

Introduction

Yōkoso Hokkaido

Yōkoso Hokkaido simply means welcome to Hokkaido. *Yōkoso* is a catchword that pervades everyday advertising culture in Japan, especially in places of transit such as airports. It is a word that takes on a different nuance in Japan's northernmost region. Flying into Hokkaido's Tokachi airport from the major population hubs of Kanto, the region around Tokyo, or Kinki, the area surrounding Osaka, is indeed like arriving in another country.¹ Looking down, none of the symbols of a stereotypical Japanese landscape are seen. Urban sprawl and sky-scraping neon are absent. There are no bamboo forests, stratified paddy fields, or elongated hamlets clinging to the walls of lush valleys. There are no picturesque temples with meticulously manicured gardens. If arriving in midwinter as I did the first time, color seems rendered in broad brushstrokes. A choppy greenish sea followed by a vacant rock-strewn coast, then occasional collections of red and blue rooftops surrounded by pure whiteness. This gently undulating snow-blanketed land is only broken by the sparse geometrically calculated roads and fences that cut through it. From above, fences, roads, and the carefully plotted wind-breaking tree lines are evocative of stitching and the land a gigantic patchwork quilt with clearly separated square and rectangular sections stretching into the horizon. Each patch of homesteaded land has its own story. Every staked-out section is its own living fabric, a singular meshwork of buildings, equipment, and well-worn tracks that betray the daily patterns of life and work. The main historical and ethnographic focus of this book is one such farm—one patch of land, one assemblage of living beings—and how it is woven into relationships within the broader tapestry of the local community, Tokachi, Hokkaido, and Japan.

Northern Tokachi is at the center of Hokkaido, Japan's largest prefecture, and the region is home to numerous physical and ideological frontiers making it a unique and particular location in the context of Japan. For example, this northern environment makes certain lifestyles and livelihoods viable while it assures others are impossible to pursue. Dairy farming is a key industry in the area, an occupation that perhaps seems unusual to many in the context of Japan; when one thinks of Japan, milk is likely low on the list of associations. But one contention of this book is that Hokkaido, and certainly Tokachi, is an anomaly in many ways if contrasted with what is popularly considered typical in Japan. This book outlines many reasons why it differs—in cultural, social, political, and economic terms—but for a start, the most obvious reason is simply rooted in the landscape. *Hiroi*, or vast, is an adjective I have often overheard fellow passengers use emphatically on my countless subsequent flights in and out of Tokachi. It is not a word used often to describe locations in Japan, but vast, spacious, and wide, as noted in what follows, describe many aspects of life on Japan's northernmost island.

Hokkaido is on the northern periphery of the country. It is due east of the Siberian steppes and its regional capital city Sapporo is closer to Russian Vladivostok than Tokyo. The region is distant from both North America and its settlers. Yet, if one focuses on environment and temporality, these regions and people share some surprising connections and similarities. Hokkaido has always been popularly imagined as a physical, political, and social frontier for Japanese people; that is to say, it was viewed as an open space where *kaitakusha seishin* (the pioneering spirit), long defined by an outcast independence, was—and I argue still is—tested and confirmed. It is perceived as a place where newcomers can make a fresh start; a place where personal changes happen or can be made to happen (Hansen 2018a, 2020a). Moreover, throughout Hokkaido's history the region has been viewed as a distant place, a locus of capital O Otherness, or alterity, in relation to a hegemonic Honshu as the political and population center of Japan (for Ainu as historically Othered see Bresner 2009; for Tokachi see Hansen 2014a; and for Hokkaido in general see Saunavaara 2018). No place fits this description of Hokkaido as Other more than the plains and foothills that comprise Tokachi (see figure I.1).

The objective of this book is to add to the historical and anthropological record of Hokkaido as a “frontier,” a locus of Otherness, and a place rife with concomitant individual and collective security searching. I specifically focus on the north of Tokachi, the largest subprefecture, and



Figure I.1. Looking south over the Tokachi region in January 2008. Photo by the author.

dairy farming as a core industry that embodies these notions of Otherness, security, and frontiers in Japan. I do not presume that the reader has knowledge of either Hokkaido or dairy farming: I describe both in detail. It is easy to find Hokkaido, past and present, intriguing. And having lived, researched, and written about this area for nearly twenty years, and having used this framing of frontier, security, and Otherness in previous academic publications and presentations, I must head off some potential misinterpretations. I am not using the term *frontier* as a general geopolitical claim regarding a buffer or periphery alone. As the second chapter highlights, the term, and its metaphoric baggage, is carefully chosen. Hokkaido has a particular and peculiar place within the context of Japan and the global history of settler colonialism. Indeed, it is Japan's only remaining settler colony. As such, it is a place where the search for micro, meso, and macro security (or individual, community, and national projects of securing) have played and continue to play a central role in defining people and place. It is home to a distinct history of Japanese colonization: a history that can and should be compared to the colonial projects of other nations at the end of the nineteenth century, for

example, the settling of the North American West, Alaska, New Zealand, Australia, or East Russia (Irish 2009; Mason 2012; Russell 2007; Seki et al. 2006; Shigematsu 2004; Thompson 2008).

Despite being a relatively ignored region within the context of global colonial history, Japanese history, and anthropology, the story of central Hokkaido is essential to understanding Japan as a modern-cum-postmodern project. Without its resources, from expansive forests to indigenous Ainu lore and, of course, its dairy industry, contemporary Japan would be a considerably more impoverished place financially and culturally. More to the point of this book, the region's history sits parallel to a shared global history of colonization and empire building, subduing native plants, animals, and humans, alongside encouraging the migration of marginalized people to marginal locations at the expense of indigenous life (Povinelli 2016; Shapiro 1997). I argue that this history, one of entwined alterities on a so-called frontier, has sown the seeds for ongoing exploitation of Tokachi as a peripheral region far from external nodes of political and cultural power via centralized governmental agricultural agencies (Hansen 2010a, 2014a). And as highlighted in this book, connections can be made, compared, and contrasted with other colonial acquisitions past and present, from Japan's troubled imperial history with Korea to contemporary identity politics in Okinawa. Again, while Hokkaido, and Tokachi in local terms, has played the role of periphery and buffer, this book is primarily concerned with its role as a frontier, literal and figurative, and the macro to micro security concerns that, past and present, continue to define a livelihood that is imagined and positioned, pragmatically and politically, as Other.

Northern Tokachi and its dairy industry are an important case study in these regards but also, simply, they are an ideal example of agrarian settler history. Important because, first, there is no history of the area in English and, as such, there has been little work contrasting or comparing it with other nineteenth-century colonized regions inside Japan or outside. In looking at the evolution of Tokachi's dairy industry from a comparative historical and anthropological perspective, I suggest that the concepts of Otherness, frontier, and security arise as essential conceptual tools in understanding this region and industry enabling, I hope, future comparisons. My use of these concepts as an analytical tool is clarified in the following two chapters. Second, despite its central role as an industry, a regional identity, and its deployment as an imaginary and image central to the prefecture, there has been no substantial anthropological research con-

ducted on the dairy industry in Hokkaido, let alone its northern Tokachi heartland. The reasons for this could be many. First is the engaged nature of such fieldwork. In order to conduct an ethnographic study on livelihood, locality, and labor a researcher needs to commit to working and living long-term in areas that can be challenging on a number of fronts, personal and professional, points made obvious in what follows. Second, any notion of a “unified and unique” Japan needs to be abandoned from the start to recognize that this region and topic fit extraordinarily poorly with many popular, and even academic, presumptions about rural Japan, a central theme in this book (Hansen 2021a). Third, it is often not pleasant to grapple with an industry that is dependent upon innumerable human and nonhuman lives; it inevitably opens the way for discomfiting reflections on contemporary practices and social theory issues. For example, how has it come to be that a rural periphery of Japan is in many ways more cosmopolitan than its urban metropolises? Or is it possible to produce a posthuman story that defines the particularity of place, a narrative that allows for the inherent phenomenological interplay and agency of human and nonhuman inclusive of the slippages and blurring of these seemingly secured categories? In this sense, this book is in conversation with other works of an ethnographic ilk, a growing list, that examine the impacts of industrialization on food production and local identity (cf. Blanchette 2020; Gillespie 2018; Kondo and Yoshida 2021; Pachirat 2011).

The Groundwork for Fieldwork

Anthropology, the discipline in which I am trained, has long been mired in internal struggles over reflexivity. For better or worse, it is common to attempt to place oneself in an ethnographic text as the key researcher and narrator. What follows is not intended to be narcissistic self-exploration but a way of sharing with the reader some insight into how this research topic was chosen and what biases might enter the work. In 2005–2006 I was employed for a year as a full-time laborer on one of the largest industrial dairy farms in Hokkaido and I spent a further eight months in 2008 doing follow up research while based at Hokkaido University on a postdoctoral fellowship. This period of research constitutes the core of my ethnography and it is a rather standard fieldwork tour of duty within the discipline of anthropology. A confluence of factors made me choose Hokkaido dairy farming as a topic: a chance encounter in a bar in Hiroshima

with two women who had volunteered on a dairy farm in Hokkaido and a wise academic mentor who pointed out that—beyond studies of indigenous Ainu—very few anthropologists have done long-term fieldwork in rural Hokkaido. But the main reason was purely pragmatic: I needed money. I needed to do self-supporting fieldwork and working on a farm was a viable option in that I had plenty of family ranching experience in Alberta, Canada. I applied for dairy jobs across Hokkaido as a laborer through websites. Many Hokkaido farms were and remain desperate for seasonal workers, so almost immediately two farms encouraged me to come and volunteer. However, working for free was not possible, certainly not for a year. Luckily Mr. Wada, a man I introduce below, agreed to hire me under the same conditions he would offer any other worker.

In 2009–2010 I made several return trips while based in Osaka doing research on dog–human relationships (Hansen 2013, 2018b, 2020a). In 2011 I was hired by the Graduate School of History and Anthropology at the University of Tsukuba. And soon after this, I got married in the northern Tokachi town where I conducted fieldwork, and I later became a father. When I started writing this book, my Kyoto-born wife, a prior interlocutor, was a nurse at a clinic in the town and my Tokachi-born *dosanko* (Hokkaido born) son attended a local school for grades 1 and 2 before we moved all moved to Sapporo, making weekly journeys to “home” in Tokachi less onerous for the Canadian in this familial triad. The writing of this book also coincides with the slow restoration of a local house. Thus, my experiences of Tokachi life and dairy farming are professional, as an anthropologist of Japan living and working there, and personal, as my family and I are part of the community that I study. Consequently, I have come to see the area progressively as a visitor, worker, and resident and have gotten to know former interlocutors and coworkers as friends and, on occasion, foes.

Given this background, the ethnographic material presented herein enters a number of ongoing debates in anthropology and social theory. One key issue is in regard to what I have argued is anthropology’s too frequent compliance with the objectives and methods of other more meta- or macro-oriented social sciences, notably the social constructivism of Pierre Bourdieu (among others), neo-Marxist paradigms, and the notion of a long-term “objective” participant observer, in homogenizing individual narratives, anomalies, and agencies (Hansen 2015 as a summary).² In what follows, I suggest that the people I have come to live with are inimitable individuals; each is a unique and singularly embodied agent (Guarné and

Hansen 2018; Rapport 2012). As a result, the way that I write is a clear and conscious attempt to reduce what Bruno Latour calls “the default social” in the social sciences, or the notion that action and identity are bound to categories (Latour 2005, 4). Strands of anthropology have long argued against such reductive trends, notably Fredrik Barth (Weller and Wu 2020). In short, the goal of this book is not to manufacture reductive human typologies for the reader.³ I am not interested in producing (or reproducing as the case may be) localized generalities about *the Japanese*, *the dairy farmer*, *the full-time worker* versus *the furitā* (part-timer) nor pitting ethnic or gender identities into competing or comparative binary categories. In this ethnography I present people with their clashes, confusions, and contradictions accounted for in what, lifting from Donna Haraway and Jacques Derrida, respectively, I see as their “significant” (Haraway 2008) “particularity” (Derrida 2008). Or what might be considered their extreme “intersectionality” in a classic social scientific and less philosophical framing (Crenshaw 1989). All of the people discussed in this book are clearly, and profoundly at times, self- and socially aware actors working and living within a rapidly changing industry and area. And importantly, they come and go. It might be surprising for some readers to learn that dairy farmers in Tokachi are an extraordinarily cosmopolitan collection of people. They are young and old, Japanese and non-Japanese, rural and urban born, many have traveled, some widely often to learn about dairying, and each one of them has life course-specific reasons for engaging in farmwork and living in the region, related to their personal demons, dreams, desires, and goals. Unsurprisingly, this human diversity, when packed into the strict regime of dairy farming as a livelihood, alongside the increasing competitiveness of the industry, leads to many conflicts, overt and covert, verbal and physical, that radically displace the aforementioned commonly held stereotypical notions of harmonious agrarian homogeneity in Japan; or as Hannah Arendt once quipped, the “rural communistic fiction” (Arendt 1998, 44). In this area and industry, the Otherness of Hokkaido and the fragmented searches for security played out in it are filtered down to represent an ethos of individual “each otherness” over group belonging. There are ample titles and examples of particularistic quests for personal security in times of rapid change in Japan: a post-1990s “Japan after Japan” (Harootunian and Yoda 2006), a burgeoning “transcultural” (Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu 2008), or “precarious” (Allison 2013) Japan, and indeed there are those who attempt to “escape Japan” altogether (Guarné and Hansen 2018; Ertl

and Hansen 2015). I hope this book finds its way onto shelves with similar titles, albeit coming from a rural perspective. But given the novel history of the region and its contemporary lure for highly individualistic, even maverick, people, the final chapters of this book focus on how the shift to industrialized production alters relationships shared between human, animal, and technology. This final objective combines the aforementioned historical and ethnographic data and analyzes it with a combination of social theories derived from the posthumanities and cosmopolitan studies.⁴ These are the examinations and issues at the core of this book, but like most ethnographic accounts, perhaps the best place to start telling an ongoing story is where the narrator enters.

Tokachi, Hokkaido: Arrival

After making my way out of the New Chitose airport, forty minutes from Sapporo, Hokkaido's 150-year-old capital city, I collected my bags, decoded the train schedule, and stood outside waiting—body tensed and exhalations visible on a frigid February afternoon. Japan sells itself as a tourist destination by referring to its four distinct seasons. Yet the climate where the majority of Japanese live is quite moderate, and while areas such as Akita are famed for heavy snowfall, they are not prone to winter temperatures of thirty below zero Celsius as in the Rikubetsu area neighboring Tokachi or ice floes like those to the north. In north-central Hokkaido winter is long and cold with a late spring, short summer, and early autumn. If a Hokkaido winter is a test of one's *gaman suru*, or perseverance, then surely the payoff comes in the summer. Hokkaido lacks a proper rainy season and it is not humid like Tokyo or Kyoto, but dry, warm, and usually sunny, teetering in the mid-twenty-degree Celsius range. Japanese have many religious and cultural celebrations such as *hanami* (cherry blossom viewing season) or *o-bon* (festival of the dead) to mark the shifting seasons. Hokkaido's climate, seasons, and differing dates of celebration are ways to mark the distinctiveness of the region.⁵

There is no *shinkansen* (high-speed train) to Obihiro, let alone from Obihiro to Gensan, the town of five thousand I was to first call home for a year of research in 2005–2006, and there likely never will be.⁶ In fact, in 1987, due to lack of demand and despite the town's protests, Japan Rail stopped servicing the area. So, not knowing my way around the sporadic train times to Obihiro yet, I took local trains. One three-car

train rocked and snaked its way over the Hidaka mountain pass that separates the Tokachi plains from the more densely populated Ishikari plain and Sapporo. Throughout the three-and-a-half-hour journey east I sat reflecting on the landscape, my preparatory pre-fieldwork research, and what might lie ahead. Heading into Tokachi the train slowed as snow had to be cleared from the tracks to progress. While the train crept along, I saw rotting hand-hewn log barns sagging through a combination of neglect and age, but in more affluent areas, these relics of Hokkaido's pioneering past yield to newer galvanized metal structures. Similarly, colorful new tractors sat alongside ones rusted and abandoned after years of toil in the dark volcanic soil of the Tokachi district—a district wherein, like neighboring Kushiro, rice, popularly viewed as the basis for *washoku* (Japanese cuisine), still cannot be commercially grown (Hansen 2014a). Indeed, Tokachi is famous for several products that may not, at least at present, seem particularly “Japanese” to some readers, though they are as Japanese as rice and fish. And such products, alongside those who produce them, serve as indexes of politicized Otherness; potatoes, beets, lamb, beef, milk, and recently wine and artisan cheeses, are all produced and widely consumed in Tokachi. American-style houses with metal or shingled roofs are also part of the landscape. They are mixed in with polyurethane greenhouses, cows, horses, dogs, and occasionally people. Having, until that point, only lived in large cities in Japan (Hiroshima for a year and Osaka for four months), I was struck by how few people I saw from the train, not to mention on it. In Hokkaido, not everyone lives in town and automobiles, preferably four-wheel-drive ones, are a necessity. Passing by modern farms that sprung from original isolated homesteads staked one hundred years ago one can literally see the material culture of historical change (see also Fujita 1994; Mock 1999; and Takata 2004 for similar examples of material culture histories in Hokkaido).

These relics and living remains of early settler life exist alongside newness and novelty. They are tactile reminders of the location's history and are immediately available reference points to anyone looking out the window of a car or train in Tokachi. Homesteading was only a century old when I arrived in my fieldwork area and, as in any “frontier” region, security (the interplay of *to secure* and *to be secure*) remains a clear desire. Tokachi's pioneer settlements mirror, quite intentionally as will also be discussed in detail, both North America's past and present. At first these settlements were geared toward survival. Japanese migrants who were successful at clearing land, building a modest dwelling, and surviving

their first winters gradually became families of farmers with horses for traction, tuber crops, and cows or other domesticated mammals like pigs or sheep for sustenance. Though regions near urban centers commercialized after the Second World War through selling agricultural products to city dwellers, a mixed farm model—largely self-sufficient with some crops and some livestock—remained the norm until only forty years ago. However, from the late 1980s, change and Otherness have returned with a renewed vehemence to the area (figure I.2). Industrial dairy farming, with its ever-increasing technological separation of human and nonhuman (ranging from bovine to the environment) and dismantling and reforming human relations is rapidly replacing earlier symbiotic practices on the family farm. There is increased tourism and economic migration, both into the area and out of the area. As working-class Japanese sojourners, and increasingly foreign contract laborers, enter, local young people, particularly women, seeking a more urbane lifestyle leave, underscoring the interplay of Otherness and the search for security found in the north of Tokachi.



Figure I.2. An example of material culture on an ever-changing frontier. Everywhere in Tokachi one can see old barns give way to newer structures. Photo by the author. See the cover of this book for an interpretive and romanticized painting of this photo by the late Matsumoto Keiji.

With changes coming so quickly there is a nostalgia attached to the relatively recent past. For locals, this past is only distanced by immediate family memories; recalling, for example, a time only fifty years ago when the town's population was triple its present declining size. For outsiders, those from Honshu or further afield, nostalgic longing is often of an idyllic rural past. The art on the cover of this book is a case in point. I asked a retired Kobe school teacher, an amateur artist and historian who chose to relocate to Tokachi when he discovered he was dying from cancer, to paint a picture for my book. Figure I.2 is the photo I gave him to work with. Clearly, the image he produced on the cover of the book is a more romantic and impressionistic image. It is a painting from a different perspective, animated with cows, and without the new galvanized barn. It is the rendering of an imaginary space, not the lived-in place of Hokkaido dairy farmers. For many Japanese from outside Hokkaido, Tokachi represents an escape to a safe and secure pastoral past, a past that is invented. It is a complex mixture of domestic and imagined nostalgia, the affective resonance of a transplanted *furusato* (hometown) of Otherness—of a foreign and pastoral ilk—alongside a tactile *akogare* (desire or longing) for a simpler time and lifestyle (see also Klien 2020). For locals however, their image of home is more concrete, often seen as a place of past struggles that is increasingly viewed in terms of present tense uncertainty with an ever-impending insecure future.

This feeling of insecurity felt by many rural Hokkaido residents is not without foundation. The population of the entire prefecture of Hokkaido (Japan's largest prefecture by far in terms of geographic area at 22 percent of Japan's landmass) is home to less than 5 percent (5.2 million) of Japan's approximately 126 million people. Further thinking through these numbers, nearly one-third of Hokkaido residents live in Sapporo, Japan's fifth most populated city with approximately 1.9 million people. Accounting for other Hokkaido cities like Obihiro, the capital of the Tokachi district and Hokkaido's fourth largest at around 170,000 people, one quickly realizes that despite popular imagination of Hokkaidoites as largely rural dwelling, the majority of Hokkaido's population is decidedly urban. But statistics aside, northern Tokachi is rural in the way one might think of rural North America's Midwest or more northern reaches of Finland, Sweden, or Norway. In Hokkaido, locals and tourists alike refer to this location as *inaka* (countryside), although it will become apparent in what follows that the use and interpretation of this term varies widely among individuals. Tokachi is an expansive fertile plain surrounded by

mountains on three sides and the Pacific Ocean on the fourth. Given this topography it is often referred to with an expressive *hontō ni inaka* (really countryside)—the implication being that given Hokkaido’s location on Japan’s periphery, Tokachi’s margins mark it as the proverbial middle of nowhere, all the more removed as an area physically cut off within Hokkaido by its rugged perimeters. Gensan as a destination prides itself as a point of isolation (Hansen 2020b). In Tokachi, mountains like towns are usually seen in the distance; one does not feel hemmed in or enclosed. Anyone who has widely traveled in Japan can attest that this contrasts with much of Honshu, Shikoku, or Kyushu with perhaps perceptions of the sea being equivalent in Okinawa.⁷ However, in Tokachi one seems forever bordered or shielded by the mountains, heading toward or from them, but always somewhere between them. To use a macro-level metaphor, when traveling one feels as though they are in an expanse of open space with towns as nodes between mountain ranges. In much of Japan, one is enclosed within cities, cities that often give way to indistinct suburbs and then to indistinct towns meandering through green valleys alongside train lines and roadways. For many elderly Gensan residents this would not describe home. Instead, it accurately describes an alien space occasionally and interestingly referred to as *naichi* (literally, inside land, the term for Honshu in the colonial period) in contrast to the colonies (*gaichi*). To them Hokkaido is *gaichi* and Japan, in this popular imaginary, is a place presumed to be clearly distinct from home, perhaps a place seen on television or one they have briefly visited. For locals Hokkaido is outside, open, and on the periphery of the envisaged “primordial” entity known as Nihon or the more politically charged Nippon. Nevertheless, in over a decade of my asking bumbling and earnestly confused questions, no equivalent all-encompassing counter reference point has ever been offered; simply, Hokkaido is Hokkaido. For those who are born to it, it can never be *naichi* and it is never considered to be *gaichi* by insiders. It is the spatial and cultural Other within par excellence.

Meeting Wada *Shachō*

Returning to the story of my arrival, the *shachō* (company president) of the dairy farm I was to work at met me at the station. This caught me somewhat off guard as I arrived in Obihiro about two hours ahead of schedule and was hoping to look around the station and have something

to eat. I had dug out the phone number of the *bokujō* (farm), just called, and was in the process of describing my early arrival to a somewhat bewildered and slightly panicking staff member when I heard a voice from behind: “Sumimasen ga . . . Po-ru san desu ka?” (Excuse me, but are you Paul?).

Startled, the best stammering response I could muster was: “Ahh . . . sou desu” (Err, it’s true).

A short and slender, clean-cut, smart looking, casually dressed Japanese businessman was peering at me overtop of thick glasses. He replied, nodding: “Uhn . . . Yes, OK, OK.”

There was a pause, silence for a few seconds, when time seemed to stop. Then, adding nothing else but a few more nods, Mr. Wada handed me a business card and quickly walked off with one of my bags. I uttered something into the receiver to my soon-to-be coworker along the lines of: “Ima daijoubu desu. Hito ikimasu” (Now it’s OK—man goes), with the grammar and meaning being as confused as this English translation.⁸

I hung up the phone and shuffled after Wada-san, trying first and foremost to decipher the Japanese name on the card he had just placed in my hand, while at the same time attempting to pull my stuff, and self, together. Whoever he was, it was clear he was intent on taking me somewhere, but from the look of him I silently reasoned he could not be a farmer. At the station exit, I scanned the parking lot for him. Searching the horizon for the ubiquitous *kei torakku*—a small, usually white, boxy 660 cc mini truck used by farmers across Japan—I spotted Wada-san waving, palm down with a strained smile on his face, ushering me toward a new white Toyota Crown, the emblematic conservative, middle-management luxury sedan, complete with doilies on the headrests. At the time, I had no idea who this middle-aged Japanese stranger was, but later I would discover that he was one of the owners of the farm. I was also to learn that Wada-san had hired me against the will of two other owners, but he was *the* boss. He was also to become a key research interlocutor.

We were soon outside of Obihiro proper. The city’s streets are laid out in a highly functional and none-too-interesting grid pattern, betraying Obihiro’s late nineteenth-century colonial beginnings. In sum, it is a town like several others in Hokkaido. The streets and avenues heading north and departing from the station lead past a rundown shopping arcade followed by stores mixed together with auto centers, pachinko parlors, convenience stores, and the odd derelict warehouse—a common theme of Japanese postwar midsize city sprawl (Richie 2003). However,

after crossing a four-lane bridge spanning the wide Tokachi river valley, we entered a new shopping suburb reminiscent of an overgrown American-style strip mall. Unlike Obihiro the stores across the river are booming and bustling. Do-it-yourself home stores, a McDonald's, large supermarkets and drugstores, a Mister Donut, and family restaurants, with names like Victoria's Station, attract both farmers and city dwellers alike. The town is an area famous for its hot springs and it is also the main Tokachi area crossroads, as well as being a conduit for traffic south to Obihiro and north to the Daisetsuzan National Park, Hokkaido's largest. It is also near the main thoroughfare that connects to the highway that links Sapporo to the west, with numerous tourist attractions and the Pacific Ocean to the east.

Continuing north through town for four kilometers there is another important intersection where one can choose to either head south back to Obihiro via a more scenic route, passing a famous bakery that has become a major tourist attraction, or head further north toward land pioneered one hundred years ago. As can be seen in figure I.3, the road sign in both Katakana and English reads Furontia dōri (Frontier Road). In northern Tokachi it is a common practice to have names in Katakana, a script further underscoring their foreignness as pointed out in other contexts



Figure I.3. A road sign outside of Obihiro with the winter landscape in the background. Photo by the author.

in the research of Blai Guarné (2018, 90–121); Great North Farm or Big Field Farm might serve as good examples, but Grand Hopes Farm, with a bit of interpretive license, is similar to the real name of the dairy farm I was to spend a year working on. Mr. Wada turned north toward the foothills and Gurando Hōpu Bokujō (Grand Hopes Dairy Farm).

Mapping the Road Ahead

In his study of settler communities in the Russian far north, Niobe Thompson builds off of anthropologist Tim Ingold’s call for a new focus on *all* the people of the North (Thompson 2008). In rural locations, anthropologists have long focused primarily on indigenous people in order to better understand what it means to live, or dwell, in northern colonized regions. Research trends in Hokkaido are similar: with a focus on Ainu as a singular indigenous Other and a focus on “proper” Japanese agriculture as something confined to Honshu, for example, a predominance of studies on part-time rice farming (Jussaume 1991; Moore 1990) with rural life equated with local isolation only occasionally critiqued (Kelly 2006; Hansen 2020b, 2022; Klien 2020). This research is not about agriculture in general nor is it about Ainu, though both enter as parts of the story. In this book I hope to convince the reader that Tokachi’s dairy industry, though marginalized, is an inextricable part of contemporary Japan’s engagement with modernity through a history that is intimately intertwined with Japanese macro, meso, and micro security interests. I suggest that in large part Hokkaido, certainly Tokachi and its dairy industry, are “uncomfortable truths” or alternatively “comfortable myths” for those seeking a unique, shared, and timeless Japaneseness (Chomsky and Herman 1988; Gore 2007). Hokkaido and its dairy farms represent extremes in this sense—extremes because they are so clearly part of what is acceptable as typical contemporary Japan and yet so clearly outside of its “epic” or hegemonic discourses (Bakhtin 1981; Foucault 1970; and specifically in the context of Hokkaido, Hansen 2010a, 2021b; Mason 2012, 2017).

The following chapter, “A Conceptual Scaffolding,” and chapter 2 “Toward Modernity: The Forming and Reforming of a Northern Frontier” define how the concepts of Otherness, security, and frontier are used in this book to examine Hokkaido’s history from a macro perspective, from an imagined open space to a particular place progressively secured, domesticated, and internalized. Chapter 3, “From Traction to *Teishoku*:

Tracing the Human-Bovine Trajectory,” briefly outlines the history of the domestication of cows and the emergence of beef and dairy farming in Japan. The next chapter, “Problems Protecting the Japanese Dairy Industry,” focuses on the ubiquitous images and imaginings of Otherness in terms of dairy farming as a specific form of agriculture and livelihood. Hokkaido’s settlers formed mixed farms with a symbiotic and symbolic—and in retrospect certainly iconic—relationship to dairy cattle in their attempts to secure new lives on what was interpreted as frontier space. However, facing the contemporary pressures of neoliberalism and globalization, dairying as a way of life in Hokkaido has rapidly changed over the last twenty years. The chapter argues that Otherness in the context of Japan and Hokkaido is well represented by the dairy industry, the policies and products associated with it, and the community tensions and security projects, group and individual, that such international and domestic changes have produced.

Building from these chapters, chapter 5, “Farm Structures,” narrows the scope of analysis. Culture and social structures in Hokkaido, and specifically in the Tokachi region, differ from those found in other lasting Japanese colonialist projects such as Okinawa. This chapter maps particular shifts in Tokachi’s population and industries over the last century, for example, the introduction of new technologies to these rural communities, such as electricity, tractors, automobiles, Holstein cows as a created breed, and most recently genomics and automated milking technologies. In chapter 6, “The Birth of Grand Hopes,” the scope of analysis is reduced further from a social history of Hokkaido and Tokachi to an in-depth ethnography of Gensan and to the workings of Grand Hopes Farm introduced above. This farm, and the social relations on and around it, are then utilized as a core case study of the recent move to incorporated, industrial, mega farming.

Chapter 7 acts as a hinge. “Dairy Farmers: Being, Becoming, and Making” marks a shift from what is heretofore a macro and historical study to an ethnography of particular people in the present tense, to individuals being, becoming, and making themselves in the community of Gensan and on Grand Hopes Farm circa 2005–2020. The ethnography includes a host of interrelated work roles from the head office to the farthest extremities of the farm and details shifting human relationships rooted in Otherness, security seeking, and personal frontiers on the farm and the broader community. Chapters 8 through 10, “From Teat to Tot: Following the Flows,” “Producing and Pumping,” and “Keeping It All

Working,” draw together individuated historical and ethnographic stories underscoring how these changes in production methods and the concomitant increase of Otherness (human, animal, and technological) currently impacts the security of the region, the industry, and people residing in it.

Chapter 11, “Locals, Lo-siders, Outsiders, and No-siders,” and chapter 12, “Assembling Communities: Two Genders and One Religion,” discuss how farm industrialization and the personal and community security debates that surround it have affected the former insularity of Gensan, opening multiple perspectives regarding, paths to, and negotiations of local belonging. Some individuals are keen to stay while others are eager to leave but many remain in precarious social and employment positions described as “liminally liminal” or suspended liminality.

The book concludes with “On the Frontiers of Animal-Human-Technology” and brings three frontiers in the community and the dairy industry front and center: the shifting macro imaginary of rural Tokachi as a frontier space, the technological meso frontiers of rotary dairy technology as forming a particular place of production, alienation, and anomie, and the micro embodied and affective frontier of human and animal Otherness. The rotary dairy parlor, as an animal-human-machine, is used as a case study crossing these levels of analysis by focusing on issues of how people find security, physical and ontological, at the bounds or frontiers of Other thinking, Other bodies, and Other ways of being and belonging. These have become key issues for the people of the local town, dairy owners, and the workers they employ. The brief epilogue underscores that this region and industry continue to unpredictably evolve, remaining sites of Otherness, frontier, and searches for security. As a final case in point, it highlights recent changes in the lives of some of the ethnography’s main actors.