wife and child, to live in Ayabe. Three **atotsugi**

also left as young, individual migrants, at least one of them to attend university. The average age of out-migrants increased markedly during this period, however, since four people, out of a total of 16, were elderly. In each case they left to enter either hospital, or an old people's 'home'. Total population meanwhile has fallen to just 65 people.

Only five households in the village still have an **atotsugi** living there, and in four of these the **atotsugi** have sons of their own. In one of these cases the son himself has already left Kusakabe, and in two more households the sons, aged 15 and 16 in 1995, have expressed their intention to leave after completing high school. In only three households can the traditional arrangement of three generations living together be found. Ten households, on the other hand, are occupied by couples above the age of 65, and in another five the sole occupants are aged widows or widowers. Two more households have an elderly couple supporting an aged parent. The very least that can be said is that the future for Kusakabe no longer looks as secure as it might have done in 1979.

Towards an effective rural policy

In response to the worsening situation in Kanbayashi, the local people have begun a new initiative to attract tourists and day-trippers. In June, 1995 two 18-hole golf putting courses were opened on former rice fields adjacent to the hostel. A restaurant and bar was also opened for visitors. Alongside the putting greens a hot-spring bath complex is under construction, and due to open in 1996. (A bore hole drilled 1800 metres underground was required to obtain natural 'spring' water.) Already more than 7000 visitors have come to the site, and the villagers are confident of a brighter future. However, the fact remains that for all the various countermeasures adopted in Kanbayashi, depopulation in villages like Kusakabe has continued unabated. The same seems true of most **kaso** districts across the country.

In Kusakabe, two main types of migrant stream were identified. One group consisted of members of the same family moving altogether. The destination in all cases was the nearest urban area, Ayabe, and the motive seems to have been a desire to improve general living conditions, particularly access to a good school. Although such moves occurred throughout the period surveyed, it is noteworthy that as many families with young children stayed in the village as moved out. It could possibly be argued, therefore, that countermeasures which aimed to improve the living environment, including road widening, and field replotment, and, more especially, the provision of kindergarten facilities locally, may have contributed to a slowing down of family-type migration, or at least prevented the situation becoming worse. The countermeasures have apparently had no impact on the largest group of migrants, however, the young individual leavers.

Typically, especially in recent years, the characteristic profile of such migrants is of a well educated twenty year-old who desires to go to a major metropolis either to enter university or to find employment. This is in the knowledge that if he or she finds a salaried position, they may be expected to stay in the one company for lifetime employment, making a return to the village after just a few years difficult. This group is as likely to include **atotsugi** as 'non-inheritors', with the outcome that population structure in the village is adversely affected, rapid ageing occurs, and depopulation continues to the extent that total village abandonment becomes a real possibility in future. No amount of spending on the improvement of local social and economic infrastructures seems to make a difference. In any case, as 'countermeasures', the projects adopted both locally and nationally were necessarily retrospective in nature. They were, and still are for the most part, attempts to remedy 'a bad situation'. By the late 1970s the damage had already been done, for most **atotsugi** had already left. The money that was made available for countermeasures was too little, initially, and it arrived too late.

This is not to say that nothing can be done in future to improve the situation. There are possible options, but they need to be phrased in the context of a clearly thought out rural policy for the future rather than a retrospective assessment of the past. In this context it is clear that the most pressing need is to establish stimulating and rewarding non-agricultural, full-time employment opportunities which will enable the well educated young individuals still in the rural area to stay, and which might attract university graduates back to the villages. This may sound an impossible dream, for few major companies offering appropriate salaried employment are willing to relocate to provincial towns and cities, let alone remote rural districts. There are, however, ways in which even this problem could be overcome.

Perhaps the most exciting development in recent years has been the development of personal computer based communications technology. Already in some severely depopulating areas video conferencing and interactive multi-media facilities have been introduced on an experimental basis in small rural schools to link them with larger schools in the urban area (Asahi Evening News, 11th Dec, 1995). Direct consultation and discussion with specialist teachers is made possible,

therefore, and the cost of operating such a system is likely to be considerably less expensive than building or improving a road to connect the rural and urban areas concerned or, for that matter, sending pupils to urban schools by bus. Similar experimental schemes are underway in some rural health clinics, with diagnostic information being sent 'down the line' electronically to video monitors operated by specialists in city hospitals (Daily Yomiuri, 1st Sept, 1995). Indeed this scheme appears to have the full backing of the Health and Welfare Ministry, who from 1996 will exchange medical, health and welfare information with all municipalities via computer networks. Tourism too may benefit from this technology, as local areas begin to advertise their charms worldwide via the Internet (Daily Yomiuri, 15th Dec, 1995).

By logical extension, there seems no reason why such links should not be employed in other workplaces. Indeed, a considerable proportion of everyday 'office-work' could be, and to a certain extent is now being done on a computer network. It seems ridiculous then for employees to have to travel in to the office when, in theory, the network can be accessed from a location many miles away from the office itself. In other words, rural people could carry on their city-based jobs 'at home' for much of the time, removing the need to commute every day. Would it not be possible, therefore, to organise work routines so that attendance at the office is only required for part of the week? The provision of appropriate computing facilities could be made communally available in a local 'service centre', with 'offices' available for hire by companies or other institutions on a regular basis, and supported by a full-time staff of clerical and technical assistants. In such a way the costs to the individual are minimized, while the social advantages of meeting co-workers on a regular basis would be maintained, though they might not necessarily belong to the same firm, or even the same industry. Pump-priming **kaso** districts from central government funds with this kind of facility may also have the spin-off effect of encouraging private enterprise to invest locally in other social infrastructure facilities for young professional people.

Regrettably, such a scheme seems a long way off in the future, even though the technology is available now. The private commercial sector is conservative in nature, and seems to expect workers to daily suffer the indignities of commuting on crowded trains, with not even any flexibility in working hours, despite the manifest inefficiencies of this urban orientated system. As long as such thinking prevails, the rural area will continue to suffer an outflow of bright, well educated young people. Perhaps, therefore, the onus must fall on central and local governments to take a lead in devising and operating innovative rural policies. In the case of a computer networked 'service centre', for example, there are many reasons why both prefectural and municipal governments should be first in the queue to hire 'office' facilities. In proving the potential of such an establishment, private companies may be more ready to follow. But first, local government authorities must lose their way of thinking that "all problems will be solved if we simply widen the road". They would be well served in the meantime to devise a common strategy for measuring population change at the sub-municipal level, preferably the village, or **nogyo shuraku**, so that more effective and efficient research into this important topic may be undertaken in future.

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Endnotes

[1]The literal translation of these terms is 'excessively dense' (**kamitsu**), and 'excessively sparse' (**kaso**). They are more appropriately rendered into English as 'urban overcrowding' and 'severe rural depopulation' respectively.

[2]After 1973, the year of the 'oil crisis', rates of internal migration nationally began to slow down. In part this was no doubt due to the impact of economic recession, but an often overlooked reason was the simple fact that in many villages all the young people able and willing to leave had already done so. There were no longer 'whole generations' of school leavers in the villages who could depart en masse. Also much touted at this time was the notion of 'return' or 'U-turn' migration, because statistics suggested 'rural' areas were now gaining population at the expense of the metropolitan cores. This was a gross mis-reading of the facts due to the inadequacies of definitions in use for rural areas. The phenomenon was actually one of urban expansion through suburbanization.

[3]Actual spending of the **kaso** countermeasures budget is devolved to two authorities. Approximately half the budget goes to designated **kaso** municipalities for spending within their own jurisdiction. The rest goes to prefectural governments for spending on a broader basis, so long as spending objectives comply with the overall intentions of the '**Kaso** Laws'.

[4]Until the 1953 Law for the Merger of Municipalities, Kanbayashi was a municipality in its own right, but was subsequently incorporated into Ayabe-shi. Ayabe-shi does not meet the criteria for official designation as a **kaso chitai** but, had the municipal boundaries remained unchanged, Kanbayashi-mura most certainly would have qualified for such designation in 1970, and would continue to qualify today.

[5]Wheras in 1970 only 65.5% of junior high school graduates in **kaso** districts went on to senior high school education, compared to the national average of 82.1%, this imbalance has steadily eroded ever since. By 1990, the balance had in fact shifted in favour of **kaso** districts, with 96.6%, compared to the national average of 95% (Kokudo-cho, 1995; 103). The reasoning here is that, over time, a declining proportion of school leavers in kaso districts is willing to engage in blue collar work, since more are now qualified for white collar occupations.

[6]Not all attempts to establish new ski grounds have been successful. Variable snow conditions apart, a recently reported case was of a village which was ordered in court to replace many of the trees it had cut down to make way for a ski-slope - on environmental grounds.

[7]It could be argued that the issue of central government support for rural areas was 'fudged' to some extent by the 1953 Law for the Merger of Municipalities (see note 4), under which many 'rural' (**cho-son**) municipalities were joined together to become, or to be part of, an 'urban' (**shi**) municipality.

[8]Site preparations for the industrial estate had been completed by 1992, but as of December, 1995 no factories had moved in due to recession following collapse of the 'bubble economy'.