

CURRICULUM MATERIALS REVIEW

The Power of Place: Geography for the 21st Century

Small Farms, Big Cities: Northern Japan and Tokyo

PRODUCED FOR THE ANNENBERG/CPB PROJECT BY
CAMBRIDGE STUDIOS, INC., 2003 (REVISED ED.)

Reviewed by Gil Latz, Joe Narus, and Joel Stewart

Power of Place: Geography for the 21st Century is an educational video series for high school and college students that teaches the geographic skills and concepts necessary to understand the modern world. The series is divided into ten units, including an introduction. In all, twenty-six half-hour video programs—fifty sites in thirty-six countries—are coordinated with a textbook and an excellent Web site of value to student and instructor: <http://www.learner.org/resources/series180.html>. The video programs feature maps, animation, and academic commentaries that introduce the field of geography and many of the defining human and physical characteristics of the world's different regions.

Power of Place uses case studies that focus on natural hazards, and one example is “Small Farms, Big Cities: Northern Japan and Tokyo.” Part One of the case study “Northern Japan: Protecting the Harvest” addresses the methods employed by Japanese rice farmers to prepare for and adapt to natural hazards, specifically adverse climactic conditions on the northeastern edge of the main island of Honshu. The program introduces geographical and climactic features that affect rice cultivation in the Tōhoku region, and explains the cultural significance of rice and rice cultivation in Japan. The labor-

intensive process of wet-rice production is articulated through video and commentary describing one farmer's crop management efforts. The effect of natural hazards on agriculture is illustrated through examination of the weather phenomenon *yamase*.

Yamase is an irregularly occurring on-shore, easterly wind originating in the Sea of Okhotsk, northwest of Japan, that is characterized by dense fog, rain, and cold temperatures. The video explores the early summer atmospheric conditions that create *yamase*, and the steps farmers take to minimize its damaging impact during early phases of rice production, including water control, fertilizer management, and advanced weather forecasting systems. Analysis of *yamase* provides insight into how the Japanese are continually interacting with their physical environment, in this case illustrated by farmers adapting to unseasonably cool weather.

In part two, “Tokyo: Anatomy of a Mega-City,” one of the world's most densely settled areas is investigated from a spatial perspective by focusing on the extraordinarily complex transportation structure that allows Tokyo to grow and thrive, and the trends in urban development emerging to accommodate Tokyo's role as a major hub in the Pacific Asia regional and world economy. These themes are vividly conveyed by profiling the daily commute of a businessman living in a nearby prefecture. Important questions are raised regarding Tokyo's ability to position itself as a headquarters of economic development in the sprawling megalopolis that stretches along the Eastern maritime portions of Japan. The program concludes by recounting the catastrophic 1995 Kobe earthquake as an event whose influence is still felt today, a reminder of Japan's, and particularly Tokyo's, susceptibility to the natural hazards associated with seismic activity. ■

GIL LATZ is Professor of Geography; Joe Narus and Joel Stewart are Master's candidates in Geography at Portland State University.



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