

**“People Captivated by Akita”: Affective Governance in the Representation of Rural Revitalization in Japan**

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**„Хора, запленени от Акита“: емоционално въздействащото управление в представянето на процесите по възраждане на периферията в Япония**

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### Abstract

This article analyzes Akita Prefecture's role in rural revitalization through affective and visual strategies, concentrating on the exhibition "People Captivated by Akita" (秋田にハマった人々展) and its corresponding website [www.a-iju.jp](http://www.a-iju.jp). Utilizing Actor–Network Theory (ANT), visual ethnography, and discourse analysis, the study conceptualizes these media not solely as promotional instruments but as performative infrastructures that convert demographic policy into emotional experiences. Through direct field observation of the exhibition at JR Akita Station (December 2024–January 2025) and qualitative analysis of eight highlighted migrant profiles, the paper delineates the collaboration of governmental entities, digital platforms, and emotional narratives in the creation of an “ideal migrant assemblage.” Akita's campaign exemplifies affective governance by integrating digital and physical representations to evoke emotion, imagery, and storytelling, thereby making migration appealing. But this visibility also hides structural weaknesses like aging, gendered labor, and inequality between regions. By examining the interaction of both visible and invisible entities, such as policy institutions, technologies, migrants, and affective publics, the article elucidates how rural revitalization in Japan functions as both a cultural spectacle and an administrative network. The research enhances a symmetrical sociology of rural policy, positing that revitalization should be perceived not merely as demographic intervention but as a continuous negotiation of emotion, representation, and agency that influences modern conceptions of rural belonging in Japan.

*Keywords:* Akita Prefecture, rural revitalization, affective governance, migration, Actor-Network Theory, Japan

### Резюме

Тази статия анализира ролята на префектура Акита в съживяването на селските райони чрез емоционално въздействащи и визуални стратегии, като се концентрира върху изложбата „Хора, запленени от Акита“ (秋田にハマった人々展) и съответния уебсайт [www.a-iju.jp](http://www.a-iju.jp). Използвайки теорията на актьор-мрежите (ANT), визуална етнография и дискурс анализ, изследването концептуализира тези медии не само като промоционални инструменти, но и като инфраструктура, която превръща демографската политика в емоционални преживявания. Чрез пряко наблюдение на изложбата в гара Акита (декември 2024 г. – януари 2025 г.) и качествен анализ на осемте изложени профили на мигранти, статията очертава сътрудничеството на правителствени организации, дигитални платформи и емоционални наративи в създаването на „идеална мигрантска

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общност“. Кампанията на префектура Акита е пример за въздействащ тип управление чрез интегриране на дигитални и физически представяния, за да предизвика емоции, образност и разказване на истории, като по този начин прави миграцията привлекателна. Тази видимост, обаче, крие структурни слабости като застаряване, разделение на труда и неравенство между регионите. Чрез изследване на взаимодействието както на видими, така и на невидими актьори, като политически институции, технологии, мигранти и емоционалната публика, статията прави опит за изясняване как съживяването на селските райони в Япония функционира едновременно като културен спектакъл и административна мрежа. Изследването засилва симетричната социология на селската политика, като постулира, че съживяването трябва да се възприема не просто като демографска интервенция, а като непрекъснато предоговаряне на емоции, актьори и дейности, които влияят върху съвременните концепции за принадлежност към селските райони в Япония.

*Ключови думи:* префектура Акита, съживяване на селските райони, емоционално въздействащо управление, миграция, теория на актьорските мрежи, Япония

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### **“People Captivated by Akita”: Affective Governance and the Representation of Rural Revitalization in Japan**

In modern Japan, revitalizing rural areas has become both a demographic need and a symbolic project. As the country continues to deal with a big drop in population, an aging population, and more people moving to cities, regional governments have come up with more and more advanced ways to encourage people to move to the country. In this policy environment, visual and emotional media have become essential for conveying rural life and opportunities. This paper analyzes how Akita Prefecture formulates and disseminates representations of rural belonging via its official migration portal, “Akita Gurashi – Hajime no Ippo” (a-iju.jp), and the concurrent public exhibition “People Captivated by Akita” (秋田にハマった人々展), conducted at JR Akita Station from December 2024 to January 2025.

The exhibition, which included eight "senior migrants" (先輩移住者) shown through portraits and short stories, tried to show how moving to Akita could make people feel. Each person's story showed migration as more than just a choice based on money and social status; it was also an emotional experience, a time when they "fell for" Akita. The website builds on this emotional story by adding personal interviews, photos, and local information to official relocation support programs. These media work together to create a hybrid infrastructure of representation that turns migration policy into a language of hope, belonging, and renewal that everyone can understand.

As a researcher who went to the exhibit in person, I saw how the display was carefully put together to make people feel close and hopeful. There were smiling faces, warm lighting, and encouraging slogans in the middle of the busy Akita Station transit hub. This physical staging turned individual stories into group testimony, making migrants both people and symbols of regional revitalization. Through these representational forms, Akita Prefecture engages in a modality referred to as “affective governance”, utilizing emotion, aesthetics, and human narratives to govern by means of attraction rather than coercion.

This study investigates the ways in which the visual, discursive, and material practices of the Akita migration campaign generate novel imaginaries of rural existence and agency. By integrating field observation, visual and discourse analysis, and Actor–Network Theory (ANT), it conceptualizes the exhibition and its online counterpart as a network of actors - governmental, digital, human, and affective- that collaboratively construct the image of a revitalized countryside.

### Research Questions

How do the a-iju.jp website and the "People Captivated by Akita" exhibition transform migration policy into visual and emotional narratives?

How are individual migrants depicted as participants in the larger framework of rural revitalization, and how does this representation influence public perception of rural agency?

How does the interaction between digital and physical media, such as websites and exhibitions, affect the relationship between the government, the community, and people who might want to move?

What types of visibility and invisibility are generated by these representational strategies, and in what ways do they obscure or illuminate the social intricacies of life in regional Japan?

### Method and materials

This study examines the “People Captivated by Akita” (秋田にハマった人々) exhibition and its associated website (a-iju.jp) as mediated assemblages that facilitate rural revitalization through affect, representation, and technology. Rather than viewing migration promotion merely as a policy instrument, I conceptualize it as a networked cultural process choreography of human and non-human actors that collectively embody an idealized representation of the countryside.

I use Actor-Network Theory (ANT) (Latour, 2005; Callon, 1986; Law, 2004) to look at this network. ANT's central thesis—that social realities are perpetually constructed through the interactions of diverse entities—offers a conceptual framework for examining the manifestation of migration discourse through exhibitions, websites, narratives, images, and administrative frameworks. In this context, actors encompass not only the Akita Prefectural Government and the highlighted migrants but also digital infrastructures, photographic displays, hashtags, policy documents, and even the venue in which the exhibition occurred. Everyone takes part in translating and spreading meaning.

I also look into ideas about affective governance and cultural mediation. Berlant's (2011) concept of "affective infrastructure" elucidates the utilization of emotions—such as hope, nostalgia, and empathy—as instruments of governance. In the same way, Yoshimi (2012) and Morimoto (2019) have said that Japanese regional policy is more and more based on emotional persuasion, making images of furusato (home-place) that people want to identify with instead of forcing them to do something. The exhibition and the a-iju.jp portal both show this trend: they try to control people by seducing them, making rural life emotionally understandable and

visually appealing.

By integrating ANT with these viewpoints, the paper conceptualizes the exhibition and the website as interfacing nodes in a policy-media assemblage that transforms demographic crisis into a visual and affective opportunity. This framework also facilitates the examination of elements that remain obscured within this network—such as rural precarity, gendered labor, and infrastructural fragility—illuminating how visibility is selectively allocated to perpetuate a specific narrative of rural vitality.

### **Field Observation**

During my visit to Akita in December 2024, I did fieldwork and saw the "People Captivated by Akita" exhibition at JR Akita Station's west-side concourse (秋田駅ぽぽろーど西側通路). The setting was important because it was a public transit hub connecting local and high-speed rail, and the exhibition was between mobility and locality, visually stopping travelers in their tracks. I recorded the spatial layout, lighting, material arrangement of panels, visitor flow, and audience interaction. I also wrote down what I thought about the emotional tone of the presentation, the stories that went along with each portrait, and the visual landscape around it (like ads and prefectural posters).

This observational aspect adheres to Pink's (2013) methodology of visual ethnography, which considers the sensory and emotional facets of exhibitions as intrinsic data. Special emphasis was placed on how the exhibition manifested affective invitation—specifically, how smiling faces, handwritten messages, and the hashtag “#秋田にハマった人々” (people who fell for Akita) fostered empathetic identification.

### **Discourse and Visual Analysis**

Along with field notes, I did a discourse analysis of both the exhibition texts and the pages on the a-iju.jp website that went with them (for example, profiles of Abe Madoka, Shimada Makiko, and Nojima Rina). This analysis looked at patterns that kept coming up, like verbs of attraction ("drawn to Akita"), relational metaphors ("encounters," "connections"), and images of pastoral abundance next to entrepreneurial energy. I saw these discursive choices not as neutral descriptions but as performative acts that create the ideal subject of migration—youthful, creative, socially engaged, and emotionally fulfilled.

A visual semiotic analysis (following Barthes, 1977) investigated the roles of composition, color, gaze, and background scenery in shaping the moral economy of rural imagery. For instance, subjects were often portrayed outdoors, surrounded by seasonal

landscapes or wooden interiors, which evoked warmth and authenticity. These iconographic choices connect emotional resonance to geographic specificity, transforming Akita from a peripheral prefecture into an affective homeland.

### **Digital Ethnography and Institutional Context**

I treated the a-iju.jp website as a digital ethnographic field (Pink et al., 2016) in addition to the exhibition itself. I looked at its information architecture, design, and interactive features, such as how it includes relocation subsidies, regional job listings, and step-by-step migration guidance. This online infrastructure is part of what could be called an administrative interface of attraction—a platform where bureaucratic rationality meets narrative persuasion. To put its creation and funding in context, I traced institutional affiliations: the site is managed by Akita Prefecture’s Migration & Settlement Promotion Division (秋田県あきた未来創造部 移住・定住促進課) and publicly funded through the prefectural revitalization budget (Akita Prefecture, 2024). This positioning shows how public policy and soft marketing can be mixed, with design and storytelling mediating governance.

### **Reflexive Position**

As an external researcher with direct field experience, my analysis is informed by reflexive observation. I occupied a dual position—both a critical scholar examining the politics of representation and an embodied witness who experienced the sensory atmosphere of the exhibition. Following Clifford and Marcus’s (1986) model of ethnographic reflexivity, I recognize that my interpretation is also an act of translation: I too participate in the network that rearticulates Akita’s image. Rather than striving for objectivity, I foreground this reflexive awareness as part of the knowledge production process.

This study employs a combination of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and multi-sited qualitative methods, treating the exhibition and the website as interconnected nodes within a singular actor-network. Observation captures the material and affective performance; discourse analysis unveils linguistic strategies; visual semiotics interprets aesthetic ideology; and institutional tracing contextualizes these elements within the governance framework. Through this integrated approach, the analysis illustrates that rural revitalization in Akita is not merely a demographic or economic process but also a representational and affective one, generated through ongoing translation among various actors, government, media, migrants, images, and audiences.

## **Results and discussion**

***Putting together the perfect migrant***

The show "People Captivated by Akita" (秋田にハマった人々展) had eight portraits of people who had moved to Akita from other parts of Japan. Their stories, which were also on the a-iju.jp website, were broken up into short narrative pieces with professional photos, personal quotes, and short biographical notes. Each profile told a different version of the same story: a city person who moves to rural Akita and finds self-realization, authenticity, and connection again.

This narrative structure creates what could be called a "ideal migrant assemblage," which is a set of discursive and visual norms that tell us who the "good" or "desirable" in-migrant is. There are three patterns that show up in all eight cases:

**Entrepreneurial Ruralism:** Migrants are depicted as active producers—operating guesthouses, breweries, cafés, or creative studios—rather than as passive settlers. For example, Abe Madoka, who used to live in Tokyo, is shown running a guesthouse and sake brewery in Yokote. Her quote, "Even when foreign visitors wander, my neighbors guide them kindly," shows the ideal of mutual hospitality, which connects personal freedom with community care. The entrepreneur serves as a link between the state's economic goals and the social capital of the community.

**Gendered Warmth and Care:** Affective labor, such as building community ties, teaching, nurturing, or making places of comfort, is used to show female migrants. The tone is personal and emotional, and the smiles and soft color palettes suggest safety and moral harmony at home. This gendered script corresponds with wider national trends to portray rural revitalization as a sphere of emotional restoration (Kitada, 2018).

**Re-enchantment of the Ordinary:** Each narrative encompasses a facet of rediscovery—whether it be the “true self,” a “slower rhythm,” or the “beauty in everyday life.” These motifs evoke furusato (hometown) nostalgia and align with the “slow life” discourse that has gained traction since the 2000s. By curating these narratives, Akita Prefecture frames migration not as a retreat but as a progression towards authenticity.

From an Actor-Network point of view, these pictures work like translation tools. They turn government policy (numerical goals of in-migration) into moral imagery, where individual fulfillment stands for collective revitalization. The exhibition space makes this effect even stronger: the panels are arranged in line, inviting visitors to "walk through" the process of falling for Akita. In this case, the actors are not only the people shown but also the material

assemblage—panels, captions, lighting, and the railway concourse—that together create the feeling of belonging.

### ***Seeing Belonging***

The design and images of the exhibition were very important to its emotional power. It was set up in the west corridor of JR Akita Station, which made it easy for both tourists and commuters to see. Each of the eight panels had a high-resolution portrait, a short life story, and a unique yellow header with the hashtag #秋田にハマった人々 (“People Who Fell for Akita”). The verb hamaru (to get hooked, to fall into) gives the impression of playful emotional intensity, suggesting that the attraction to Akita is spontaneous but impossible to resist.

Color, composition, and gaze work together to create closeness. Most of the time, the subjects are photographed in natural light, often outside or at work, which suggests that they are part of the place. The warm colors, yellows, browns, and greens, are similar to Akita's agricultural palette. The camera angle is slightly below eye level, which gives the subjects dignity while still making them approachable. The backgrounds often include visual cues like rice paddies, wooden interiors, or snowy landscapes, which make each portrait distinctly Akita. In Barthesian terms, these backgrounds serve as anchorage: they connect personal emotion to geographic authenticity.

From an analytical standpoint, this visual regime operates as affective governance. Through carefully curated imagery, the prefectural government invites viewers to feel the possibility of rural life as emotionally rewarding and socially meaningful. Rather than presenting statistical evidence or policy jargon, it relies on what Berlant (2011) calls “public intimacy”, the production of collective emotion through mediated personal stories. The exhibition thus performs governance by sensation: it persuades through warmth, optimism, and visibility.

However, visibility also means exclusion. These pictures do not show elderly residents, deserted hamlets, or crumbling infrastructure, which are all real parts of Akita's demographic landscape. By focusing on vitality and affect, the exhibition makes the structural weaknesses of rural life invisible. This selective visibility shows how representation works as a form of power: it decides what can be seen, felt, and imagined as part of the "revitalized" countryside.

### ***Translating Rurality Through Different Media***

The a-iju.jp website and the physical exhibition are two parts of a multi-layered translation network. The website has detailed interviews, information about moving, and links

to policies, while the exhibition turns these into sensory experiences. Together, they make up a digital-physical continuum of persuasion: the website guides potential migrants through rational steps ("Find work," "Locate housing"), while the exhibition shows the emotional endpoint, falling for Akita.

In the Actor-Network Theory, this duality shows how agency moves in different ways. The same people - prefectural officials, communication designers, and migrants - work in both digital and physical spaces, but their roles change. Online, they are data points and storytellers; offline, they are icons and examples. The exhibition panels are not just copies of web content; they are translations that turn linguistic narratives into material presence. Their placement in the public transit corridor creates accidental audiences, passers-by who might never look for migration information but who temporarily join the network of rural imagination.

The a-iju.jp site itself amplifies these translations through algorithmic and discursive linkages. Profile pages are embedded with search functions (“search by municipality”), downloadable guidebooks, and information on financial incentives such as the “Relocation Support Grant” (移住支援金制度). Each link extends the actor-network outward, from emotion to policy, from representation to bureaucracy. In this sense, the website operates as a policy-media hybrid: simultaneously a governmental document, marketing platform, and narrative archive.

The fact that Akita Prefecture's Migration and Settlement Promotion Division pays for the site is important because it connects it to institutional networks of revitalization funding. The exhibition is part of an administrative economy where visibility equals legitimacy. The more attractive migration is represented, the more the prefecture can justify continued investment in its revitalization apparatus. Representation becomes both evidence and instrument of policy success.

The phrase "Akita ni hamatta" ("captivated by Akita") sums up the emotional logic of the whole campaign. It changes the grammar of migration: instead of the subject choosing Akita, Akita captures the subject. This linguistic inversion turns place into an active agent—an actor that exerts affective pull. In ANT terms, Akita itself becomes a non-human actor endowed with agency, capable of enrolling human participants through emotion. Billboards, hashtags, and social media posts repeat this structure of feeling, performing what could be called territorial affectivity: the place itself as seducer.

But this emotional capture is a double-edged sword. It creates excitement and

identification, but it also hides the structural imbalance between the center and the periphery. Urban viewers are encouraged to "fall for" Akita, but they don't have to deal with its economic problems or political marginalization. The campaign's success depends on keeping up a certain level of fantasy—of harmony between self-realization and community integration—that may not be true to the complexity of rural life.

The exhibition's strength, however, lies in its performative optimism. When visitors see the panels at Akita Station, they are momentarily interpellated as potential migrants; the visual environment creates a possibility space where moving to the countryside seems both possible and emotionally satisfying. This momentary change in affect is the campaign's main success: it turns demographic anxiety into aesthetic hope.

### *Analytical Insights Summary*

Using both ANT and affect theory, we can see the "People Captivated by Akita" exhibition and the a-iju.jp platform as an actor-network of affective revitalization.

Actors who can be seen include the eight migrants who are profiled, as well as prefectural officers, designers, and photographers.

Panels, lighting, digital interfaces, hashtags, and public funding structures are all examples of non-human actants.

Policy → narrative → affect → visibility → legitimacy are the steps in the translation process.

This network creates a coherent emotional story: Akita's future depends not only on the number of people moving there, but also on how much they care about it. Moving there becomes a moral and aesthetic act of caring for place.

## **Conclusion**

### **Representing Rural Futures: From Policy to Performance**

The "People Captivated by Akita" (秋田にハマった人々) exhibition and its digital counterpart a-iju.jp are examples of the performative side of Japan's ongoing regional revitalization (地方創生) efforts. These media platforms do not just provide information or serve administrative purposes; they also perform policy by turning demographic and economic needs into emotional spectacles of belonging. They show the countryside not as a place of crisis, but as a theater of possibility, where people can rediscover their identity, creativity, and community harmony.

This performance can be seen as a process of translation through the lens of Actor–

Network Theory. In this process, government actors, designers, digital infrastructures, and human subjects negotiate and stabilize the meaning of "rural revitalization." Policy goals like increasing migration numbers are made sense through affective mediations like smiling portraits, hopeful narratives, and emotionally charged slogans. Each photograph, caption, and hyperlink acts as a mediator that carries not only information but also affective charge, which keeps the network going. In this way, revitalization is not just done; it is performed through representational infrastructures that make it possible to imagine.

The Akita campaign is strong because it combines bureaucratic logic with cultural aesthetics. The a-iju.jp website has detailed instructions on how to get relocation grants, housing, and jobs—all of which are parts of governance by calculation. The exhibition, on the other hand, uses governance by sensation. Together, they show what Kimura (2020) calls "affective governance," where emotional resonance becomes a way to communicate policy. The public is not asked to comply but to empathize—to fall for Akita.

### **The Exhibition as an Emotional Infrastructure**

The exhibition's location in JR Akita Station, which connects movement and place, makes it both a literal and a metaphorical gateway. The panels break up the flow of urban mobility with scenes of rural calm, which is an example of how affective infrastructures work: they do not work by giving orders, but by changing people's attention and desire. Visitors are invited to stop, look, and imagine themselves living in the slower rhythms and meaningful relationships shown in the portraits.

Here, affect is not secondary to policy; it is the policy's medium of transmission. The exhibition activates what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) might term a "territorial assemblage"—a constellation of people, images, emotions, and places that collectively stabilize the sense of Akita as both unique and accessible. The act of "falling for Akita" (秋田にハマる) is thus simultaneously emotional and infrastructural: a way of binding subjects to territory through the circulation of feeling.

By framing migration as a love story instead of an economic transaction, the campaign changes the relationship between citizens and the state. The government becomes a facilitator of emotional experiences, and citizens are invited to participate not only by moving but also by feeling appropriately. This emotional management of belonging turns demographic anxiety into cultural production: decline becomes a chance to rediscover intimacy, authenticity, and care.

### **Visibility, Erasure, and the Politics of Representation**

The analysis has demonstrated that affective representation is inherently biased. The visual coherence of the Akita campaign relies on selective visibility. The panels exclusively depict specific categories of migrants, namely, young, creative, and socially integrated individuals, while excluding others whose experiences could complicate the narrative of success. Challenges in rural areas, such as underemployment, depopulated villages, and gendered labor imbalances, are absent. This omission is not due to oversight but rather a strategic erasure: the invisibility of adversity reinforces the credibility of optimism.

This representational strategy mirrors broader patterns in Japanese rural policy, where the image of the ideal in-migrant functions as both symbol and instrument. By displaying migrants who have “succeeded,” the prefecture not only inspires potential newcomers but also legitimizes its own revitalization framework. The exhibition thus enacts a feedback loop: it visualizes policy success to justify continued policy intervention. Visibility becomes currency within the affective economy of rural governance.

From an ANT perspective, this dynamic can be understood as a form of stabilization through representation. By materializing policy outcomes in images and stories, the actor-network achieves coherence. However, this coherence is fragile, contingent upon continuous investment in imagery, publicity, and affect. The exhibition must be maintained, updated, and circulated to keep Akita’s revitalization real. Without these mediations, the network risks dissolution into the demographic realities it seeks to transcend.

### **The "Visible Actor" and the Change from Representation to Agency**

An interesting thing about the Akita exhibition is that it turns regular people into visible actors of policy. The eight migrants featured in the show are both subjects of representation and agents within the network. Their images are shared through both digital and physical media, making them affective ambassadors of the prefecture. They represent a new model of citizenship based on visibility, emotion, and entrepreneurial participation.

Their agency is double-edged, though. They gain recognition and symbolic authority, but their stories are curated within institutional limits. The prefectural government's communication team chooses, edits, and frames each story to fit with policy goals. This means that migrants' self-expressions are turned into tools of governance. They are not forced to do anything, but they are enrolled in a process that ANT calls "obligatory passage points," where individual paths pass through institutional mediation to achieve public visibility.

These visible actors make the otherwise abstract machinery of revitalization real. By being there, they help people connect emotionally with the policy's goals. Their lived

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experiences make governance more human and give people a model to follow. In this way, the exhibition does a powerful act of delegated agency: the migrants speak for Akita, but Akita also speaks through them.

### **The Unseen Actors and the Weakness of the Network**

The visible actors give the network its structure, while the invisible actors—like bureaucratic routines, financial subsidies, logistical arrangements, and infrastructural conditions—keep it going without anyone noticing. These non-human actants include the prefectural budget lines that pay for the exhibition, the data systems that handle relocation subsidies, and the web algorithms that make sites more visible. Their invisibility is useful because it makes affective persuasion seem spontaneous. But recognizing their agency shows how fragile the network is. If funding is cut or interest wanes, the emotional infrastructure could fall apart.

The exhibition's one-month duration also emphasizes the fleeting nature of these kinds of emotional interventions. Once they are taken down, only digital traces remain. The long-term success of Akita's revitalization depends not only on policy continuity but also on the constant re-enactment of emotion. Rural futures are kept alive through repetition, circulation, and re-display.

### **Toward a Balanced Comprehension of Rural Revitalization**

By examining both the visible and invisible dimensions of Akita's migration campaign, this study contributes to a symmetrical sociology of rural revitalization—one that treats discourse, technology, and emotion as equally real components of policy practice. Rather than privileging structural or cultural explanations alone, the ANT-informed approach reveals how revitalization is enacted through a distributed network of actants, each translating demographic decline into affective potential.

This viewpoint contests traditional dichotomies—between government and citizen, policy and culture, rationality and emotion. In Akita's instance, revitalization is neither a top-down initiative enforced on communities nor solely a grassroots movement; it represents a hybrid amalgamation where governance, aesthetics, and affect converge. The prefectural website and exhibition are not ancillary; they are integral to the policy's ontology. They establish the conditions that render “revitalization” both credible and actionable.

The "People Captivated by Akita" campaign exemplifies the contemporary visual and emotional politics of rural Japan. It illustrates that migration and settlement are now conveyed not merely through statistics or incentives, but through curated emotions and mediated identities.

By presenting rural life as an object of affection, Akita Prefecture converts demographic policy into cultural performance. This shift, while successful in fostering visibility and enthusiasm, also prompts inquiries regarding the sustainability and inclusivity of such emotional governance.

From an analytical perspective, the study highlights three principal insights:

Rural revitalization as affective infrastructure—policies manifest through emotional and visual media that incite desire.

Representation as translation—pictures and stories serve as links that turn bureaucratic goals into real-life experiences.

The fragile agency of actors—both visible (migrants, officials) and invisible (funding, digital systems)—is essential for maintaining the network's stability.

The Akita campaign ultimately prompts contemplation regarding the conceptualization, presentation, and mediation of rural Japan's future. In the dynamic between policy and performance, belonging transforms into a commodity of emotion—one that necessitates continuous production to maintain optimism in the face of demographic decline. Analyzing these dynamics through a symmetrical, actor-network lens allows scholars to perceive rural revitalization not merely as population movement but as a continuous negotiation of affect, representation, and agency that influences the moral geography of contemporary Japan.

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