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A Sociological Study of the Historic Preservation Movement in Otaru, Japan, 1965–2017

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A Sociological Study of the Historic  
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## Preface

March 27, 1984. 10 p.m. This is when I first stepped off the train onto the snowy platform of Otaru Station. Although I had no way of knowing at the time, this moment marked the beginning of thirty-six years of fieldwork in Otaru.

I had entered university the previous April and immediately developed an interest in urban sociology. My newfound interest was initially nothing more than a vague curiosity that I could not express with any degree of coherence. This in itself was frustrating, but the larger problem was that I had never personally experienced the various issues at the heart of my urban sociology lectures. The emergence of a “resident-led movement” was surely an event of major significance within a local community, but I could not grasp the reality behind the term. Other terms—“class struggle,” “structural functionalism”—also belonged to this distant world, well beyond my comprehension. Day after day, I attended these lectures without any sense of personal connection or shared experience.

I made a plan to break this deadlock: I would travel to Kobe, and observe with my own eyes a residents’ movement that had garnered national attention for challenging a municipal government so intent upon development that it was often referred to as “Kobe Co., Ltd.” I wanted to personally experience every step in the process by which a sociological thesis is developed: I would first observe the field site with my own eyes and ears, and slowly discern how these experiences could be abstracted and woven together into a compelling thesis. I thought that if I could undergo this process just once, I would be able to glean the reality behind the term “residents’ movement.” The entire university career of this intensely earnest nineteen-year-old would hinge on the success of “Operation Kobe.”

I happened to mention this plan to my eldest brother, who told me “if that’s your goal, perhaps you should take a look at Otaru, in Hokkaido, where everyone is up in arms about the canal.” I had visited Otaru briefly as a junior high school student, but had no real knowledge of the “canal controversy” that had divided the city. As I listened to my brother, I realized that Kobe was not the only place where I could achieve my goal of personally experiencing a local resident-led movement. In early

spring I set out for Otaru. Sheer chance had led me to the city that would become my fieldwork site for the next three decades.

On that cold March night, Yamaguchi Tamotsu was waiting for me in front of Otaru Station. Yamaguchi, a key member of the campaign to save the Otaru canal, drove me through the snow-covered streets of the city to the coffeehouse he owned and operated. We passed through the shop to his narrow living quarters in the back. Some hours later, empty beer cans littered the room and I heard the sound of the morning newspaper delivery scooter. Yamaguchi had talked insatiably through the night about the state of the preservation movement.

I had listened intently to Yamaguchi, who was passionate but also extremely logical in his arguments. But I was puzzled. Why was Yamaguchi so insistent that the canal be saved? Why was the Otaru canal so important to him? What was so wrong with tearing down old structures and replacing them with new ones? Why did Yamaguchi continue to participate in this preservation movement, when there wasn't a single yen in it for him? And why was the Otaru city government so obstinate in refusing to make any change to the road construction plan that threatened the canal?

I didn't have the answers to these questions, but I wanted them—no, I think I *needed* to find them. Before my eyes was a man who was putting into practice, with enormous conviction, the principles of community development, preservation, and resident-led activism. Here was a man who was trying to do something for the entire city, with no regard for personal benefit. I sensed that if I could understand a man like Yamaguchi, who even as he clashed with his opponents was trying to collectively protect and create something for the city of Otaru, I would be able to finally discern the real significance of sociological inquiry. *Why preserve?* I had to find the answer to this question through every possible means. Slowly but surely, my research proceeded from that first nightlong conversation with Yamaguchi in 1984. Otaru was my new field site, and I was soon a frequent visitor.

Yamaguchi's coffee shop was a common meeting place for members of the preservation movement, and I was offered free lodging whenever I came to town. There I was able to focus on the subjective world of local activists, and interrogate their reasons for seeking to save the canal and their motivations for joining the movement. I gradually expanded the scope of my inquiry, from the people who visited Yamaguchi's coffee shop to their broader network, and from there, to the municipal government. In 1997, when I began teaching a social research practicum as a young faculty member at Hosei University I added a fixed point observation survey of Otaru's historic canal district to the scope of my fieldwork. I still return to Otaru to conduct this fixed point observation survey every year.

In the course of my three decades of research, I have interviewed countless people, and walked endlessly through the narrow streets of Otaru. My questions have deepened and become more complex, but I have never grown tired of my subject matter. This is because Japanese cities remain entirely indifferent to history, and enslaved to the new. In the face of the wholesale destruction of historic districts and the unchecked

construction of new buildings, my inquiry has kept its relevance. *Why preserve?* The question that awaited me on that March night so long ago is the question I have attempted to answer in this volume. It is my hope that this case study of a small port city in northern Japan can nevertheless speak to the universal themes of cities and preservation, change, and control.

Tokyo, Japan

Saburo Horikawa

## Acknowledgements

Writing a book is a solitary act. Yet a book is never the creation of just one person. I could not have embarked on the project of writing this book without considerable support and encouragement—and the generous cooperation of countless people in Otaru, my fieldwork site. Even when I secluded myself in my office during the final stages of the writing process, I was never really alone. The long list of names that follows should thus come as no surprise, particularly given the fact that this book is the result of thirty-six years of fieldwork. Indeed, I am humbled and a little awed by the number of people I have the good fortune to acknowledge in these pages.

It was my great fortune to study under such excellent teachers as an undergraduate and graduate student. Shimazaki Minoru (formerly of Chuo University), Okuda Michihiro (formerly of Rikkyo University), Tomoeda Toshio (Osaka University), Kawai Takao (Keio University), and Fujita Hirō (formerly of Keio University) responded to my budding academic interests with rigorous introductions to urban sociological theory, fieldwork methodology, and research fundamentals. Kawai Takao, who never uttered a superfluous word and remained intently focused on the substance of my work, was particularly influential. His comments on my research reports were always brief and to the point. He would tell me, “You’re not there yet. You won’t be finished until the depth of your research can be appreciated not only by your fellow scholars, but even by the people at your fieldwork site.” While his comments were unsparing, Prof. Kawai remained laser-focused on my research, and never raised more worldly concerns. I cannot recall a single instance in which he pushed me to finish my dissertation as soon as possible in order to secure employment, or to adopt a more fashionable research theme. Looking back, I realize that my ability to remained steadfastly focused on my field site, even when the going got tough, was because of Prof. Kawai, who patiently waited for my efforts to pay off. To Prof. Kawai, who has now retired to far-away Yamagata, I offer my heartfelt thanks. I would also like to acknowledge the support of my former classmates Takemura Hideki (Keio University) and Ōyane Jun (Senshu University), who studied with me under Prof. Kawai. Arisue Ken (Keio University), Terada Ryōichi (Meiji University), and Hama Hideo (Keio University) supervised my doctoral dissertation, upon which this book is based, and offered me endless encouragement along the way to its completion. I am deeply grateful for their advice and support.



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The late Funabashi Harutoshi (Hosei University) would shrewdly get to the very essence of the issue at hand, and always offered me the exact piece of advice that I needed. Indeed, Prof. Funabashi invariably brought a truly remarkable degree of clarity to my rather inchoate discussions, and helped me to organize my thoughts and clarify the underlying theoretical framework. Whenever I came to an impasse in my writing, I knew that a conversation with Prof. Funabashi would help me break the deadlock and press forward. Professor Funabashi passed away in 2014, before I could present him with a copy of my finished work. This is something I will always regret.

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The fact that the list of people to whom I am indebted is too long to continue with by name is a reminder of how this work came to completion. However, the advice and suggestions I received from my colleagues in the fields of environmental sociology, urban sociology, and regional sociology are incorporated throughout this work. I hope this will be understood as a reflection of my enduring appreciation.

The English-language publication of my work was supported by a grant from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (18HP6003) that supports the sharing of research findings. Fritz Schmul, an editor at Springer Nature, was the first to appreciate the value of publishing an English translation of the 504-page original, which was originally published by the University of Tokyo Press. Fritz and I first discussed the possibility of publishing an English language translation in July 2016, at an airy courtyard cloister on the University of Vienna campus. Since then Fritz has cheered me on in this challenging endeavor over countless cups of sake at his favorite tempura

restaurant in Tokyo. This English edition would never have been possible without his warm encouragement. Fritz's editorial acumen was confirmed when my book went on to receive three major academic awards. Margaret Deignan took over editorial duties from Fritz in the final stages of bringing this book to publication. I thank Ms. Deignan and her team—Jill Ritchie, Catalina Sava, Ilona Isaeva, Ram Prasad Chandrasekar, Muruga Prashanth, Hermine Vloemans and Amudha Vijayarangan—for their splendid work and constant support.

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Of course, my greatest debt is to the citizens of Otaru. Due to privacy concerns, I cannot thank many of my informants by their real names. But I offer my heartfelt thanks to the citizens of Otaru and the Otaru city government—and most of all, to the former activists who led the campaign to save the Otaru canal. These preservation activists welcomed me into their home and talked with me late into the night about the history of their campaign. Many rummaged through their old storage spaces to dig out primary sources (often handwritten documents) from the preservation campaign. Meanwhile, city officials met with me in their offices to passionately explain the necessity of paving over the canal, and elaborate on their vision for community development in Otaru. Other city hall employees made endless trips down to the basement archive room on my behalf, and good-naturedly pushed their work aside whenever I came to ask more questions. I have been granted interviews from hospital beds. My requests for help with my survey of Otaru have been met with invitations to partake in delicious crab and sake. These countless acts of kindness are forever etched in my mind.

In some cases, this type of generous support can end up interfering with the pursuit of objective research. But this was not the case in Otaru. Every time I met with a new informant, I would remind him or her that I planned to write a report on my findings, and that my conclusions might not be to his or her liking. I warned my informants that, while I would of course correct any factual inaccuracies, I would not accommodate any other requests for revision. I would then ask if they still wished to proceed. I always received the same answer: "But of course! You should do all the research you can, and then write with conviction." I am profoundly grateful for the unparalleled tolerance and generosity displayed by the people of Otaru.

Notwithstanding privacy concerns, I would like to acknowledge the following individuals in Otaru. Yamaguchi Tamotsu always welcomed me cheerfully into his home. Ogawara Tadashi readily stayed up until dawn with me to continue our conversation. No matter how busy she was, Mineyama Fumi never refused to meet with me during my many visits to Otaru over the years. Former Otaru mayor Shimura Kazuo would prepare meticulous notes for me and always talked with real passion during our meetings. The cooperation of these individuals was absolutely essential to my research. Here I want to emphasize once more the enormous support I received from the Otaru municipal government. Even when they were at their busiest—preparing

for questioning at the city assembly, for example—city officials readily provided me with the documents I requested, and patiently answered my questions.

The list goes on. During our many conversations, Sasaki Kyōjirō always spoke from his heart. Also deserving of special thanks are Yanagida Ryōzō, Ishizuka Masaaki, and Morishita Mitsuru—the so-called “Hokudai trio,” who clearly and calmly guided me in our many conversations. I also owe these three men an apology: I was unable to adequately situate their work within my history of the canal preservation movement in Otaru. Their many accomplishments, including their advocacy of the “educational power of the environment” (*kankyō no kyōikuryoku*), cannot be contained within a single case study of Otaru; they demand further attention from Japan’s architects and urban planners. I did not omit an analysis of their attitude to life and the specific terms they generated because they were insignificant, but because they were all *too* significant to be treated in anything less than comprehensive fashion. I have faith that their work will soon receive the attention it deserves.

Finally, I acknowledge with enormous gratitude the support of my family: my late parents, Atsuhiko and Hatsue; my elder brothers, Jun and Jōji; my sisters-in-law, Hikaru, Midori, and Yumiko; my father-in-law, Isamu; my mother-in-law, Keiko. Without their moral support, I could never have completed this book. But I have saved for last the two most important people of all. Parenting my son, Gen (pronounced as “Ghen”), has taught me the fundamental joy of learning. And it is no exaggeration to say that my wife, Yukiko, has supported and guided me every single step of the way. It is to Gen and to Yukiko that I offer my most profound and heartfelt thanks.

Saburo Horikawa

# Introduction

**Abstract** The Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011 wrought enormous and diverse changes within Japanese society, and revealed that life cannot go on without a stable form. What mechanisms might allow us to control changes to the material “form” that is the basis of our daily existence—be that one’s own house or the broader townscape? This is the question that guides this book. Bearing in mind the lessons of March 11, I address this question through an examination of the community development efforts practiced by residents of Otaru, a once prosperous city on Japan’s northernmost island of Hokkaido. This book asks: “who is affected by changes to urban space, and how are they affected?” Local townscape preservation movements are one window into these issues. The preservation campaign launched by residents of a small port city in northern Japan offers a unique perspective on half a century of change within Japanese society. It also illuminates the relationship between urban society and the built environment, and suggests a sociological theorization of this relationship.

**Keywords** Townscape · Preservation · Social movement · Community development · Sociology

Ten years have passed since the devastating March 11 earthquake, tsunami, and Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster. Since then, the survivors of this triple disaster have fought to rebuild their lives. Yet they have also remained deeply attached to *photographs* of their old homes. Amid the struggle of their daily lives, they seek out old photographs that recall lost homes and communities. Photographs cannot fill empty stomachs or alleviate the discomfort of cramped temporary housing units. Why, then, are survivors so intent upon finding them? Perhaps they hope that these images might allow them to heal, or at least soothe their troubled spirits. However, this does not fully explain the intensity of their hunt for photographs of their family and hometowns. What is the real significance of their relentless search?

This is a question with no ready answer. What I would like to consider here is the fact that there is a shape to human activity. In other words, the society in which we live has a physical form, and changes to this physical form are capable of transforming society.

We tend to forget that while the images conjured up by the word “society” are abstract, *society itself is material*. Human activities comprise society, and these activities are not conducted in a vacuum, but rather through earthly materials. Houses, roads, clothing, food, tableware, musical instruments, buildings, railroads, harbors, seawalls—none of these things can exist without a material form. In a very literal sense, the March 11, 2011 earthquake and tsunami shook and destroyed the material basis of Japanese society.

At the same time, the *material components of society are social*. Just as the original apple was entirely different from the apples grown and consumed today, material substances have been transformed by society’s tastes and inclinations, and by the significance society confers on them. The original apples were modified for the convenience of human society. Similarly, the forests that we often assume to be unchanged since time immemorial are, in most cases, second growth—the result of a decision made by society at a particular juncture in history. A beautiful forest is not necessarily a “natural” landscape. It would be more accurate to describe it as a “landscape with socially-assigned meaning.”

Thus, society is material, but materials are equally social in nature. Consequently, when an earthquake, tsunami, or nuclear disaster fatally alters the material foundation, society can no longer survive in its old form and must submit to the inevitability of drastic change. Society and materials exert reciprocal influences upon each other: societal changes transform the material world, while the effects of these transformations return to reverberate through society.

It is because changes to physical space have such an enormous impact on people’s daily lives and consciousness that people attempt to ward off these changes, or, when this proves impossible, to compensate for them. When a tsunami has swept away any trace of your home, or radioactive contamination has forever condemned your hometown, the sense of loss must be overwhelming. Imagine a feeling of helplessness so strong that it makes you uncertain of who you are, or where you belong. Or the desolation you would feel if the people who populated your daily life suddenly disappeared, without so much as a goodbye. Or a feeling of utter isolation akin to the sensation of walking alone through the soundless void of space. Japan’s relatively quick resumption of nuclear power generation, meanwhile, must prompt a very different sense of alienation among survivors, who can never hope to resume their former lives. The hunt for old photographs is one manifestation of an effort to restore what was lost. For it is not enough for humans to remain living organisms—they must live embedded within the social relationships of their local community. Otherwise, simply surviving the earthquake and tsunami would have been enough, and there would be no need to sift through the rubble in search of images from the pre-3/11 world.

Ten years after the March 11 disasters, young volunteers continue to look for old photographs within the rubble of the disaster area. They clean whatever they find, and attempt to return the salvaged images to their owners. This is because people live and remember through certain material forms: it is the familiar landscape of our hometown that enables us to feel we are truly home. As social relationships are expressed intensively within a certain form, the loss or transformation of this

form signals an immediate change to these relationships. Relationships were permanently severed when the earthquake and tsunami destroyed their material form. Yet photographs preserve these forms, and the social relationships that lie embedded within them. Having lost their homes and all other mementos of the deceased, “at least a photograph” has become the final plea of those left behind.

The Great East Japan Earthquake wrought enormous changes within Japanese society. These changes are diverse and wide-ranging. Given the inevitability of change, whether natural or man-made, people have always hoped to welcome it when it arrives. What was unexpectedly revealed by the 2011 earthquake was the fact that life cannot go on without a stable form. What mechanisms might allow us to control changes to the material “form” that represents the basis of our daily existence—be that one’s own house or the broader townscape? This is the question that guides this book. Bearing in mind the lessons of March 11, I address this question through an examination of the community development efforts practiced by residents of the port city of Otaru. The guiding concern running through this book is “who is affected by changes to urban space, and how are they affected?”

It is generally accepted that urban spaces must be regulated and controlled, rather than abandoned to the chaos of unchecked change. However, the regulation of urban space is far from straightforward. We have learned that livable urban spaces cannot be achieved by the free market (“market failure”). Nor is there any guarantee that government intervention in city planning will achieve something more satisfactory (“government failure”). Despite all the indicators that attest to Japan’s status as an economic superpower, the Japanese continue to live in cramped quarters frequently derided as “rabbit hutches,” and city residents are often forced to walk along narrow roads with no sidewalks, dodging passing cars as they go. Verdant parks are but a distant dream for these city dwellers. As new apartment buildings and high-rise office buildings reach closer to the sky each day, the desire for something as simple as a sidewalk seems pathetically modest by comparison.

Given the reality of “market failure” and “government failure,” it is time to ask what mechanisms might better control change within Japanese cities. It is easy to casually opine on the “lack of livability” in Japanese cities. However, this is hardly the sociological approach to the issue, to say the least. Social science demands that we ask *why* Japanese cities are so poorly equipped to meet the needs of residents. If Japan’s economic strength and talented bureaucrats cannot create livable cities (or a sense of abundance and satisfaction among city residents), we can assume that certain decision-making processes and structures prevent Japan’s ample resources from being channeled into community and urban development. To understand the current state of Japanese cities, we must begin by investigating the allocation of resources, existing decision-making processes and structures, and the consciousness and desires of local residents.

Local townscape preservation movements are one window into these issues. The preservation campaign launched by residents of a small port city in northern Japan offers a unique perspective on half a century of change within Japanese society. More importantly, however, it illuminates the relationship between urban society and the built environment, and suggests a sociological theorization of this relationship. The

residents of Otaru rejected modern Japan's tendency to abandon history in its constant pursuit of the new, and raised their voices in defense of the historic Otaru townscape. An analysis of their philosophy and practices carries enormous implications for a rapidly globalizing and homogenizing world.

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# Chapter 1

## Why Preserve?: Positioning the Issue and Methods of Analysis



**Abstract** Cities change. Old townscapes are destroyed and replaced with shiny new buildings. The cities of Japan are in a perpetual state of redevelopment. This process is so self-evident that no one gives it a second thought. Yet some people argue that old townscapes should be preserved. As cities change to meet the demands of a new age, those who would prefer to save existing townscapes appear resistant to change. Why would they attempt to protect old townscapes that are hardly convenient or the most comfortable? This is the central concern of this chapter. What does the act of preservation seek to achieve? What are the demands for preservation based upon? Are these demands simply a reflection of individual taste? What type of people participate in preservation movements? Are development and preservation always in conflict, or is it possible to conceive of a different relationship between the two? Most importantly, what do conflicts surrounding preservation reveal about society? In this chapter, I address these questions and, through the use of a detailed case study, undertake a sociological approach to the question of “why preserve?”

**Keywords** Townscape · Preservation · Otaru · Control of change

### 1.1 Why Preserve? Positioning the Issue

Cities change. Old townscapes are destroyed and replaced with shiny new buildings. The cities of Japan are in a perpetual state of redevelopment. This process is so self-evident that no one gives it a second thought.

Yet some people argue that old townscapes should be preserved. As cities change to meet the demands of a new age, those who would prefer to save existing townscapes appear resistant to change. Why would they attempt to protect old townscapes that are hardly convenient or the most comfortable? This is the central concern of this volume.

What does the act of preservation seek to achieve? What are the demands for preservation based upon? Are these demands simply a reflection of individual taste? What type of person participates in preservation movements? Are development and preservation always in conflict, or is it possible to conceive of a different relationship between the two? Most importantly, what do conflicts surrounding preservation reveal

about society? These are the questions that have shaped my research. Through the use of a detailed case study, I adopt a sociological approach to the question of “why preserve?”

In the spring of 1984, my interest in such questions led me to begin my research on the subject of urban “preservation.” The core concern guiding my research can be summarized in a single question: How do society control and shape “changes” to the urban environment?

This question demands further explanation. When urban landscapes are transformed by redevelopment, the entire city does not change uniformly. Nor does all change elicit strong resistance. People who join preservation movements do not set out to prevent any and all change to their environment. They do not completely refute the necessity of change, but rather distinguish between “places that ought to be preserved” and “places that ought to be torn down and redeveloped” (or “places where redevelopment is an acceptable option”). Their approach to the question of change, and the nature of that change, is governed by their perceptions. Sometimes distinctions are made according to clear standards, but in other cases they stem from non-explicit norms. In either case, the meaning ascribed to a particular urban environment by its residents or administrative authorities is not monolithic but rather replete with gradations: people may deem changes to certain places unacceptable, but tolerate sweeping changes in other areas.

How are such distinctions made? How is change controlled, and by whom? No single entity wields unambiguous control over change. Individual landscapes are produced or demolished through the conflict between governmental authorities, social movements, and other varied sectors and actors. Taking up the subject of cities and preservation can thus be distilled into the single question: “How does society control changes within cities?” (Horikawa 2010a). This book can be described as a sociological investigation into changes to the urban environment.<sup>1</sup>

This description must be qualified, however, through a discussion of four specific aspects of my approach to this subject. These four points could equally be described as the distinguishing characteristics of my research.

First, we must not take up the issue of “preservation” as a type of political indicator. Approaching changes to the urban landscape and the preservation movements opposing these changes as an occasional political phenomenon only leads to the labeling and exclusion of factors from analysis (for instance, preservationists could simply be equated with left-wing activists). While the social control of change is in itself a political phenomenon, using political party support (or affiliation) to subsume or exclude factors simply renders our original question impossible to answer. In this book, I ask how changes to the urban environment, which occur in response to market trends and may also involve party politics, are controlled by civil society. Posing the question in this way allows us to better comprehend the reality of preservation movements that do not conform to the conventional schema of political analysis,

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<sup>1</sup>If we follow the use of the term “function” to describe the elucidation of certain mathematical principles from the course of change (rather than the simple observation of change), then my research might be described as a “study of cityscape functions.”

such as “conservatives versus progressives,” or “old residents versus new residents” (Horikawa 1998b).

Second, we must address the issue of “preservation” from the perspective of society. To be sure, matters of underlying system are absolutely essential, as the classification of urban space in Japan is determined by the legislative system in the form of the City Planning Act and the Building Standards Act. However, framing the issue of urban preservation in purely legalistic terms limits our capacity for understanding: problems can only be explained as the result of “imperfect laws,” while “appropriate development” would be deemed “a legal act, and the exercise of legitimate authority prescribed by the law.” We cannot ignore the impact of the legal system on real urban spaces—indeed, to do so would be exceedingly reckless. However, the legality of a particular form of urban development does not necessarily signify its relevance to residents. Indeed, *the real question here is why so many legal forms of urban development meet with repeated opposition from residents.* We must avoid stunting the question by adopting a narrow legal focus (Horikawa 2001). While the legal framework is a major factor in social decisions, it does not explain everything. The sites of conflict between the forces of preservation and redevelopment indicate the necessity of approaching the question from the level of society. Indeed, my refusal to compartmentalize the preservation issue as a legal one and my consideration of the issue within the context of civil society can be described as another distinctive feature of this research (Horikawa 2010a).

The third point pertains to the relationship between the individual and society. Many readers might question whether the issue of urban preservation is not really just a matter of personal preference. If you were to ask someone whether they preferred an old brick warehouse covered in ivy or a solid and lustrous black *minka* (a traditional Japanese-style residence), her answer would be a reflection of individual taste. However, during local conflicts surrounding the issue of preservation, one cannot easily persuade others of the significance of preservation by appealing to personal preference. This is even more true within bureaucratic organizations, where justifying a position in such terms is to be avoided at all costs. Indeed, I suspect that it is precisely because the issue of preservation has been presented not as a matter of individual preference, but rather as one in need of the consent or rejection of the local community, that movements for preservation have spread across Japan like wildfire<sup>2</sup> (Kankō Shigen Hogo Zaidan, ed. 1981; Zenkoku Machinami Hozon Renmei, ed. 1999).

Yet one frequently encounters a completely different discourse on the subject, expressed in such statements as: “scenery is subject to diverse assessments and there can be no unequivocal evaluation of its merit.” There are many variations on this theme: “There is no uniform appraisal of a landscape,” or, “as of yet there is no consensus on how to evaluate a particular landscape.” From this point of view, treating movements seeking the preservation of old townscapes as a focus of the sociological inquiry is not only difficult but ultimately meaningless. The lack of consensus on the merit of a particular townscape confines the issue to “one of individual taste.”

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<sup>2</sup>See also the cases compiled in *Jurisuto*, ed. (1976, 1977).

But is this truly the case? Here I would like to draw attention to the background hypothesis informing this discourse. Underlying the argument that “scenery is subject to diverse assessments and there can be no unequivocal evaluation of its merit” is the assumption that “far from being objective, an assessment of a landscape is exceedingly subjective, and therefore a matter of individual taste.” In this case, the real issue should be the validity of the underlying premise. Let us consider a real example of such an assertion:

People’s assessments of scenery, even with regard to the same place, will vary depending on the person. One person may perceive a *building* to be beautiful, while another person may deem the effect of the same *building* to be unpleasant.

Nakano et al. 2011: 325. Emphasis added.

Now replace the italicized word *building* in the above passage with the word “policy,” or “prime minister.” One could also replace it with the word “fine art,” or “Mr. A.” In any case, the authors’ meaning would still hold true. In other words, the possibility of differing assessments and the difficulty of establishing an unequivocal judgement is not specific to the question of the physical landscape. It is equally true of a wide range of social phenomena. Indeed, any attempt at the sociological analysis of a subject will confront the same difficulty pertaining to the diversity of potential assessments and the impossibility of an unambiguous conclusion; the issue of the physical townscape must thus not be dismissed on this basis. On the contrary, it confirms the fact that landscape preservation movements represent a viable focus for sociological inquiry. Before dismissing preservation movements as “nothing more than a matter of individual taste,” *we must consider their significance at the societal level*. In fact, one could argue that it is precisely the structure of a society that dismisses an important *social* issue as a mere “matter of *individual* preference” that should be interrogated.

Finally, I focus on the relationship between society and the urban environment. We lead our lives within a physical environment. Changes to this environment inevitably produce changes to our way of living and our social relationships. This point—namely, the material nature of society and the sociality of the material world—is so self-evident as to be often overlooked, but we must consciously incorporate it into our field of vision (Horikawa 2011; Wakabayashi 2012). Social life never occurs in a vacuum. In the sense that it is led within the physical ordering of a specific urban environment, society is material in nature. Meanwhile, in that we transform nature according to our needs and thoughts, creating and deploying man-made objects, physical objects have a social existence.<sup>3</sup> Once constructed, buildings

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<sup>3</sup>Those seeking a more complete explanation of the sociality of physical things may find helpful the following passage from Satō Kenji: “Above the fortieth parallel north, where evergreen oak and *madake* [timber] bamboo cannot grow, nor sweet potatoes, nor naked barley, forests are comprised entirely of camellia trees; in places, these trees grow in abundance. The rare sight of these camellias growing in such northern climes is a landscape that the Ministry of Home Affairs has designated as a ‘natural monument’ for preservation. This landscape, however, is more correctly described as a ‘historic monument,’ for it was created with what people transplanted to the area, or what they permitted to remain” (Satō 1994: 171). Even the natural forest before our eyes does not exist there

are incorporated as a new condition of our social existence, and our lifestyle changes as a consequence. Society does not simply produce new objects, it is remade by these objects in turn.<sup>4</sup> What kind of changes to cooperative relationships are brought about by changes to the physical urban environment? And conversely, how do these changes transform the urban environment? Our analysis must incorporate this “double-layered relationship” (Horikawa 1998a). Therefore, I situate the issue within a specific space and time, and attempt to grasp the interrelationship between the environment and society. For we cannot hope to gain a complete picture of the preservation issue unless we understand the particular environment that a preservation movement seeks to protect. Specifically, I adopt and apply the method of fixed point observation of architectural landscapes.<sup>5</sup> My use of both perception data obtained through traditional sociological fieldwork and this hard data on actual changes to the physical landscape is yet another distinguishing feature of this research. Repeated analysis of both survey and environmental data makes it possible to describe the relationship between the urban environment and society—but also illuminates the gaps within each approach. I do not treat these gaps as problems to be resolved; rather, I seek to identify what these very gaps might allow us to decode.<sup>6</sup>

As this overview should demonstrate, this book can be described as an inquiry into the ways in which society controls changes to the urban environment, and into townscape preservation as a means of “making cities what cities should be,” in which I offer a sociological explication of how such movements seek to legitimize the involvement of city residents in public spaces. My application of the tools and perspectives of urban and environmental sociology signifies a fresh approach to the issues of “townscape preservation” and “historic environment preservation,” which are more commonly addressed within the fields of architecture and urban planning.

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naturally, but as a result of the human “history of practice” (Satō 1994: 171). In this sense, even a forest has an exceedingly social existence.

<sup>4</sup>I have previously discussed this as “the physical basis of the public sphere” (Horikawa 2011: 54–57). Wakabayashi Mikio offers a more refined version of the same argument: “The living bodies of humans, all forms of consciousness or principles, and all acts, relationships, and groups exist within, and have been held, formed, and molded by, a material environment, from the [first] natural environment to the huge and complex artificial environment of the modern city...Cities do not exist only as the actions, relationships, groupings or consciousness of its inhabitants, but also as such physical “things” as castle walls, roads, buildings, modes of transportation, communication media, which enable people to use these things and to be supported by them in turn...the material nature of society and the sociality of physical objects is one indispensable perspective for *Shakai(gaku) o Yomu*” (Wakabayashi 2012: 135).

<sup>5</sup>An overview of the fixed point observation method can be found in Chap. 3.

<sup>6</sup>Changes to the environment are not immediately reflected in human perception. Perceptions may change after a delay, or prove extremely resistant to change.

## 1.2 A Case Study of the Otaru Canal Preservation Issue

This book takes as its case study the preservation movement that unfolded in the city of Otaru, on Japan’s northern island of Hokkaido. A detailed discussion of the Otaru case begins in Chap. 3; here a brief summary of the city’s history will suffice to guide our discussion. Otaru is a commercial port city that underwent rapid development during the Meiji period (Fig. 1.1).

Located thirty kilometers northwest of Sapporo, Hokkaido’s administrative and political center, Otaru was for many years an important distribution hub and economic center. In fact, the export of coal from the Otaru port led to such prosperity that

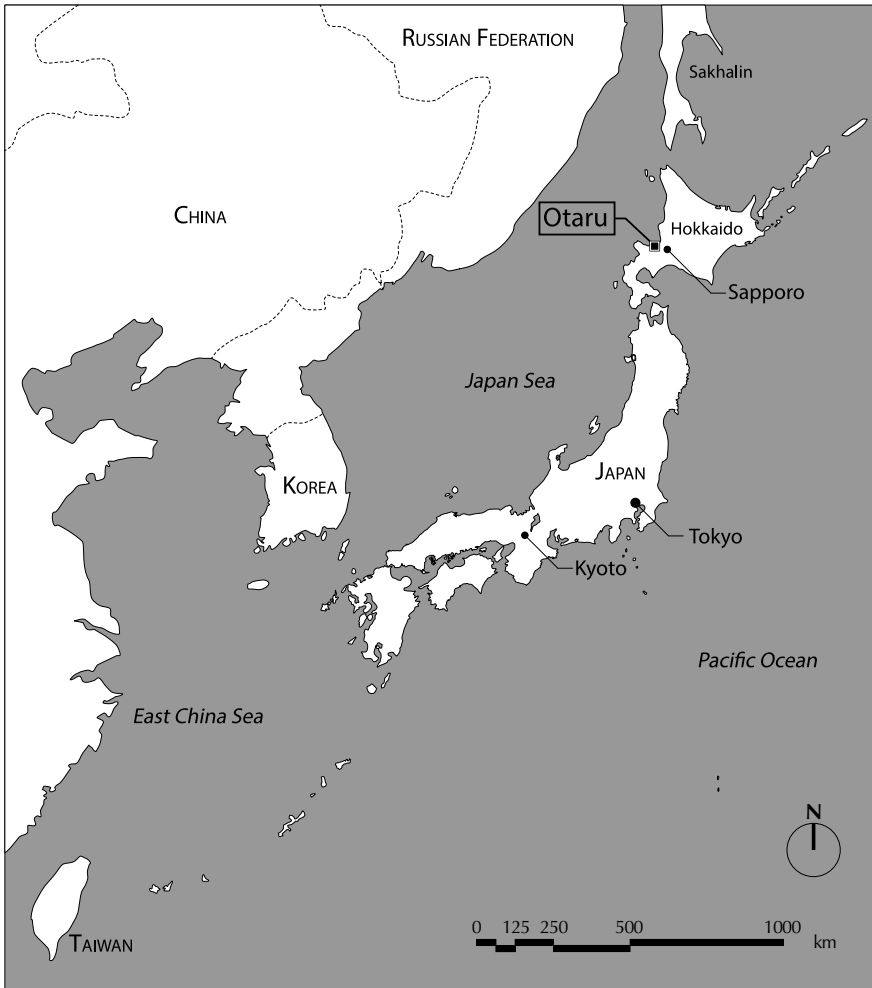


Fig. 1.1 The geographic position of Otaru (Author’s illustration)