

Environmental Protection Issues in Japan's Upmarket Mountain Resort Town of Karuizawa

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The upmarket resort town of Karuizawa established itself as a summer resort since the late 19th century due to its pleasant coolness during the summer. Karuizawa is composed of two types of residents including local residents and vacation-house owners. There are more than 15,000 vacation houses while there are less than 6,000 houses of local residents. In discussing environmental protection issues of Karuizawa, I have shown how local residents and vacation-house owners together or only one party have dealt with environmental protection issues. The paper concludes by suggesting the need to promote unity and solidarity among those residents to preserve Karuizawa sceneries from loss or damage to natural environments.

Key Words:

local residents, vacation-house owners, Karuizawa Natural Protection Guidelines, Karuizawa Condominium Method, loopholes

1 Introduction

Karuizawa is an upmarket resort town that can be reached from Tokyo in one hour by bullet-train. The town has established itself as a summer resort at an altitude of above 1,000 meters since the late 19th century. For over a hundred years, the elegant vacation houses of Karuizawa have been the objects of envy in Japan. In summer, the pleasant coolness of the town attracts more than four and a half million people. However, such popularity has resulted in dire consequences. The nature and landscape of Karuizawa have deteriorated over the recent years due to the cutting down of forests by developers to sell off small lots of deforested lands and to accommodate the growing population of visitors.

In this paper, I discuss the environmental issues in Karuizawa with a focus on resident types. Karuizawa is composed of two types of residents based on their levels of environmental consciousness: local residents and vacation-house owners. I stress the need to promote unity and solidarity among local and temporary residents so that the natural environment of Karuizawa

be preserved and prevented from loss or damage.

2 Previous Studies

In general, environmental issues have been studied from perspectives of engineering, law and public administration, and urban studies. Nishimura (1997) proposed urban policy and planning in Japan in accordance with British or American environment protection cases. Igarashi and Uehara (2012) analyzed a series of wavering legal judgments on Kunitachi landscape cases and criticized the Japanese Supreme Court's decision in favor of the developer. One of the most classical masterpieces is Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) in which she expressed the features constituting urban planning and stressed the importance of the activities of residents. Gratz (1990) evolved Jacob's theory and proposed urban regeneration.

Relatively few studies have been conducted on the natural environment of Karuizawa. Presenting a historical perspective is the most traditional approach when writing books on Karuizawa. *History of Karuizawa* (2013) illustrates Karuizawa from the Jomo period (c. 14,000-300 BCE) to the present. More books were written on the history of vacation-homes in Karuizawa since the late 19th century (Sato 1976, Shishido 1987, Miyahara 1991, Kobayashi 1999, Editorial Board of the 50th anniversary of foundation of Karuizawa Cultural Association 2003, Okamura 2018). Most of these studies focused on the nature of upmarket resort town (Yamaura & Yamamoto 2001, Inumaru 2011, Kiriya & Yoshimura 2012). Unexplored regions in Karuizawa were introduced in the work by Karuizawa Vignette Expedition Party (2008). Karuizawa was discussed from the perspectives of a news reporter (Hirokawa 2010). Writers and their works were surveyed in the works of Yoshimura (2009) and Kiriya & Yoshimura (2017), as well-known writers such as Tatsuo Hori or Michizo Tachihara lived in Karuizawa. In addition, some works encourage the resort life of Karuizawa (Tsuchiya 2017, Masumoto 2017).

More academic studies have been conducted regarding the architecture of Karuizawa (Hanasato 2012, Takahashi 2013). The landscape of Karuizawa and its natural environment were also studied (Okawara 2008, Okawara 2014, Okawara 2016, Okawara & Yokoi 2017).

In this paper I discuss the natural environment of Karuizawa keeping in mind how regular residents and vacation-house owners constitute the environmental protection issues of the upmarket town.

3 Double-system of Karuizawa

1. Residents

Karuizawa has two types of residents: local residents and vacation-house owners. Vacation-house owners are those who do not live in Karuizawa but visit and stay in the town on weekends and holidays from May to early November. Before the World War II, the vacation-house owners were aristocrats or wealthy businessmen who stayed in Karuizawa throughout the whole summer, and thus, knew each other and frequently visited each other. Nowadays, vacation-house owners are weekend visitors to Karuizawa and do not know each other. Such a weak relationship is an obstacle to the preservation of Karuizawa's environment.

2. Address

The local residents have only postal addresses, but vacation-house owners have two addresses to their home: a regular postal address and a house number. As some vacation houses are located up in the mountains or in the woods, it is difficult for visitors or deliverymen to find the houses. Hence, house numbers are allotted to each vacation house for easy identification.

Thus, the owner of the vacation home can get postal mails or packages, using either a postal address or a house number.

3. Pricing

Double pricing system is followed in Karuizawa: one is for local residents and the other is for vacation-house owners. For example, weeding the garden of a local resident costs 8,000 yen per day, but the same task for a vacation-house owner will cost 15,000 yen per day. The high price for vacation-house owners is named 'Karuizawa Price'.

Vacation-house owners come and stay in Karuizawa from late spring to late autumn, i.e. for only six months a year. During the period (25th of July to 31st of August), the construction workers voluntarily refrain from working to maintain the quietness of the summer-house area. This means that the working time is reduced, and hence, they charge such high prices to vacation-house owners.

4. Tax and Management Fees

Not only the local businessmen but also the Karuizawa town uses the double pricing system. The town imposes higher tax to vacation-owners. Any person who lives or stays for at least one

day every month is considered as 'resident'. The property tax for local residents is half of that for vacation-house owners. In other words, the property tax is not imposed equally on the two different types of residents.

Management cost also varies among types of residents. Long-term residents are charged half of the maintenance fee of vacation-house owners. In other words, short-term residents or vacation-house owners pay the double amount of the management cost. As short-term residents do not stay for long in the area, it may seem strange that they pay twice larger than long-term residents. But, the management office explains that long-term residents contribute to crime prevention in the area. Vacation-house owners are also charged higher for building repair or construction work than the local residents.

5. Tax Revenue of Karuizawa

The ratio of vacation-house owners' property tax to the total Karuizawa property tax is not made open by the town. The following is a preliminary calculation of the ratio of vacation-house owners' property tax made by the author, using *karuizawa Annai* (2018).

The total number of vacation-houses in Karuizawa in 2017 was 15,763 houses. The total number of local houses was 5,717 houses. This means that the number of vacation-homes is three times more than that of local houses. In other words, vacation-houses accounts for 73.4 % and the remaining 26.6% represents the local houses. As mentioned before, those who can stay for at least one day every month are considered as residents. Their property tax is as same as the local residents. However, it is not easy to stay overnight per month in Karuizawa due to severe winter as the water pipe freezes in winter if not used daily. Most of the vacation-house owners pay higher property tax than the local residents. Thus, it can be concluded that the property tax paid by vacation-house owners accounts for 70% or 80% of the total property tax of the town.

Karuizawa is a wealthy town with high property tax payers. The town holds the fifth rank in the percentage of income and expense among all local towns in Japan. The first-ranked town is Asuka village at Aichi Prefecture which is a coastal industrial zone. The second- and third-ranked towns of Tomari village and Rokkasho village, respectively, have nuclear plants. These towns receive some compensation for the disadvantageous nature of nuclear plants. The fifth-ranked town Karuizawa town does not receive local distribution tax, but is a rich town because the vacation-home owners pay high property tax.

4 Efforts against Destruction of Nature

1. Military Exercise Area (1953)

In 1953 American military forces had planned to establish a maneuvering ground at the skirts of Mt Asama in Karuizawa. The local residents and villa owners developed a movement against the establishment of maneuvering ground because of the possible corruption of the moral standard of the town. The Earthquake Research Institute of Tokyo University was also opposed the plans of the military forces because of the possible hindrance to the investigation of volcanic eruptions of Mt Asama. The three parties persuaded American military forces to abandon their maneuvering plan. The withdrawal of American military's plan was a successful case that proved the importance of close cooperation between local residents and vacation-home owners.

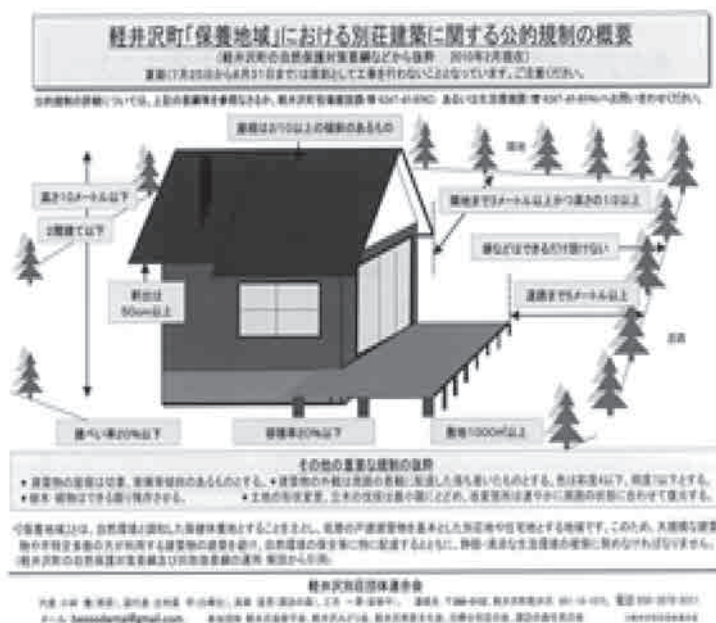
2. Karuizawa Nature Protection Guidelines (Karuizawa Shizen Taisaku Youkou) (1972)

In 1972 Karuizawa town provided a general plan called the Karuizawa Nature Protection Guidelines. The following is the sum and substance of the general plan, also shown in picture on page 6.

- (1) The size of a lot in summer-house areas must be more than 1,000 m².
- (2) The average height of a tree is between 10 meters and 15 meters. The height of a house must be built below 10 meters in order to maintain the landscape in harmony with trees.
- (3) A house must be built such that there is a gap of at least 3 meters from its neighboring house.
- (4) The color of the house must be subdued color to harmonize the scenery of trees. The owners must keep trees as many as possible. Building a wall around the house is prohibited to maintain total harmony of the vacation-home area. Instead, garden plants are planted around the house.
- (5) Construction workers should refrain from working from 25th July to 31st of August to maintain the quietness of the summer-house area.
- (6) Prior discussion must be conducted when the owner wishes to sell more than three lots of land or divide one lot into smaller lots.

As the average size of lots for houses in Tokyo is in between 150 m² and 200 m², the 1,000 m² size regulated in the Guidelines is quite spacious for Japanese standards. The aim of the rule

is to avoid crowded houses in summer-house areas. The problem of Karuizawa Nature Protection Guidelines is its weak restraining force. Not many but a few houses with orange-color roof and blue walls are observed in exclusively vacation-house areas.



3. Condominiums

3.1 Building Agreement (2003) – Suwa-no-Mori Kenchiku Kyotei

Land prices of Karuizawa soared in the bubble economy of late 1980s and 1990s. The construction of condominiums was popular because not much land is required for condominiums in terms of the number of households. Summer-house owners were concerned that the appearance of high-rise condominiums would impair the landscape of Karuizawa.

A plan of building condominiums arose at the Old Karuizawa area in 2001. Twenty villa owners set up an association against the plan of building condominiums. The association negotiated the change in the plan of building condominiums with the developers, Nagano prefecture government and Karuizawa town government for over two years. The association concluded a building agreement with the developers, that was authorized by Nagano prefecture. The developers eventually retracted their plan of building condominiums; they instead built villa houses for sale. The movement of the association led to the establishment of a later regulation called Karuizawa Condominium Method.

3.2 Karuizawa Condominium Method

In 2001 Karuizawa town provided regulations on building condominiums called Karuizawa Condominium Method. Yasuo Tanaka, the then Governor of Nagano Prefecture, who owns a summer-house in Karuizawa, had a strong interest in environmental issues in Karuizawa. He pushed Karuizawa town to provide regulations against high-rise condominiums.

The main points of the regulation are as follows. The condominiums in Karuizawa must be under two-storied buildings. The maximum number of apartments must be less than twenty in each condominium building. The area of each apartment must be over 110 m² when the condominium area has more than twenty apartments. The average area size of an apartment is 75 m². The aim of the regulation is to avoid building inexpensive studio type apartments to keep Karuizawa an exclusive resort area.

4. Karuizawa Townscape Method (Karuizawa Machinami Method) (2005)

In 2005, Karuizawa town provided a plan called Karuizawa Townscape Method under the joint signatures of the Mayor of Karuizawa, Masayoshi Sato, and the Governor of Nagano, Yasuo Tanaka. The plan pressed forward the cause of Karuizawa Condominium Method. The aim of the plan is that the town in collaboration with the prefecture should deal with the preservation of nature and landscape of Karuizawa.

5. Logging Rate

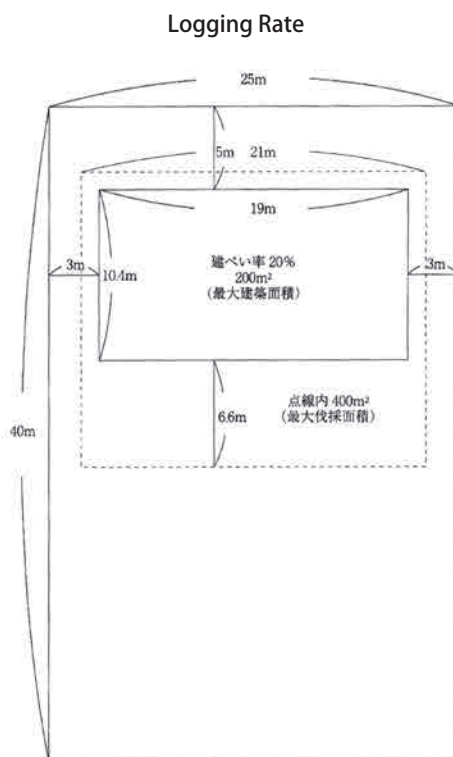
Land in lots has been traditionally sold in Karuizawa, while preserving trees as they are. Those who buy land lots then build villa-houses, keeping the trees around the buildings. However, land is now sold as a completely vacant land-lot after all the trees on the lot are cut down.

Real estate agents consider vacant lots as easier to sell because buyers consider vacant lots to be easier for building houses. Moreover, villa owners are often encouraged by local agents to cut down all the trees on their lots so that the owners could avoid compensation to their neighbors for possible damages by fallen trees on the neighbor's lot.

Nagano Landscape Ordinance of 1992, which has given high priority to Karuizawa's landscape, clearly states that owners keep trees on the lot as many as possible. However, trees in the lot have been regularly cut down by developers in Karuizawa.

Tadao Yokoi of Karuizawa Association of Villa Groups plays a central role in the campaign of adopting the logging rate, shown in the picture on page 8. Logging rate indicates the rate of keeping trees around a house within one's lot. The ratio is decided by building-to-land ratio. For example, in a building site of 20 % coverage ratio 10 % logging area is added to the building,

which makes 30 % is the cutting-down area. Another 10% can be added to the cutting-down area at the maximum. The maximum logging rate becomes 40% , and the trees are kept and protected in the rest 60% of the lot.



6. Loopholes

6.1 Solar Power Panel

Karuizawa town has dealt with the problem of environmental destruction, using Karuizawa Nature Protection Guidelines. However, there is a loophole in their efforts to maintain the nature of Karuizawa. Karuizawa's regulation on solar power generation prohibits the building of solar power plants in the vacation-house areas. However, the regulation adds one sentence, which states that solar power plants may be built in the vacation-house areas if one cannot see the panels from the main road. Vacation houses are usually built away from the main road. This sentence indicates that solar power plants can be built in vacation-house areas as well.

In 2016, Karuizawa Association of Villa Owner asked the Nature Protection Committee of Karuizawa to remove the sentence from the regulation. The committee judged that the request was appropriate and the sentence was thereby removed from the regulation.

6.2 Bill Gate's Vacation House

In the winter of 2012, trees were completely cut down on a vast area of land of 19,830 m² (6,000 tsubos) in the western part of Karuizawa, though the Karuizawa Nature Protection Guidelines states the owners must keep trees as many as possible. Building work soon started but the construction site was completely covered by metal fence. The label on the fence stated that the party ordering work is named PM Resort, with an address of Simbashi, Minato-ku, Tokyo. PM Resort was found to be a dummy cooperation. The owner of the house must be Bill Gates as if it were true in the town.

The building was completed in June of 2016. It was a grand-scale building of one floor above ground and three floors were built underground. The cost of the building was approximately 8,000,000,000 yen. The Karuizawa Nature Protection Guidelines states that the height of the house must be built below 10 meters in order to maintain the landscape in harmony with trees. The building is a one-story building, which meets the requirement of the Guidelines. The then drafter of the guidelines could not foresee someone would build a house with multiple-stories underground.

Vacation-house owners were enraged at the allegedly Bill Gate's house because it was apparently against the Karuizawa Nature Protection Guidelines. However, local residents were quiet about the building of the house because the building project earned the local residents a huge amount of jobs. A cooperation between vacation-home owners and local residents lacked in this case, unlike the case of the establishment of US military exercise area. Both local residents and vacation-house owners agreed that the plan of US military exercise area would corrupt public morals of Karuizawa town. However, Bill Gate's house would give jobs to only local residents, but there would also be noise pollution and the destruction of nature in the quiet vacation-house areas. It is not a realistic idea to preserve nature of Karuizawa without close cooperation among its residents and shared value toward the environment between the two different types of residents.

5 Conclusion

Karuizawa town is inhabited by local residents and villa owners. Although the villa owners do not live in Karuizawa for the whole year, they pay higher property tax, management cost, painting cost, building cost compared to the local residents. Both villa owners and local residents differ in many ways, but it is vital for both of them to work together for the protection of the environment of Karuizawa. History shows that the successful campaign for environment protection against the US military exercise area is the result of the cooperation between local and

villa people. If the nature of Karuizawa is preserved, the villa owners as well as local residents would gain environmental as well as financial benefits from the prestigious image of the town.

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This work was supported by the 2018 Special Grant-in-Aid from Takasaki City University of Economics (Heisei 30 Nendo Takasaki Keizai Daigaku Tokubetsu Kenkyu Joseikin).

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