

Introduction the two
are divided by the
tsugaru



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Introduction

Japan is a nation made up of several islands and is located in the eastern part of Asia, in the Pacific Ocean. The total number of islands making up this nation are close to six thousand in number and the four largest are Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu and Shikoku. These make up almost ninety seven percent of Japan's land (McDougall, 1993, p. 23).

Most of these islands are characterized by mountains, most of which are volcanic. Hokkaido means North Sea Circuit in the Japanese language and it is the second largest Japanese island. Hokkaido's neighboring island is Honshu and the two are divided by the Tsugaru Strait. There is focus on this area due to the economic activities that its habitants engage in (McDougall, 1993, p. 24).

These activities are favored by the region's global location which subjects it mainly to temperate conditions. They are mainly agriculture, forestry, fishing and tourism.

History

It is believed by archaeologists that Hokkaido was inhabited by the Ainu, Gilyak and Oroke people some twenty thousand years ago. Form historical studies, Abe no Hirafu fronted a large army north between the periods 658 and 660.

Hokkaido is one of the places that Hirafu is believed to have gone. Settlers in Hokkaido traded with Dewa Province, an extension of the Japanese central government between the periods 710 and 1185 (McDougall, 1993, p. 26).

Hokkaido was known as Ezochi in the earlier periods and the name only changed after the Meiji re-establishment.

The Meiji administration changed the name to Hokkaido and the main reason for this was to secure the island before the Russia widened its control of the Far East beyond Vladivostok. These efforts were championed by Kuroda Kiyotaka and among his early undertakings were to look for an agricultural expert from the US. He found one in the name of William Clark who arrived in Hokkaido in the year 1876. He did a marvelous job by motivating the natives with insights into agriculture and Christianity (Howell, 1994, p.

142). Among the notable occurrences of that decade was a population upsurge from fifty eight thousand to two hundred and forty thousand. Clark is actually the man who established the first agricultural college in that region which was located in Sapporo.

Geography of Hokkaido

Hokkaido is the northernmost land of Japan and is surrounded by two seas, the Sea of Japan and the Sea of Okhotsk, and the Pacific Ocean. As at October 2008, the island stood at a population of 5.

54 million, which accounted for about four percent of Japan's total population (Statistics Bureau, Japan, 2010). Most of Hokkaido's land bears mountains and flat terrains of volcanic origin. There are several other smaller islands that are counted as part of Hokkaido and they include Rebun, Rishiri and Okushiri, among others. Hokkaido lies in position twenty one in the world by area.

By population it lies in position twenty. Hokkaido is volcanically active like the rest of eastern Asia. Several earthquakes do occur and there are quite a number of volcanoes that are deemed to be active like Mount Meakan and Mount Koma. An earthquake of 7.8 on the Richter scale spawned a tsunami in the year 1993 which ravaged Okushiri and left two hundred and two people dead. Another one struck near the island on 25th September of the year 2003 and it hit 8.0 on the Richter scale (Statistics Bureau, Japan, 2010).

Despite this, Hokkaido is one of the leading regions in most aspects of agriculture, forestry, fishing, tourism, sport and mining. This is as a result of the geographical set up and location of this island; various factors in the region favor these industrial and economic activities. All the above are favored by appropriate climate in conjunction with the physical set up of the region. The summer season that comes about here is normally calm and the winter is frosty. The whole of Hokkaido is under the clammy continental atmosphere region. Hokkaido is not normally influenced by the June and July rainy spell and considerable lack of humidity as other Japanese islands. The usually warm rather than hot summer season draws tourists from the rest of Japan and the world over.

Powder snow during the winter season makes Hokkaido the most popular haven for various snow sports (Statistics Bureau, Japan, 2010). Snowfall usually begins in November and continues till April. Establishments that offer skiing are usually full at this time.

The economic mainstays of Hokkaido

Hokkaido is the biggest food basket in Japan with agriculture being one of the island's economic props. The island has close to a quarter of the larger Japan's total arable land (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, 2010). Quite a number of agricultural products, both crop and animal products, are produced here and will be looked into detail below.

Hokkaido experiences fairly dry and mild climates which offer an appropriate ground for wheat production. Winter wheat is normally grown from January and thrives on cold temperatures which are the development period in preparation for crop production during the spring season. This period is very vital for substantial wheat production.

Heads of wheat stalks rise during this period and they are usually an indication of a healthy crop. Spring wheat is normally planted from early August to mid-September and has a shorter growing season. Temperatures usually range from 17 °C to 22 °C during this period. The Portuguese brought in corn to Japan in the 16th Century and only a few farmers grew it initially.

Large scale cultivation only took foot after the Meiji campaign that was aimed at developing the area. Corn production in Hokkaido then began hitting peak levels and currently the region produces more than 90% of Japan's requirement. The farming practices have grown by leaps and bounds with only the old generations tending to stick to the old style corn production. Corn is used as livestock feed and as a constituent for products such as cornstarch and glucose (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, 2010). Other functions include usage as a fermentation material

for liquor and beer production. Cultivation of soybeans has been in practice for over five thousand years mostly in Japan and China, with Hokkaido being the main production region in Japan. Hokkaido is mainly a region of volcanic well-drained soils of an acidic range of a pH between 5.

8 and 7. 0. This favors soybean growth on large-scale. The brown and black soybeans that have the most preferred flavor do well in the region. Soybeans are normally a warm weather crop and are usually planted at around the same time as corn. Soil and air temperatures of between 10-16 °C which are experienced in the region are the most conducive for good development.

End of May and beginning of June are usually the planting times for this crop (Statistics Bureau, Japan, 2009). As these plants develop, they grow a relatively pronounced taproot system which improves their tolerance to dry spells that are experienced in the region towards the approach of their maturity. Plant material from the crop like leaves and stalks are converted to livestock feed.

Hokkaido is reputed for its spectacular onions. The soils of the region favor growth of this crop which is a biennial but usually grown as an annual. The root system is shallow and fibrous and thus adapts well in the friable volcanic soils of the region.

The crop requires pH ranges from 5. 8 to 6. 0 which fall under the pH ranges of the region's soils (Statistics Bureau, Japan, 2009). Towards maturity and harvesting, the days are generally longer than twelve hours and the temperatures generally higher. Cultivation of potatoes in Hokkaido began towards the end of the 19th century. The region accounts for more than <https://assignbuster.com/introduction-the-two-are-divided-by-the-tsugaru/>

seventy percent of Japan's total production. Cool conditions support cultivation of this crop and after harvest they are mostly consumed locally.

Forestry is another major economic activity favored by Hokkaido's location and climate. The total forest coverage is over five and a half million hectares. (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, 2010). Natural forests consist of sixty six percent while artificial forests cover twenty four percent. These forests are classified under the temperate group. Hokkaido's distinct seasons promote these forests to a large extent.

Their growth is favored by the moderate climate and a growing season of 20-30 weeks during the four to six frost-free months. Other factors that enhance development of these forests include: precipitation of between 75 to 150cm well distributed throughout the year, fertile soils enriched with decomposing litter and temperature ranges between -30 to 30° C (Statistics Bureau, Japan, 2010). These forests can be further subdivided into temperate coniferous, temperate broad-leaved rainforests, dry conifer forests and moist conifer and evergreen broad-leaved forests. The harvested timber is normally used locally for various purposes like furniture, building, and paper manufacture, among others. The rest is exported to other parts of the world thereby earning the region and the nation at large the much sought foreign exchange. Hokkaido is fast developing as the holiday spot in the entire of eastern Asia, the prevailing season notwithstanding (Statistics Bureau, Japan, 2010).

The moisture intensities are normally reduced in summer and it is the prime time for staying outdoors. When winter commences, the accompanying ice

makes way for recreational activities like skiing. The Kushiro Marsh National Park is home to many valued living things like the Japanese cranes.

Shikotsu-Toya National Park is mainly composed of volcanoes and beautiful lakes and springs. There are other National Parks and game reserves still harboring natural vegetation and Shiretoko National Park is an example. The secluded Shiretoko-hanto Peninsula and the Daisetsu-zan National Park form the majorly visited places by leisure seekers.

The landscape also has several hot springs and geysers where tourists enjoy relaxing baths as they cool off tiredness from their journeys and vacations. These springs include the Jozan-kei-onsen, Soun-kyo-onsen and Noboribetsu-onsen springs. There are various festivals and celebrations held in the region as with each passing season.

These have also proved to be popular with tourists. Mining is another economic activity that contributes Hokkaido and the larger Japan's Gross Domestic Product (Statistics Bureau, Japan, 2010). Ni-bearing minerals like pentlandite and heazlewoodite are found in the Horoman peridotite of Hokkaido. The central Hokkaido earth consists of I-type and S-type granitic rocks of Miocene Age. These rocks are rich in ilmenite, rutile, pyrrhotite, pyrite and chalcopyrite. Substantial sub-solid reactions for sulfide minerals took place in the ground until temperatures within the earth's mantle cooled to below three hundred degrees Celsius. Natural aggregates like gravel, sand and crushed stone also exist in the region.

These are normally used in their natural state in industry or crushed and sized to required quantities. Some of the Ni-bearing minerals are used locally

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in Japan while the rest are exported mainly to the Americas and Europe (Statistics Bureau, Japan, 2010). These minerals are used in alloy formation such as stainless steels and in chemical and aerospace industries. Phosphate rocks are mainly used in acid and manure producing industries.

Quartz crystals are mainly used in the production of electronic components owing to their piezoelectric qualities. It is also a vital component in production of glass, paints and measuring instruments. Commercial fishing is a major economic mainstay for Hokkaido and Japan in general, with Japan being the largest fish-eating nation in the world, consuming seven and half billion tones of fish annually. This accounts for about ten percent of the world's catch (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, 2010). The waters surrounding the region are fertile fishing grounds since warm and cold currents converge here. The entire fish industry combines fishermen, traders, transportation firms, processors and packers. The products undergo various stages right from catch to the consumer's plate, with those involved at each stage making a profit and a living from this industry. Employment has also been created for the producers of fishing vessels like ships and other equipment like nets.

The region's location on the globe also favors fish farming with Japan being one of the world's leading fish farming nations. The most popular breed of fish raised in these establishments is salmon, red sea bream, yellowtail and puffer fish. Flounder is mainly reared in large tanks since they do not move much. In the year 2007 there were about 15, 470 fishing enterprises in Hokkaido.

The employees in this industry were approximated to be 26, 580 with eighty six percent of them being male (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, 2010). In the same year, fish production hit the value of 1. 474 million tons, contributing to about twenty six percent of the Japanese total.

The total gains from fishing activities for marine and marine aquaculture hit the ? 311. 4 billion mark, which accounted for 19. 8% of the Japanese total (Statistics Bureau, Japan, 2010). This led the authorities to strengthen policies regarding the fishery industry.

In order to bar competition from imported products and dwindling prices, the Hokkaido government endorsed the Hokkaido Fishery Industry Promotion Act in March of 2002 followed by setting up of the Fishery Industry Development Plan the following year. All these efforts were in a bid to regenerate the fishing industry and offer a stable local and international supply of quality fish products. The target is to hit 1. 72 million tons by the year 2017.

Hokkaido is a key region of livestock production in Japan. From agricultural statistics, the year 2006 livestock production of Hokkaido hit the 502 billion yen mark which accounted for about nineteen percent of Japan's total livestock output (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, 2010).

Again, all the aforementioned economic activities also encourage livestock rearing. Dairy farming is the main livestock undertaking and gains greatly from corn, wheat and soybean stalks as they are used as feed for the animals. The main breed reared is the Friesian which adapts well to Hokkaido's climatic conditions. The cattle are kept indoors during winter and come out to enjoy warm conditions during summer. They usually feed on

preserved hay when indoors. There is a vast area of grasslands in Hokkaido which accounts for about seventy three percent Japan's area of grasslands. In the year 2006, it was approximated that there were 8, 590 dairy farmers and 859, 100 dairy cattle in the region (Statistics Bureau, Japan, 2009).

Commercial dairy farming began in Hokkaido in the late Meiji period.

It, however, developed fully after the Second World War, at about the same period when the school lunch system commenced in elementary schools. In the year 2004, raw milk production hit the 8. 36 million tons. Presently, it is approximated that there are thirty thousand dairy farms in the region. Beef cattle are reared on a lesser scale as compared to dairy farming. It is believed that the practice was started in 1858 when Nanbu Cattle were introduced in the southwestern region of Hokkaido. Availability of forage in this region facilitated the importation of other breeds like Aberdeen Angus and Hereford in the 1960s.

Agricultural statistics of the year 2006 showed that beef cattle farmers in Hokkaido were three thousand (Statistics Bureau, Japan, 2009). The heads of beef cattle were 467, 000 and 73, 613 metric tons of beef were produced. Pigs are also kept since their food is readily available from the products of processed fish. Hokkaido's pig farms held 521, 900 pigs in the year 2006, which accounted for 5. 4% of Japan's total. The number of farers stood at 323 and put forth 70, 617 metric tons of pork. Hybrids adapt well to the climatic conditions and among them are three-way crossbreeds involving Landrace, Large White and Duroc. Merino sheep which comfortably adapt to the temperate conditions of the region are also reared.

Their fur is shaven during the warm months and left to develop as the cold season approaches. They also feed on plant materials at times but are mostly left to graze. Dairy and meat products are processed and consumed locally while the rest are exported, earning the region and the nation at large the much sought after foreign exchange. Milk production led to the development of Bilk, a mix of beer and milk by the Abashiri brewery in Hokkaido. Hokkaido is the hub of racehorses in Japan. The temperate conditions of the region are conducive for horse rearing and Hokkaido accounts for above 90% of all horses in Japan.

The most popular breed is the Hokkaido-Washuba which stays outdoors throughout the year and serves as packhorses. Their population stood at 1,468 in 2006 (Statistics Bureau, Japan, 2009).

Conclusion

It is clear from this research that the inhabitants of this region have adapted to the prevailing physical and climatic conditions and have utilized them for economic progression.

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