

A Short Note for Dr. Murakami's Review in 1986

Dr. Murakami's review reconfirms that Japan's high economic growth following World War II did not realize the construction of urban areas robust against disaster, rather, the destruction caused by repeated natural disasters has triggered the development of disaster management measures. When all major Japanese cities but Kyoto were destroyed in the catastrophic American air raids of 1945, the urban development in Japan has begun. Among the disasters bearing valuable lessons in the need for disaster management was the 1959 Ise-Bay (Ise-Wan) Typhoon, which led to the 1961 Disaster Countermeasures Basic Act laying the groundwork for disaster management measures in Japan. This law obligated the central government and local organizations to take three measures: (1) preparedness against disaster to reduce damage before a disaster strikes; (2) measures against disaster to control the spread of damage and to promote emergency recovery; and (3) preparation of restoration plans transforming damaged urban areas into safer, more comfortable locales by repairing damage, reconstructing residences, and returning daily life to its natural order. Dr. Murakami's paper shows how difficult it is to remodel already established but dangerous cities into safe ones. The 1964 Niigata Earthquake promoted measures in managing earthquake destruction in urban areas, as did the Tokachi Offshore (Tokachi-Oki) Earthquake of 1968 and the Miyagi Prefecture Offshore (Miyagi-Ken-Oki) Earthquake of 1978, which triggered revision of the Building Standard Law. These developments did not, however, mean that cities had become safe. If the lessons taught by disasters in the 1960s and 70s had actually been implemented in urban development, the tremendous damage precipitated by the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in Kobe in 1995 might have been reduced. What we should note here is that the efforts toward urban disaster management measures taken during this period have formed a firm base for current urban disaster management measures.

Itsuki Nakabayashi
Professor, Tokyo Metropolitan University