

# Morals and Market: Changing Attitudes Toward Minorities

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**I**N SUPPORT of the United Nations (UN) Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004), Japan adopted a national plan of action for human rights education in 1997 that triggered the adoption of local action plans in more than five hundred prefectures and municipalities in the country.<sup>1</sup> However, this enthusiasm gradually subsided at the start of the 2000s.

Japan enacted the Law on the Promotion of Human Rights Education and Human Rights Awareness-Raising (LPHREA) in 2000. But this law failed to stop both national and local Governments from giving less attention to the international framework on human rights education and specifically the United Nations (UN) initiatives.

Japan's inward-looking political environment was reinforced with the change of the ruling party (Liberal Democratic Party) in 2012. In 2014, when the United Nations Human Rights Committee recommended that the Japanese Government should ban all racially discriminatory propaganda, the Cabinet immediately commented that this UN recommendation had no legal binding force.

Treating international human rights standards lightly, the LDP Government ignored human rights education and started to emphasize moral education. The Government is now bringing moral education back as an official subject at primary and secondary schools in 2018 and 2019 school years respectively.

Upgrading moral education to an official school subject negatively impacts on human rights education in two ways. Moral education in Japan was only taught as an informal subject in the post-war period due to the criticism that it instilled patriotism and militarism that led the nation to war. Consequently, moral education, with high flexibility as an informal subject, became a good vehicle to integrate anti-discrimination (DOWA) and human rights education. However, once upgraded as a formal subject, moral education has to follow the national school curriculum and provides little room for DOWA and human rights education.

Secondly, teaching abstract moral values as defined by the state will destroy the tradition of DOWA and human rights education, which has always focused on real issues, and problem-solving through empowerment of people. For example, the revised course of study of moral education for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year primary students lists 19 items, such as honesty, sincerity, hope, courage, kindness, gratitude, politeness, friendship, trust, and so on. Stronger emphasis is given on values rather than rights, and on personal attitude formation rather than democratic participation.

Changes in political and educational environments are gradually influencing citizens' attitudes. In Japan, many local governments regularly conduct attitude surveys to evaluate the impacts of their human rights education programs. In their recent surveys unexpected changes in attitudes have been observed. The majority of respondents expressed their belief that private solutions are more important than institutional measures in dealing with social problems, prioritizing "moral actions" and "individual capacity and responsibility" over laws and administrative systems. "Morals" and "individual capacity and responsibility" mean minimized government intervention and more private initiatives in resolving problems.

On the other hand, preference for private initiatives should also be understood in the context of growing neo-liberal market economy. When the old model of welfare state is no longer providing protection to citizens' lives, citizens seriously react to it as a way to survive under the changed situation by supporting neoliberalism which translates to giving higher priority to private initiatives than to institutional measures.

Morals and market, although seemingly very different, have commonality at one point - they both promote private initiatives. In this paper I discuss how morals and market have influenced recent citizen's attitudes in Japan, using three separate local government surveys of this kind, conducted in three cities, two in Hyogo, and one in Osaka, which provide the examples that confirmed the changes. To supplement the findings of three attitude surveys, I present another survey conducted by Kyoto Human Rights Research Institute in 2014 in order to explain particular influence of changes in political and educational policies on the younger generation.

### **History of Attitude Surveys**

The history of attitude surveys to measure citizen's human rights awareness dates back to the period of the special Dowa measures (1969-2002). Under

a series of national affirmative action laws that provided special financial assistance to improve the conditions of *Buraku* communities and to promote education to eliminate *Buraku* discrimination, both national and local governments regularly conducted attitude surveys to benchmark citizen's level of understanding of the issue and their attitude towards *Buraku* (both communities and persons with *Buraku* origin), in order to plan and implement effective anti-discrimination education programs.

After special Dowa projects ended, attitude surveys are still being continued, but currently under a different law, the LPHREA. Now the focus of attitude surveys is no longer limited to *Buraku* discrimination but they cover different human rights issues. According to Uchida (2016), more than 35 prefectures, out of a total of 47 prefectures, have conducted attitude surveys of this kind between 2000 and 2015, not to mention many more surveys by governments at the municipal level.

### Surveys in Himeji and Tamba Cities

Himeji and Tamba are cities in the Hyogo prefecture in western Japan, but they differ in character and population size. Himeji is an urban city with a population of approximately 0.54 million (as of 2011). It has a long history and is now wellknown as a castle town due to the World Cultural Heritage status of Himeji Castle. It is also wellknown for its traditional leather production, which has historically been an occupation for the local *Buraku* communities. Tamba city is in a rural district with a population of sixty-thousand (as of 2012), and was created in 2004 after the merger of six townships. Tamba, a rural city surrounded by mountains, is famous for its agricultural products. Both cities have made significant commitment in adopting basic policies and local plans of actions for human rights education.

The attitude survey in Himeji was conducted in 2011 and in Tamba in 2012. In both surveys, respondents were asked to express their level of agreement or disagreement to ten statements that represent different views related to human rights, using a four-point ordinal scales: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The ten statements were the following:

1. People increasingly insist on their rights, while they lose patience;
2. Human rights have nothing to do with me. They are meant for those who are discriminated against;

3. If everyone is kind and considerate to others, there will not be any human rights infringements;
4. Schools should teach students to perform their duties rather than rights;
5. Inequality is unavoidable in a competitive society as individual abilities are different;
6. Benefits of the community should be given priority over individual rights;
7. Not only the person who discriminates, but also the person discriminated against has a problem;
8. Government holds primary duty to fulfill the human rights of the citizens;
9. In order to eliminate discrimination, anti-discrimination law needs to be legislated;
10. Persons under nursing care (i.e., the elderly and the persons with disabilities) should not insist too much.

The responses revealed two distinctive tendencies. First, the majority of respondents prioritized morals over rights. Table 1 lists the statements which have more “agree” responses than “disagree” responses. As seen in this table, more than 80 percent either strongly agree or agree to the statement that “people increasingly insist on their rights, while they lose patience,” expressing their negative views against human rights activism. More than 60 percent believed that teaching children to “perform duties” is more important than the teaching of rights, and that human rights infringement can be avoided if everyone is “kind and considerate to others.”

Interestingly, more than 60 percent also agreed with the statement “Inequality is unavoidable in a competitive society as individual abilities are different.” Inequality is certainly morally unjust, but it was justified as a result of differences in individual abilities. Inequality is recognized as a matter of personal ability and responsibility, not as a failure in social institutional systems.

**Table 1**

	Strongly Agree + Agree	
	Himeji (N=1450)	Tamba (N=1131)
People increasingly insist on their rights, while they lose patience.	83.0 %	81.6 %
If everyone is kind and considerate to others, there will not be any human rights infringements.	67.4 %	67.6 %
Schools should teach students to perform their duties rather than rights.	66.0 %	61.3 %
Inequality is unavoidable in a competitive society as individual abilities are different.	64.5 %	54.0 %

Second, contrary to their strong support to private solutions, the majority of respondents disagreed with institutional solutions. As seen in Table 2, over half of the respondents in Himeji and Tamba neither acknowledged the Government as “primary duty-bearer to fulfill the human rights of citizens,” nor agreed with the need for “anti-discrimination law” in order to eliminate discrimination. The majority of respondents distrust government intervention and democratic mechanisms of society.

**Table 2**

	Strongly disagree + Disagree	
	Himeji (N=1450)	Tamba (N=1131)
Government holds primary duty to fulfill the human rights of the citizens.	54.3 %	59.3 %
In order to eliminate discrimination, anti-discrimination law needs to be legislated.	63.5 %	65.3 %

In fact, the responses to the two statements in Table 2 are significantly co-related, and intriguingly, those who agree more strongly with the two statements manifest stronger discriminatory attitudes toward the Buraku. Thus the questions: why do those who support laws and government initiatives hold more discriminatory attitudes? Why not the other way round? This result is unexpected because those who support institutional measures (laws and government initiatives) should be pro-democracy and pro-human rights, and therefore, would not hold discriminatory attitudes.

In the case of Himeji, another interesting observation is that the respondents with the least willingness to commit themselves in alleviating *Buraku* discrimination manifested highest support to institutional measures. It can be interpreted that people are unwilling to make their own personal commitment and expect the government to do something for the minority. The attitude of supporting institutional measures may simply be a manifestation of indifference to the minority, and their habitual dependence on the government. In this sense, support for institutional measures does not mean support for democracy and human rights.

Taking those results into account, there is an indication that Japanese citizens seem to strongly support private solutions through morals and personal responsibility, while holding negative view towards institutional measures. Institutional measures are not properly understood as democratic mechanisms and processes, but misunderstood as abandoning one's personal effort and throwing the responsibility to the government. Therefore, those who support institutional measures manifested negative attitudes towards the minority.

### **Sakai City Survey: Market Reinforces Discrimination**

Sakai city in Osaka prefecture is located alongside Osaka Bay, and has historically been a major port town in the region. It is a satellite city of Osaka, with the population of 0.85 million (as of 2015). Sakai city is also quite known internationally in relation to human rights. In one report, the city has been described as follows:<sup>1</sup>

59. In 1980 Sakai City Government recognised the sanctity of human rights, affirmed that it would enlist the efforts towards the realization of a "Human Rights Protection City." Sakai City subsequently advanced policy based on the human rights principles and later joined other local governments in formulating its own education and enlightenment plan called the "Sakai City Action Plan for the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education." Following on from previous efforts, in 2007 Sakai enacted the "City Ordinance for Community Development Respecting Peace and Human Rights" and the Sakai City Human Rights Policy Promotion Plan", and has since comprehensively and systematically advanced human rights policy.

Sakai city has been undertaking surveys on the attitude of its residents on human rights every five years since 1985. The latest survey in 2015 provides some explanation on the influence of market economy on discrimination.

There were two different types of questions in the survey in Sakai city: one that asked respondents' recognition of existing discrimination against the *Buraku* (whether they think discrimination still exists or not), and one that measured the level of discriminatory attitudes of respondents against *Buraku* (whether they do discriminate or not) in two situations; 1) at time of marriage with person with *Buraku* origin, and, 2) at time of renting or purchasing property within a *Buraku* community or within the same school district.

Figure 1 shows respondents' recognition of the existence of discrimination. More respondents thought that "discrimination exists" at the time of marriage (45.4%), than at the time of renting/purchasing a home (28.1%). Noting that *Buraku* discrimination derives from feudal class divisions, and that people during the feudal period were deprived of their freedom to marry, to abode and to choose one's occupation, *Buraku* discrimination is not only manifested in treatment of people with *Buraku* origin, but also towards occupations and the lands where *Buraku* communities have historically been assigned to be located.

Figure 1. "Do you think discrimination against *Buraku* still exists?" (N = 1293)

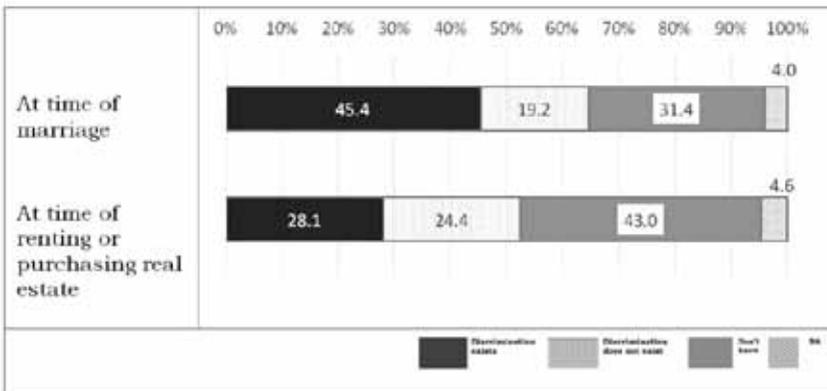


Fig. 2. "Do you agree with marriage of your child with a partner from *Buraku* community?" (N = 1293)

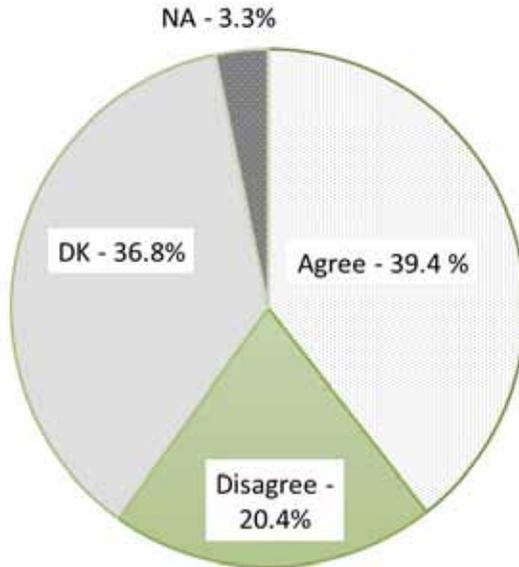
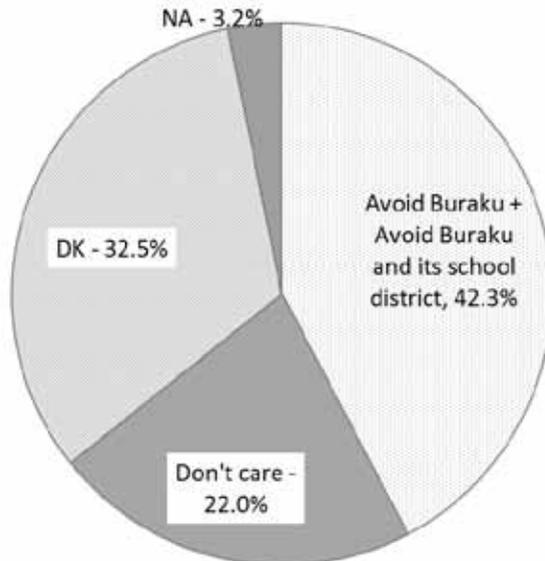


Fig. 3 "Do you mind renting/purchasing a house within *Buraku* communities and their school districts?" (N=1293)



Note: NA – No Answer; DK – Don't Know

Figures 2 and 3 show the respondents' attitudes towards *Buraku* in two situations: marriage of their child with a partner of *Buraku* origin (Figure 2), and renting/purchasing a house in a *Buraku* community or in its school district (Figure 3).

On marriage, 39.4 percent replied that they would "agree" to have their child marry a partner with a *Buraku* origin which is twice those who "disagree" (20.4 percent). On the contrary, in renting/purchasing a house, the percentage of those who would "avoid *Buraku* and its school district" (43.3 percent) is nearly twice as high as those who "don't care" (22.0 percent). The respondents tend to be more discriminatory regarding property located in *Buraku* community than persons from the *Buraku* community.

Interestingly, by comparing Figure 1 and Figure 2 data we can see that those who think discrimination exists at the time of marriage was 45.4 percent (Figure 1), but those who actually discriminate went down to 20.4 percent (Figure 2). In contrast, when comparing Figure 1 and Figure 3, those who think discrimination exists at the time of renting/purchasing a house was 28.1 percent (Figure 1), but those who actually avoid *Buraku* and its school district went up to 42.3 percent (Figure 3). Respondents' attitudes were clearly different in these two occasions.

More interestingly, exposure to DOWA and human rights education at school made a difference in attitude towards marriage, but not in attitude towards property. Table 3 makes a comparison of learning experience between the two groups; those who think discrimination exists but agree with marriage, and those who think discrimination exists and disagree with marriage. The former had more exposure to DOWA and human rights education in lower and upper secondary schools and in various trainings. Continuous and cumulative learning experience from school age to adulthood may have contributed in the formation of anti-discriminatory attitudes.

**Table 3. Exposure to DOWA and human rights education (multiple responses, N=1293)**

		Primary school	Lower secondary	Upper secondary	Tertiary	Training at workplace	Trainings organized by local govt.	Training organized by CSO	Others	Don't remember	No exposure	NA
Discrimination exists > agree with marriage	n=221	45.2	41.2	25.3	10.0	25.8	9.0	7.2	3.2	17.2	7.7	1.8
Discrimination exists > disagree with marriage	n=179	43.0	31.8	20.1	6.1	15.1	3.9	5.0	2.8	22.9	11.2	2.2

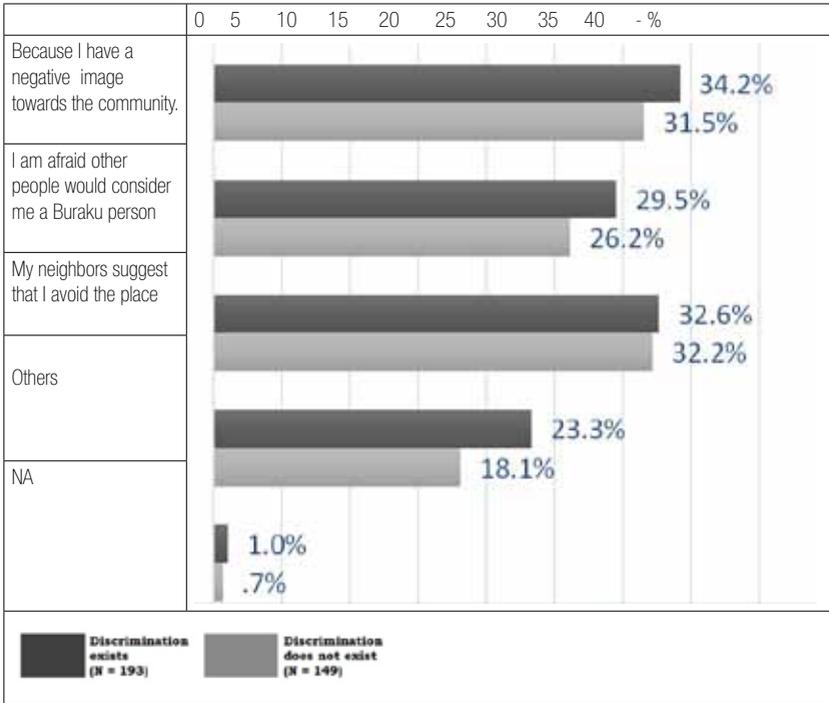
On the other hand, at time of renting/purchasing a house within a *Buraku* community and its school district, little difference was observed between the two groups, those who recognize discrimination still exist and those who do not. Regardless of their recognition of existing discrimination, around 50 percent of both groups replied that they would avoid *Buraku* communities similarly (Table 4). A question arises why do they, those who think discrimination do not exist, still avoid *Buraku* communities ?

**Table 4. Avoidance of Buraku communities**

		Avoid Buraku or its school district	Do not care
Discrimination exist	n=363	53.2%	18.2%
Discrimination does not exist	n=315	47.3%	25.7%

Figure 5 shows the reasons selected by those who avoid *Buraku* communities and their school districts. The upper bar shows the responses of those who thought discrimination exists (n=193), and the lower bar shows responses of those who did not think discrimination exists (n=149). Little difference is found between the two responses.

**Figure 5. Reasons for avoiding Buraku community and its school district (multiple responses)**



Regardless of their recognition of whether discrimination exists or not, the responses of the two groups showed similar trends. Respondents’ negative image towards the *Buraku* (their own prejudice), their neighbors’ suggestion to avoid the *Buraku* (prejudice in neighborhood), and their fear of being mistaken as *Burakumin* were almost equally selected by one-third of each group.

For those who selected “others,” a space was provided for stating their own reasons. Eighty-eight of these respondents filled the space, and eleven among them referred to the lower asset value and low marketability of properties in *Buraku* communities. In the case of renting/purchasing property, the true motives of avoiding *Buraku*, whether they are discriminating *Buraku* or simply avoiding disadvantages in the market, is difficult to discern. At least, the impact of marketing on citizen’s attitudes should not be overlooked. In the era of neoliberalism, discrimination against minorities may be reinforced by market economy, if people consider association with the minority might cause economic disadvantage.

### Kyoto Human Rights Research Institute Survey

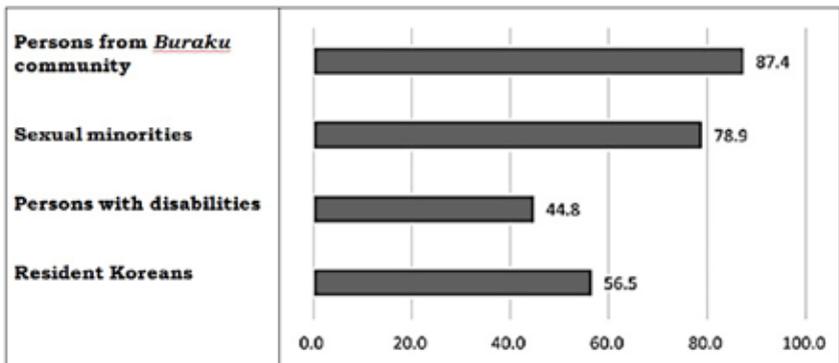
Moral education promotes private measures in resolving social problems, by emphasizing good personal relationships through teaching of values. The teaching of morals is based on presentation of abstract ideas, and keeps the students distant from engagement in real issues in society.

In fact, the understanding of *Buraku* issues has recently been getting more and more abstract especially among the young generation. This is partly because of the current form of moral education, and partly because of the end of special measures on the *Buraku* issue.

The Kyoto Human Rights Research Institute conducted a survey in 2014 in 12 colleges and universities in the Kinki region.<sup>2</sup> 2,867 undergraduate students (mostly junior and sophomore) were asked whether they had any contact with minority groups, including “persons with Buraku origin”, “residential Koreans”, “persons with disabilities”, and “sexual minorities (LGBT).” They were asked to choose their response from the following: “I have a close friend,” “I have a casual acquaintance,” “I have my family and relatives,” and “I do not know anyone personally.”

Figure 6 compares the percentages of respondents who selected “I do not know anyone personally” to four different groups. Those who do not have any personal contact with “persons with *Buraku* origin” was the highest (87.4%) among four groups, while the lowest was “persons with disabilities” (44.8%). Contact experience may be higher with more “invisible” minorities, and with the groups that schools do not, or hesitate, to teach about them.

Figure 6 Respondents who selected “I do not know anyone personally” (N = 2867)



The lowest contact experience with “persons from *Buraku*” is also explained as the outcome of the ending of special measures legislation. When the special measures legislation was still effective, *Buraku* communities were designated under the law as recipients of DOWA projects. Therefore, empowerment and coming-out of the communities and individuals with *Buraku* origin were preconditions for designation. However, since the termination of the law, many schools stopped teaching anything that might lead to identifying *Buraku* communities or persons with *Buraku* origin, since there were no longer designated communities under the law, believing that it was wrong to identify them without legal foundation. Many schools no longer have programs such as fieldwork, or programs inviting speakers from local *Buraku* communities for students to encounter the realities, which were popular among schools in the Kinki region<sup>2</sup> while the law was still in existence.

As a result of changes in schools and the learning experience of the young generation, feedback from students after discussing *Buraku* discrimination in my lectures at the university has also been changing. The typical comment goes: “without knowing any *Buraku* community or person with *Buraku* origin, I do not feel any serious discrimination still exists. I don’t think you need to teach about *Buraku* issues, as you may perpetuate discrimination by informing us.”

## Conclusion

Changes in political and educational policies, and growing impacts of the market economy in accordance with neo-liberalization of society gradually changed the attitudes of citizens. Both morals and market promoted private initiatives, while weakening citizen’s trust in institutional solutions through the democratic mechanisms of society. Considering that human rights education facilitates participation in democratic decision-making processes, the results manifested in the recent attitude surveys in three cities were discouraging, and even alarming for human rights educators. The relationship among morals, market, and human rights education needs to be seriously discussed, and human rights educators must face these changes and provide continuous learning opportunities on rights and democracy.

At the same time, abstract teaching of morals raises risks that the understanding of human rights issues among younger generations will remain

abstract too, without having opportunities to encounter real issues and real people. As stated in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (2011), “Human rights education ... should take into account the particular challenges and barriers faced by, and the needs and expectation of, persons in vulnerable and disadvantaged situations and groups.” (Article 5.2) Human rights educators should create space for both members of the majority and the minority sections of society to encounter each other and exchange views and experiences in order to foster a community that works for the realization of human rights.

## Reference

Uchida, Ryushi. 2016. “Direction of Human Rights Education and Awareness-raising Viewed from Awareness Survey of *Buraku* Issues in Recent Years” (in Japanese). In *The Journal of Human Rights Education and Research*, Vol. 16. Hyogo: The Japan Association of Human Rights Education and Research.

## Endnotes

1 See the final report of the United Nations Human Rights Council Advisory Committee (UN HRCAC) on the role of local governments in the promotion and protection of human rights (A/HRC/30/49) which was adopted at the 30th session of the UN Human Rights Council in September 2015.

2 Kinki region refers to an area in western Japan that covers the prefectures of Osaka, Hyogo, Kyoto, Shiga, Nara, Wakayama, Mie, and Tokushima, and the major cities of Osaka, Kobe, Kyoto, Ohtsu, Nara, Wakayama, Tsu, and Tokushima.