

## Introduction:

Why is it that Japan is enamored with this enigma called Furusato? Let me first start with briefly explaining what furusato is. It is the nostalgia in any Japanese person for a place, thing, or just the feeling of a time before Japan was industrialized and westernized. Even in the highly urbanized cities of Japan there seems to be an increase in the popularity of the furusato imagery of the “old times”. What intrigues me is why even the young people who have never left the city or experienced any “old times” find enjoyment in furusato destinations. With this increase in popularity of the furusato tourism, will the future of Japan's domestic tourism involve more furusato oriented travel destinations or more modern travel destinations like Tokyo Disneyland? In this paper I hope to analyze what influences can help or hinder the future growth of furusato in the continuing urbanization in Japan. I am also going to analyze what strategies Japan is using to continue the prosperity of furusato tourism.

The word furusato literally means “old village” which brings to mind how Japan used to be like before it was influenced by outside sources. The westernizations and industrialization of Japan in my opinion was what stripped the Japanese people of their national identity. Before westernization, Japan had been secluded from all other countries which allowed it to come into its own and create its own identity. Because of high and continuing internationalization of Japan today, I believe that the Japanese people are trying to find a way to recreate what was lost. This need to grab ahold of a national identity has created the furusato craze that can be found all over Japan. This furusato craze has created a large market in domestic tourism but is it really helping out rural villages or is it hindering them? It is inevitable that Japan will become more and more modernized and influenced by outside sources in the future so this brings me to the main point: will these furusato villages continue to flourish or will they eventually wither in die with non-

stop urbanization of Japan. These furusato villages are kept alive by urbanization but at the same time the constant urbanization could destroy what little rural areas that are left in Japan. I believe that furusato villages will continue to thrive because people always want what they cannot have which in this case is the nostalgia of a time long gone. With urbanization branching out to rural areas I believe than in the future the little remaining rural land that still holds the “true spirit of Japan” will be prized above anything else just as it is today. Altogether, I think that the influence of urbanization in Japan has rekindled Japanese people’s nostalgia for the “old times” and greatly helped the future growth of furusato in Japan. Sadly furusato also hides the truly historical rural areas in Japan

I previously said that Japanese people had been stripped of their national identity by westernization and this caused nostalgia for the “old villages”. In a sense haven’t the furusato villages, which are supposed to give the Japanese people back their identity, also done something to the same effect of stripping them of their national identity? One example is found in Kuzaki. Kuzaki is a popular furusato travel destination visited by tourists for its “authentic pearl divers” and historical customs. The images depicted of the pearl divers were of young sexy women. In actuality the Kuzaki village “authentic pearl divers” are really middle-aged abalone divers. The Kuzaki furusato village would not be as popular if not for the exotic pearl divers that are advertised to tourists. This invented tradition gives the impression that national identity has once again been stripped. Although there are quite a few negatives to the furusato villages the positive is that many of the rural villages, which may have disappeared, are able to thrive off of the domestic tourism. Kuzaki is able to continue a tradition of important religious events which are legitimate historical traditions. Kuzaki will put on “fake” historical customs to conceal their real traditions. I believe that while furusato tourism is needed to keep some of these remote

rural villages afloat, they do more harm than good in “preserving a village’s historical culture”. This will warp the Japanese perception of what is truly real and what is fake.

Besides domestic tourism, other industries have found means to use furusato imagery to their advantage. For those who cannot travel to the furusato village areas it is, in a sense, brought to the people in other ways. Such examples are department stores promoting and advertise authentic events such as festivals and crafts. Department stores also promote local foods from remote villages. If people really want to immerse themselves in one of these furusato villages without leaving the comforts of their own house, some of the furusato villages have established a voluntary villagers club. Creighton (1997) describes the villager club as such: “For an annual fee, city dwellers . . . become honorary village residents and receive a furusato newsletter on local events and town activities” (p. 450). Those who become honorary villager are also encouraged to come to the village and participate in some of their events. With the imagery of furusato branching out to other industries in Japan I believe that there are high hopes of it continuing in the future. Where there is money there will always be business.

Although furusato is profitable and good for the economy and domestic tourism in Japan I believe that if it continues in popularity it will have a negative effect on society. As I have said previously in other statements, furusato takes an actual historical event or tradition and molds it into something new and exotic that will fit the image of furusato. It almost gives a false sense of reality. According Peter Seigenthaler “... it was estimated that Japanese each year took nearly 150 million leisure trips within the country...” (p. 178). This figure does not show how many of the 150 million trips are exclusively to furusato type areas, but it does give us a broad idea about how many people can be influenced by the invented traditions found in furusato. The best correlation example I can give is with the American holiday called Columbus Day. For many

many years Columbus Day had been celebrated as the day when Christopher Columbus arrived to the Americas. Although this is true what is not usually told is what his real encounters with the indigenous people were. Instead of being peaceful and friendly with the indigenous people he conquered and slaughtered them for their gold. Many people in America do not realize that Columbus was such a person because the event has been and molds it into something new and acceptable. The basis for both Columbus Day and any furusato tourism is that they are based off of fact but change to be acceptable or interesting for the public interests. Through analyzing and understanding what drives furusato tourism I believe that the invented traditions found in furusato will help the growth of it in the future.

If furusato is built off of bits and pieces of culture and heritage of particular rural villages, are there any real and authentic villages that still deal in tourism? In contrast to furusato tourism there is a growing market for green tourism, especially satoyama type destinations. These areas are much more authentic than furusato villages in that they do not change the landscape or traditions for the tourists needs. Satoyama type villages are the epitome of coexisting with nature and not changing for modern conveniences. Furusato tourism lets you experience fun and mostly leisure activities while satoyama type destinations let you experience the nitty gritty of what a village really does as a community. An example for green tourism is a family coming out for the weekend to live with a host family in their rural village. The room and board is free but the tourists have to help out their host family with all of their work. Tourists get to experience the really life of a rural village by participating in such things as farming and household chores. It really comes down to preference whether a person chooses a furusato village or a satoyama village. I believe that people who grew up in a rural village community are more predisposed to want to experience a satoyama destination because they have old memories

of growing up in such a villages. For the many people that grew up in the city the only images they have of rural community villages are from movies, TV dramas, or advertised furusato destinations, so I believe city people would choose the glorified version of the old village. I believe that furusato villages, although profitable, need to keep the spirit of the old rural villages and take an example from satoyama type villages if they want to continue to flourish in the future.

## Conclusion

In my findings I have come to the conclusion that although furusato tourism changes and invents traditions, it is still able to attract people to the villages. I think that because this type of tourism has been going on for quite some time people don't know or don't care anymore that these villages are not authentic. Furusato has become part of a new culture in Japan. It give people what they want weather it is the truth or not. People want the experience of nostalgia and that is what they are getting. It is like going to a zoo to look see all of the exotic animal but you don't care that what you are seeing are the animals in captivity, not in the wild. Furusato does not just represent tourism anymore. It has branched out into many areas that it can be promoted to good use. I believe that this is a great influence on the growth of furusato tourism in Japan because it can reach out to more people. In my opinion it seems like the negative of furusato are pretty major but people seem to just gloss over them. Furusato villages profit from domestic tourism but at the same time they have to change their village life to accommodate the needs of the tourists. This in turn will destroy the once authentic village. I think that furusato villages should take some aspect of satoyama village to stay partially authentic. Although the negative of furusato are prominent, I do not believe that it will hinder the growth of furusato in the future, because if not for domestic tourism in the remote villages they could have already been long

gone. To sum it up I believe that furusato is a double-edged sword for society and rural villages alike because in everything that is it is a contradiction.