

Memories of Otaru — The Hyogo Photograph Collection

Some 5,000 photographs taken between 1975 and 1980 depict Otaru as a city in decline. After the 1950s, other ports on Hokkaido's east coast offered more convenient shipping routes to Tokyo, and the main source for the nation's energy needs switched from coal, once shipped from Otaru, to oil. Banks and businesses moved to Hokkaido's capital, Sapporo. Against this backdrop, Hyogo Katsundo (1942–2004), a professional photographer from Sapporo, took thousands of photographs of the city, recording decaying barges, faded signage, narrow back alleys, and quiet shopping streets.

This collection of photographs is a rare record of Otaru before revitalization efforts began in the 1980s. The works stand in stark contrast to the restored warehouses, elegant streetlamps, and attractive landscaping of the city today. Hyogo bequeathed the collection to the Otaru Museum of History and Nature, where a changing selection of the photographs is on display.