Development *for* Preservation: Localizing Collective Memory in 1960s Kanazawa

PETER SIEGENTHALER

INTRODUCTION

Over the six decades since the end of the Pacific War, in Japan the most prominent public debates over historic preservation (the protection and reconstitution of notable buildings and historic landscapes) have ended in defeat for the country’s preservationists. From the Kyoto Tower and Tokyo Imperial Hotel controversies of the 1960s, to conflicts over the building of *manshon* housing in Kyoto in the 1980s and 1990s, to the construction of the Mori Company’s Roppongi Hills development and destruction of Moto Azabu’s Gamaie pond in the Tokyo of the new century, the dominance of development over preservation has been continuously underscored.1 Even the few high-profile government programmes to promote preservation, most notably the Ministry of Culture (Monbushō) designation beginning in 1976 of what are now more than eighty Important Districts for the Preservation of Groups of Traditional Buildings (jūyō dentō-tekki kenzōbutsu-gun hozon chiku, often referred to simply as *denken chiku*), serve as much to highlight the fates of the hundreds of rural and urban districts not favoured by official recognition as to publicize those few dozen that are termed successes.2

Fortunately, the experiences of the historic city of Kanazawa, facing the Japan Sea in Ishikawa prefecture, offer a striking alternative to the polarized development-or-preservation scenario that tends to dominate debates in Japan and abroad. One among only a handful of Japanese cities to escape Allied incendiary bombing during the war, Kanazawa was poised at the opening of the post-war era to play a role as a premier
tourism destination. In the late 1950s, Kanazawa’s civic leaders began to explore heritage tourism and the preservation of the urban environment as means for boosting their city’s prominence on the national scene. To achieve this goal, they asserted the strength of municipal, and not national, control over urban planning and historic preservation activities, challenging directly the power of the planning bureaucrats in Tokyo. In arguing for the localization of control over planning and preservation, Kanazawa’s elites chose a pattern of tourism promotion and cityscape protection that brought prestige, money and power to the city itself. The central event in their efforts, the 1968 enactment of the Kanazawa Ordinance for the Protection of Traditional Environments (Kanazawa-shi Dentō Kankyō Hozon Jo-rei), announced an open revolt against control by the national bureaucracies, while inspiring similar ordinances in cities and towns nationwide in the years that followed.

Kanazawa’s innovations gave the municipality substantial influence over the activities of builders and developers, allowing it to promote the idea of a ‘unified landscape’ for the city as a whole. The city’s achievement did not come without its costs. Resistance among public and private builders was immediate, and the exclusion of most residents from discussions over urban planning resulted in 1975 in the rejection of a widely publicized plan to designate a former teahouse quarter as a protected urban district, an unexpected turn that dramatized the gap in outlook between city officials and local citizens. Taken together, however, Kanazawa’s successes and failures demonstrate both the promise and the limitations of the ‘preservation and development’ and ‘development for preservation’ approaches city leaders defined to preserve the collective memory in one of Japan’s leading historic cities.

I will explore Kanazawa’s favouring of the localization of control over preservation and development by tracing debates recorded over the course of the 1960s in the newsletter of the Kanazawa Keizai Dōyūkai (Kanazawa Committee for Economic Development), an association of businesspeople, government officials and academics who still meet regularly for lectures, symposiums and study sessions. Working largely within the meetings of the Dōyūkai, in the mid-1960s, Kanazawa’s leaders proposed and put in place a plan for historic preservation that favoured local concerns over national agendas.

By investigating the discussions occurring at the Dōyūkai, we are able to place the city’s plans in the context of national debates over the relative value of economic development and historic preservation that were taking place at the time. During the course of those debates, some members of the Dōyūkai’s leadership went further in their thinking about preservation activities than did even the cultural authorities in Tokyo, proposing an approach to historic preservation that would shift the focus away from protection of a few examples of the city’s heritage and instead seek to preserve the general atmosphere of the cityscape’s