

2 The Era of Rapid Economic Growth



Endangered Way of Life

The sewing machine (1950), the electric washing machine (1956), the portable TV (1965), and the 8mm video camera and projector set (1969). These were all either the grand prize or first prize in their respective year for the New Year's postcard lottery, one of Japan's seasonal traditions. TV broadcasting began in 1953, while the 1964 Tokyo Olympics helped to increase the popularity of the color TV. From the late 1950s to today, many products in our lives have changed a great deal.

To restore Japan's post-war economy, high expectations were placed on Hokkaido to absorb the population of repatriates, supply food to alleviate food shortages, and develop its natural resources. The Hokkaido Development Act of 1950 called for the start of Phase I of the Comprehensive Development Plan of Hokkaido in 1952. This plan emphasized industrial development, including the creation of infrastructure such as dams, roads, ports and river embankments, increased food production, and construction of housing. This plan also focused on increasing coal production because it was seen as the key to restoring industry. Under the protection of the government, Hokkaido's coal industry would grow considerably. In the late 1950s, the government shifted its energy policy from coal to petroleum, resulting in vast imports of petroleum. This petroleum was used to make gasoline, plastics and other products essential to our everyday lives. The coal industry faded rapidly after losing the competition battle with cheaper petroleum. As a result, Hokkaido's coal mines began to close one after another.

As economic development progressed, the people of Japan also saw great changes occurring in their way of life. Soon vast quantities of manufactured products would inundate Japan, resulting in the belief that consumerism is a virtue. This created the perception among people that it was acceptable to purchase new items and throw away old ones. Hand-made daily essentials, fishing gear and agricultural tools were soon replaced by manufactured products, and home electronics soon became widespread, popularized by the "three sacred treasures" of the TV, washing machine, and refrigerator. This was also the time when pitched-roof houses began to emerge as a countermeasure against Hokkaido's harsh winters. As roads developed, automobiles rapidly became available expanding peoples' range of activities, but in turn causing a downturn in railway passenger traffic, forcing the closure of local lines on the island.

During this time more people began to speak up in campaigns against regional development, pollution and discrimination. In concert with other movements in Japan and internationally, workers, students, women and local community members stood up to move these efforts forward.



Changes in Hokkaido Housing

In 1947, Toshibumi Tanaka was elected as the first governor of Hokkaido. One of his most important policies focused on the development of cold-climate homes tailored to the needs of life in Hokkaido. The goal of this development was to build low cost housing that could ward off the cold and provide comfortable, somewhat spacious living spaces. To achieve this goal, the pitched-roof house was eventually designed. This house features exterior walls constructed of concrete blocks made of cement, sand, and pebbles, to prevent heat loss, no hallways, and the use of the attic space as a room.



Voices to Remember

During its period of rapid economic growth, environmental destruction and pollution became major problems facing Japan. This was also a time when information from around the world began to find its way to Japan as well. During the 1960s, especially, people in Japan actively participated in movements to change the world, voicing their opinions against these social problems. These people included those asserting that environmental protection should take precedence over rapid development. Others included those whose rights had been forgotten or trampled upon during development, such as women, the Ainu, people of Korean descent and the disabled. In what ways did these voices influence Japan today?