

**THE PUBLIC INTEREST: UNDERSTANDING THE  
STATE AND CITY PLANNING IN JAPAN**

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## **Abstract**

The recent development of civil society in Japan has created an increased demand for accountability of public policy. An important outcome of this development is that it has led to an intense exploration of the concept of the public interest in planning processes. Having said so, a comprehensive analysis of the public interest in the development of Japanese planning is absent from the literature. This absence is particularly noteworthy as discourses of the public interest are central in understanding the development of the modern state and public policy. The purpose of this paper is to address the current gap in the literature, by deconstructing the origins and developments of the public interest in Japan's process of modernisation and analysing how the concept has contributed to planning policy development. The analysis shows that the nation-state has been and continues to be identified as the centre of both public and private domains. Although the boundaries between the state and the market have become increasingly blurred, the role of civil society has remained severely conditioned. Moreover, the concept of 'public' as sociability is non-existent and the mould of gender roles have been fixated by public policy. As a result, the concept of the public interest has not led to improved accountability in planning to Japanese citizens.

## 1. Introduction

The public interest has been central to formulating planning policy. However, because of difficulty in its articulation, the concept was long discredited within Western academic circles and by planning professionals for its application to policy studies (Held 1970; Young and Willmott 1986; Taylor 1998). A major criticism was that planning outcomes were not pre-determined by planners based on the (given) public interest, but rather settled as a consequence of *real politics* (Lindblom 1959; Dahl 1961; Simmie 1974; Klosterman 1996). In spite of scepticism towards the concept, arguments about what the public interest was mobilised the idea of planning in Western liberal democracies.

The progress of capitalism caused comparable problems in land-use of advanced economies. Since the beginning of modern planning systems, the international community of planners responded with similar tools for these issues (Hall 1996a; Friedmann 2005). Even so, the impacts of planning policies vary widely across advanced economies.

There is an opinion that 'planning culture' differs across nation-states reflecting institutions and governance (Cullingworth 1993; Friedmann 2005). Advancing the proposition of planning culture, the author would like to propose that planning culture varies amongst nation-states because the definitions of the public interest are different. Moreover, I suggest that diverse paths towards the modern state have significantly influenced both the idea of the public interest, thus planning culture itself.

Despite its significance in Western planning histories, the concept of the public interest has been one of the least explored issues in Japanese planning studies. Nonetheless, as Japan's spectacular economic mismanagement in the last decade emanated from its overinvestment in land and development, its citizens have begun to call for more accountability of its planning policy which – up until recently – has been heavily engineered for economic growth. The objective of this paper is to explain why Japanese cities ultimately lack the quality of life compared with cities of Western liberal democracies (e.g. landscape aesthetics, open space, affordable housing, and the protection of heritage), despite the fact that Japan is one of the richest nations in the world (Foreign Press Center Japan 2005). Furthermore, its government has developed a planning system by importing planning tools from the West. Thus, a comparative analysis of the discourse of the public interest in Japan with Western ones would illuminate their dissimilarities and thus elucidate why its planning system failed to promote the quality of life as a public interest.

This paper will look into the conceptual development of the public interest in planning in the framework of the modern state. Section 2 will explain the common characteristics of the modern state and its evolution process. Then an analysis will follow explaining how the experiences of latecomers to modernisation differ from leading modern states in Western Europe. Section 3 will investigate the complex arguments on the public interest derived from the four major classifications of public / private distinctions in liberal democracy in the West. The influences of these arguments on the public interest in planning will be discussed in Section 4. Section 5 will discuss the public interest of modern Japan based on the prior classification. The

examination will illuminate the unique characteristics of the public interest in Japan originating from its relation to the outside world. Section 6 will explain how these features affected Japan's planning development. The conclusion will summarise the findings from preceding arguments and emphasise how the logic of the public interest in Japan failed to make its planning policy more accountable to its citizens.

## **2. The development of the modern state**

The current form of the state is a rather new entity in political history (Hall, Gieben et al. 1992; McLean 1996). There had already been empires in the wake of civilisation and city-states in the Middle Ages. However, anthropologists claim that people had long lived in a stateless society which was based on communities that were not necessarily ruled by state authorities (Hall, Gieben et al. 1992; McLean 1996). After a long feudalistic era, the absolute state transformed into a nation-state with sovereign power, and then gradually developed into the modern state (Eccleston 1986; Hall, Gieben et al. 1992; Pierson 1996). Although there is no agreed view of the modern state, Max Weber (1864-1920) offered the most influential definition of it in his works (Pierson 1996). From Weber's point of view, the following characteristics of the modern state are particularly important (See also Tilly and Ardant 1975; Giddens 1985; Mann 1993a): (1) monopoly and control of the means of violence; (2) territoriality; (3) sovereignty; (4) constitutionality; (5) impersonal power; (6) public bureaucracy; (7) authority / legitimacy; (8) citizenship; (9) taxation (Pierson 1996: 8). This form of the modern state is regarded as having come into existence during the eighteenth and nineteenth century in Western Europe (Hall, Gieben et al. 1992).

However, the route to the modern state varies considerably, in particular for the cases of latecomers to modernisation. Compared to former colonial states in Asia, Africa and Latin America as well as non-colonised states like Japan, Western European states contained two elements that were particularly important for their modernisation. First, the Enlightenment and the birth of social science challenged ideas and beliefs of traditions, in particular, of religions (Hall, Gieben et al. 1992). The radicalism of the Enlightenment enabled the progress of both industrialisation and liberal political thought. Second, the establishment of the nation-state with a monopoly on violence, territoriality, and sovereignty had been completed prior to the development of the modern state. Popular nationalism then united people of the same origin to institute parliamentary democracy against the absolute monarchy (though the majority of members were from the bourgeoisie) (Anderson 1991). This transformation was viable since industrialisation and the Enlightenment brought wealth and knowledge to the bourgeoisie. Then the working classes challenged the power of the capitalist class calling for mass democracy and socialism (social democracy) in the late nineteenth century. Because former colonial states (except for white immigrant countries like the USA and Australia) and Japan fundamentally lacked these important forerunner stages for modernisation, it can be surmised that the absence of these experiences would affect their evolution towards a modern state.

### **3. The public interest in the modern state**

The development of the modern state led to the growth of political institutions, which meant that the legitimacy of state governance became an increasingly important issue. The expansion of political institutions in the modern state posed a question: what constitutes the public interest? In other words, what is the distinction between public

and private? In the age of absolutism, this was simple. A monarchy equalled 'public' since the monarchy's legitimacy was justified on the claim of 'divine right' backed by churches (Hall, Gieben et al. 1992: 84). Because the separation of political power from monarchies and churches has been a pattern toward the development of the modern state in the West, the growing role of state administrations and political participation under mass democracy has made it more difficult to answer this question.

In fact, the meaning of the public interest or distinctions between public and private has been very much entangled with characteristics constituting the modern state (Weintraub 1997). As a result, the discussion about the public interest in planning is more complicated. To get a better understanding of these issues, the first part of this section classifies current debates about public and private. The second part shows how the arguments have contributed to shaping the public interest in planning in the West.

#### *Public/private distinction in politics*

Although the distinction between public and private is a core issue in social and political analysis in the modern state, according to Jeff Weintraub, there seems to be considerable confusion over arguments about the characteristics of public and private (Weintraub 1997: 1). The reason for this is that there are multiple dimensions to the concept of 'public' and 'private', and numerous ways to contrast the two concepts (Weintraub 1997: 3). While 'public' is always defined by that which is 'private', there appears to be four major themes which distinguish public from private. These are: 1) liberalism: the market and the state; 2) citizenship: from the polis to the 'public

sphere'; 3) 'public' life as sociability; and 4) feminism: private/public as family/civil society (Weintraub 1997). By using Weintraub's classification, issues surrounding the public interest can be understood better.

First, in discussion on public policymaking in the liberal economy, the state as public is contrasted to the market as private in dichotomies such as public/private sector. In a debate on privatisation of the public sector's services, public here means 'the administrative state' (Weintraub 1997: 8-11). This interpretation of the state and the market as public and private appeared when market powers grew and caused social problems in the nineteenth century modern state. The administrative functions of the state expanded to govern the relationship between the market and society to ease these problems.

Second, the public sphere or the public realm mainly stands for 'the realm of political community' or 'civil society' where political debates, discussions, collective decision-making and actions take place by citizens (Weintraub 1997: 10-16). The public sphere is not subordinate to either the market nor the state; it is the sphere in which - in principle - citizens have open access and form public opinions freely (Habermas 1997: 105).

Third, 'public life' as sociability does not necessarily refer to political activities alone, but more generally to spontaneous and lively ongoing interactions among heterogeneous individuals and groups in a society (Weintraub 1997: 17). The activities of public life tend to occur in certain spaces, in particular in cities in modern life (Jacobs 1972). Consequently, social life, which is distinguished from intimate

and emotional private life (Weintraub 1997: 20), is often discussed in conjunction with the creation of such physical spaces.

Fourth, there is a distinction between private and public in discussions involving the domestic versus public split of life (Weintraub 1997: 27). According to this view, which originated in Aristotle's *Politics*, as women traditionally and disproportionately occupied domestic or family dimensions of life, the private sphere was considered to be the women's sphere (Elshtain 1997; Weintraub 1997). Feminist critiques challenged the division of private/public life based on fixed gender roles which confined women to the household (Elshtain 1997: 606).

#### **4. The development of the public interest in planning**

Modern planning in the West has developed to challenge existing boundaries between public and private. Citizens have continuously confronted the definition of the public interest in liberal democracy which is the dominant mode of the modern state. Questions about existing notions of the public interest arose from political conflicts, economic problems, and changes in societal relations. Faced by ongoing challenges from citizens, the public interest, and therefore planning governance itself, has had to be revised accordingly. Therefore, the public interest is not a static concept. The public interest is a vehicle for changes in planning practices about the desirable form of the built environment, governance, democracy, collective values and human rights in the Western liberal democracy.

First, the emergence of planning policy in the modern state was a turning point in the relationship between the market and the state: private and public. The principle of a

*laissez-faire* economy, free from state intervention, was modified following the crises of the foundation of economic production – a loss of productivity in urban labour that was related to deteriorating public health in cities (Fraser 1984; Hall 1996a). Furthermore, the state also had to provide the necessary infrastructure to make urban life for both capital and labour (production and consumption) work smoothly (Harvey 1985; Klosterman 1996). The constraints on the environmental and physical capacity of early industrial cities in the West changed the boundaries between ‘private’ (the market) and ‘public’ (the state) in capitalist society.

Second, industrial cities in nineteenth century Europe and the USA presented opportunities and spaces where the public sphere thrived. The public sphere, which originated from the Greek or Roman polis, was first revived by the bourgeoisie in capitalist society to counter the power of aristocracy. However, capitalist cities not only enlivened the ‘bourgeois’ public sphere, but also mobilised the urban working classes to achieve political citizenship. While ‘free’ wage-labour and capital was removed from traditional feudal villages and put into urban factories and offices, life in industrial cities made the masses conscious of the deep class division and inequality in capitalist society (Giddens 1995: Ch.6). This realisation led to riots and intensified the growth of labour movements in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century in European industrial cities (Jones 1976; Geary 1981; Hinton 1983). In the early twentieth century, labour movements resulted in materialising mass democracy in capitalist society, and then followed by the provision of social security and social housing in Europe. Urbanisation and labour movements also altered the characteristics of the public sphere. The public sphere further grew by the expansion of political citizenship: in later years, this included all adult females and males.

Planners in local governments and civil society responded to urban social problems by improving the living conditions of working class people. State social reform initiatives such as the improvement of working class neighbourhoods, which had previously been in the private domain, also altered the agenda discussed in the public sphere. Since then, planning policies to secure the quality of life in communities became a major topic discussed in the public sphere in Western liberal democracies.

Third, the creation of spaces for 'public life' also became a major planning challenge in the modern state. As seen in the development of the public sphere in the late nineteenth century, urban spaces such as streets, parks, and squares were important as they allowed the gathering of people, the exchange of information and opinions, and also mass protests. Not only did these 'public' spaces offer places for political activities, they were crucial to social life as well. However, suburbanisation, motorisation and the separation between work and living spaces in modern cities made it difficult to maintain public spaces as lively places. In fact, Jane Jacob's criticism of modern planning is mainly based on this decline of social life and the breakdown of established inner city communities in late twentieth century American cities (Jacobs 1972). Nonetheless, planners in the West always concerned themselves with the creation of 'public' spaces, in particular amenities where people could enjoy light, air and the green in *the public interest* (Gehl and Gemzæe 1996b; Van Rooijen 2000). There is a cynical view that early planners had a hidden motivation in building such spaces: stimulating the moral reform of the 'lazy' working class population (Jones 1976; Davis 1983; Wood 1992). Even so, it is essential to note that public spaces and buildings, as well as the façade of private architectures, became increasingly recognised as the representation of the public domain and were viewed as

contributions to aesthetical symbols of social democracy in the twentieth century modern state (Tibbalds 1992; Worpole 2000).

Fourth, the feminists' critique towards the gender biased public-private distinction as public (male) vs. domesticity (female) is also relevant to modern planning development. Although the history of modern planning was illustrated in the male domain (Meller 2004), middle-class women in capitalist society initiated early planning efforts in the form of working class housing improvements in the U.K. and the U.S.A (Hall 1996a: Ch.2). Octavia Hill (1838-1912) dedicated her life to improving the quality of life of the urban poor in the inner city of London (Hill 1883). An American woman, Jane Addams (1860-1935), who visited East London in 1888, became deeply impressed by the charities' works in slum improvement. On her return to the U.S., she committed herself to improve poor immigrants' settlements in Chicago (Addams 1893; Addams 1907). Dame Henrietta Barnett (1851-1936), a socialist campaigner, planned and developed Hampstead Garden Suburb which incorporated well-designed housing and Hampstead Heath in forming a new community. Her vision was to promote the integration of the poor and the rich by sharing beautiful open spaces and other amenities in Hampstead (Barnett 1928). These female pioneers in early planning initiatives shared the common awareness and tactics to improve the condition of the urban poor, in particular women and children. They first noticed that the characteristics of poor urban environments in Victorian slum settlements such as overcrowding, poor hygiene, air, light, amenities and open spaces caused ill health, incest and other negative outcomes amongst the urban working classes (Hill 1876; Hill 1883; Addams 1893; Meller 2004). Their approach was human-centred compared to the environment-centred attitude in modern planning

characterised by male professional planners (Meller 2004). However, because of this 'citizenship' approach, women's role in modern planning became considerably marginalised in the West after planning came to be established as a science to manage built environments by '(white) male' engineering and architecture experts (Meller 2004).

Although the contribution of female philanthropists to the emergence of modern planning had been long ignored, Jane Jacob's criticism to the de-humanised face of modern planning revived the forgotten tradition of people-centred planning (Jacobs 1972). Since the 1980s, gender issues in planning became an important wave of new theory development in planning (Greed 1994; Ritzdorf 1996; Sandercock and Forsyth 2000). Prior to the development of feminist planning theory in advanced economies, the role of women had already become a prime focus in economic and social planning in developing countries (Greed 1994; Sandercock and Forsyth 2000). Feminist critics considered that existing urban design in developed states was far removed from the needs of women who often juggled work and domestic responsibilities (Stimpson 1981; Milroy and Andrew 1988; Whyte 2000). In their research, many women expressed their discontent about the locations of facilities, the designs of public spaces, transport networks, motorisation, and the lack of security in modern cities which were almost exclusively designed by male planners. Feminists started challenging the existing boundary of the public-private domain as follows:

While abolishing all divisions between the private realm and the larger world would be undesirable, feminists indicate that in the arena of urban planning the line between public and private or domestic life has been drawn to men's advantage. Thus the public domain is a physical construct that by definition represent a whole set of

contested political and economic issues within planning (Sandercock and Forsyth 2000: 453).

Feminist interventions helped to remind policymakers that the goal of planners was to incorporate different voices in decision-making *in the public interest* (Fainstein 1996; Ritzdorf 1996).

As planning policies affect many aspects of human life, planning turned out to be in policy arenas where the public interest of liberal democracies was contested. Subsequently, the results of these challenges in turn altered the existing paradigm of the public interest. Although challenges by citizens did not eliminate all planning problems, endless trials, arguments and conflicts in search of the public interest in planning served to improve the quality of life in the West. Therefore, to understand planning culture in Japan, it is important to find out what the role of the public interest has been in shaping the objectives of its planning policies. The process in which the public interest has been identified is also crucial to figure out its impact on Japan's planning development.

## **5. The public interest in Japan's modern state**

There are significant differences between the West and Japan with respect to the distinction and the origins of public and private (Matsumoto 1978; Boling 1990; Iokibe 1999; Terao 2000). While 'in English, 'public' comes from the Latin word *populus*, meaning all adult male population', Japan's equivalent word, *ko* or *oyake*, originally means the 'great house' of the emperor, implying the authority (Boling 1990:140). Many observers agree that private (*shi*) in Japanese still carries negative

or inferior connotation to public (*ko*) and there is a vertical relationship between public and private (Koschmann 1978; Matsumoto 1978; Boling 1990; Iokibe 1999; Terao 2000; Mizubayashi 2002). There is no doubt that public is superior to private in this relation. Having originated in Confucian China, *ko* as an authority and *shi* as an individual represented the relationship between a ruler and the ruled in feudal Japan (Kurozumi 2002; Mizubayashi 2002). In addition to the difference in roots, although *ko* nowadays holds nearly the same meaning as public in English, Japanese *ko* does not include the English meaning of public as ‘political process or decision-making, open to the scrutiny and participation of ordinary citizens’ (Boling 1990: 140).

As the origins and connotations of public and private in Japan indicate, there is a disparity in the discourses of the public interest between Japan and the West. The meanings of Japan’s *ko* imply that ‘public’ is a monarchy, an authority and a state equivalent to the ruler. On the other hand, although *ko* of contemporary Japan includes the implications of commonness or openness such as *kokyo kukan* (public space) or *koshu denwa* (a pay phone), *ko* does not entail the notion of people or more precisely citizenship. Furthermore, *ko* also does not infer ‘social’ despite its modern notion of being common or open to people. In addition to the meaning of ‘*ko*’ itself, the distinction of ‘*ko*’ and ‘*shi*’ (public-private) in Japan has developed into distinctive discourses of the public interest in its path towards the modern state. The differences in the discourses on public and private between Japan and the West will be summarised based on Weintraub’s classification in the following section.

### *The state and the market*

The deviation in public-private relationships between Japan and Western liberal democracies exists in the boundary between the administrative state and the market. Japan's industrialisation started from the Meiji oligarchy's (the powerful and enlightened ex-samurai group) close ties to wealthy Tokugawa merchants who supported the 1868 Meiji Restoration (Norman and Woods 2000: 49-62). While the government gave advice, support and protection to the start-ups of banking industries, it also set up key strategic industries such as steel, mining, engineering, shipbuilding, railways and telecommunications to strength its military development (Beasley 1995; Allinson 1999; Norman and Woods 2000: Ch.4). In the 1880s, the government sold many state-owned firms to private enterprises which had maintained close links to the Meiji oligarchy (Beasley 1995; Allinson 1999; Norman and Woods 2000; Tipton 2001). This sale created Japan's oldest *zaibatsu* (conglomerate) groups led by banks such as Mitsubishi, Mitsui, Sumitomo and Yasuda. The political and business elites in the early Meiji era were strongly connected by personal liaisons. They also shared the same goal which was to modernise the Japanese economy in order to support national sovereignty against the Great Powers of the world. These historical origins of Japan's industrialisation rendered the distinction between the administrative state and the market ambiguous.

Although there has been a vocal claim that Japan is a highly regulated state so that '*kisei kanwa* (deregulation)' is essential since the 1980s (Japan. Provisional Council for the Promotion of Administrative Reform. 1989; Carlile and Tilton 1998; Lincoln 1998), in reality, its industries are for the most part '*unregulated*' (Kerr 2001: 137).

The regulations to *control or guide* industries exist in Japan (Johnson 1982), but they do not actually ‘regulate companies’ to promote fair competitions and protect consumers (Johnson 1982; Lincoln 1998; Kerr 2001). Lender-liability law has not yet materialised in Japan. Similarly, the weakness of product-liability law (1994), environmental impact assessment law (1997) and rules against insider trading (1989) as well as false financial statements in Japan demonstrate the absence of strong regulatory measures towards market behaviour (Kerr 2001: 137).

In the late Meiji era, the state’s guidance of the economy further developed to cultivate the values of ‘hard work and frugality’ among its people in order to increase the productivity of the national economy through education and moral suasion in private life (Garon 1994; Garon 1997; Tipton 2001). The legacy of the state’s moral campaign in the pre-war era is still visible in modern Japan as employees tend to regard their employers’ interests as almost equivalent to ‘the public good’ (Boling 1990: 145). The loyalty and commitment of Japanese workers to the employers is often expressed as *messhi hoko* (sacrifice of self in service to the public). The pre-war strategy of social mobilisation by influencing individual beliefs further blurred the distinction between public and private as the state versus the market (Rohlen 1989)

#### *The public sphere as political community*

In contrast to the ambiguous boundaries between the state and the market, there is a sharp divide between the public sphere and the private sphere in Japan’s policymaking. This division seems to originate from the inception of parliamentary democracy. Both Japan and Western countries established parliamentary democracy systems in the nineteenth century. The discourses of the public interest cannot be

separated from the development processes towards popular democracy. Since the establishment of parliamentary democracy in the West, what the public interest stands for has been redefined along with an increasing size of the electorate. Class conflicts in the industrial economy affected its definition. In Japan, after the Meiji oligarchy finally removed the disgruntled ex-samurai clans following the 1868 Restoration, government outsiders such as the Freedom and People's Right Movement (*jiyu minken undo*) started demanding political participation. The first parliament in Japan opened in 1890 compelled by both international (as a showcase of the modern state) and domestic pressure to the Meiji oligarchy. In fact, the Meiji authority deeply feared that political participation as well as growing Westernisation undermined Japan's economic achievement so that the authority endlessly campaigned for demoralising the legitimacy of parliamentary politics and simultaneously 'edifying' the Japanese populace (Gluck 1985; Beasley 1995; Garon 1997).

Therefore, it is noteworthy that the beginning of Japan's modern democracy was accompanied with the introduction of *kyoiku chokugo* (the Imperial Rescript on Education) which preached the virtues of hard work, civil obedience and national sacrifice centred upon the Emperor as the head of the (family) state and Shinto (Gluck 1985; Tipton 2001). After the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution on the 11<sup>th</sup> February 1889, granting an emperor the executive, legislative, diplomatic and military power of the state (Allinson 1999: 15), the Meiji oligarchy issued an ordinance to declare the immunity of high ranking civil servants from politics, claiming the bureaucracy's importance in having 'specialised knowledge' and their ability to manage 'the now extremely detailed laws' in the public administration (Gluck 1985 :

55). Yamagata Aritomo (1838-1922), the leader of the Meiji oligarchy explained this as follows:

[Changing policy official with each cabinets would result in] administration losing its character of impartiality and independence and becoming a tool of favouritism and self-interest. Thus, if administrative officials are not made to stand – impartial and non-partisan [*fuhen futo*] – apart from politics, one cannot hope to have fair and impartial administration (Tokutomi 1933: 371-372, cited by Gluck 1985: 55).

With the ideology of *chozen shugi* (the supreme principles of justice and the public interest), the Meiji oligarchy emphasized the superiority and impartiality of the state bureaucracy in policymaking to self-serving party politics and politicians who did not have ‘expertise’ in science and technology. Through this campaign, the Meiji government tried to reaffirm the ancient East Asian political thought of ‘the division of the ruler and the ruled’, which still accentuates Japanese politics in the dichotomy between the *kan* (official and government) and the *min* (people) (Matsumoto 1978; Gluck 1985; Barshay 1988).

Furthermore, another notable aspect of the start of Japan’s democracy in 1890 was the definition of the *min* as opposed to the *kan*, when the large majority of the Japanese populace was excluded from the electorate, which then consisted of only 1.1 per cent of the Japanese population (Gluck 1985). Within this context, the *min* (both politicians and the electorate) was equal to the gentry class, who held large tracts of land in the countryside, or other elite members of society (such as journalists, intellectuals or notables). Their views were regarded as representing the ‘public opinion’ (*yoron*), whereas the masses were not politically defined nor represented

(Oka 1982; Gluck 1985). Once parliamentary politics started in Meiji Japan, the elite *min* gradually acquired more power to introduce their interests into party politics, so that policy outcomes became increasingly clientelistic (Silberman 1982; Gluck 1985).

In contrast, the masses, whose majority were poor urban dwellers and tenant farmers, were totally neglected in politics, which led them to resort to riots sometimes during periods of economic depression in the early twentieth century (Okamoto 1982; Gordon 1991; Tipton 2001). However, the elite felt that these social conflicts would weaken the nation's economic development, so that they started channelling the masses' anger towards support for the capture of overseas territories (Storry 1957; Wilson 1969; Tipton 2001). A radical nationalist, Kita Ikki (1884-1937) argued in his *Nihon Kaizo Hoan Taiko* (Outline for the Reconstruction of Japan) in 1924 as follows:

Justice [wrote Kita] is the proper demarcation of interests. As the class struggle within a nation is waged for the readjustment of unequal distinctions, so war between nations for an honourable cause will reform the present unjust distinctions [between nations]..... The socialists of the West contradict themselves when they admit the right of class struggle to the proletariat at home and at the same time condemn war, waged by a proletariat among the nations, as militarism and aggression.....If it is permissible for the working class to unite to overthrow unjust authority by bloodshed, then unconditional approval should be given to Japan to perfect her army and navy and make war for the rectification of unjust international frontiers. In the name of rational social democracy Japan claims possession of Australia, and Eastern Siberia.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As translated and cited by Storry, R (1957: 38)

As argued here, nationalists saw themselves as social democrats and their opinions were popular among the underprivileged. As a consequence, those who opposed the nation's interest were often referred to as the mob not only by the Japanese establishment (Gordon 1991; Dower 1999), but also the majority of citizens ended up considering that they were not considered to be *kokumin* (citizens)<sup>2</sup>, because of their 'unpatriotic' behaviours (Gluck 1985; Williams 1993; Dower 1999).

At the beginning of the parliament, the emergence of the public sphere in modern Japan was so emasculated that democracy and politics largely become disconnected from ordinary Japanese citizens (Richardson 1974; Gluck 1985; Stronach 1995). This is the reason why the word for public (*ko*) in Japanese does not include the notion of political participation even nowadays. The discourses of public (*ko*) originating in the Meiji period became so deeply entrenched in the Japanese mind that – until very recently - the public interest in policymaking came to be regarded as representing authority's interest or at most the interests of a limited group of notables.

### *The public life as sociability*

In relation to political participation in Japan, the Japanese 'ko' does not include the meaning of 'sociable'. Although Japanese words like *komin-kan* (community hall), *koen* (park) or *kokyo-hoso* (public broadcasting) represent common spaces or mediums open to the public, the primary 'ko' here means that the government manages these facilities for people and does not necessarily indicate spontaneous

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<sup>2</sup> Even *kokumin* (citizen) was a newly adopted word for the 1946 Constitution of Japan, which was drafted by the GHQ during the US occupation in Japan. Having said so, it has contained some reference people as the ruled. In the Meiji Constitution, Japanese people were called *shinmin* - the subjects of the emperor. pp.351-352. Dower, J. W. (1999). Embracing defeat : Japan in the wake of World War II. New York, W.W. Norton & Co.

public participation. Nonetheless, it does not suggest that there is no active social life in Japan. In fact, foreign observers witnessed that the streets of Japanese inner cities contained a rich social life throughout the modern period (Seidensticker 1983; Cybriwsky 1998). The vitality of its metropolitan areas is a virtue and fascination for Western visitors to modern Japan because it resulted in lower crime, thriving culture and economy in cities compared to its counterparts (Alden 1986; Cybriwsky 1998; Sorensen 2004). However, the concept of public as sociability was not clearly recognised as a policy agenda, and therefore not incorporated in its policymaking in contemporary Japan. As the creation and preservation of public spaces in modern cities and countryside has been so important in Western planning, the lack of the sociability concept as public in Japan is likely to have had considerable impact on its planning policy.

#### *The domestic and public domain*

As in the West, the Japanese authority considered the domestic domain as the woman's and promoted 'womanly virtues as those of modesty, frugality and purity' (Tipton 2001: 61). Even in the twenty-first century, *ryosai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother) seems to capture the most idealistic figure of a Japanese woman (Ishii 2002; McVeigh 2004: Ch.12). Political participation of Japanese women was rejected by the 1890 *Shukai oyobi Kessha Ho* (Law on Associations and Meetings) as it was claimed to be against women's social values (Nolte and Hastings 1991: 154). However, the Meiji authority regarded the home as the forefront of the public domain to increase economic productivity as well as reproduce (through child-rearing) 'nationalistic value' (Nolte and Hastings 1991; Garon 1993; Garon 1994; Garon 1997). While child rearing was supposed to be the most important role for women,

household savings, collaboration during wars, and charitable works were designated as central female roles by the state and the state-sponsored organisations (Garon 1993; Garon 1994; Mackie 2003). Although women did not have the opportunities of direct political participation, the domestic domain increasingly became the vanguard to maintain and reproduce 'traditional' as well as 'modern' virtues of the Japanese which the state considered to be desirable (Garon 1994).

Although there have been feminist movements in Japan trying to break the mould of these imposed roles for women, there seemed to be strong resistance from the state, businesses and a certain type of civil society (mainly religious and the right-wing) organisations. In particular, the state's suppression and manipulation of women's roles in Japanese society still appear to be pervasive. For example, contraceptive pills only became legally accepted in Japan in 1999 after thirty years' of campaigning. In addition, there is still an incentive for married women to work part-time, as the salaries of less than 1,030,000 Yen (£5,000) are eligible for tax exemption. The majority of two-year colleges and their curriculum under the supervision of the Ministry of Education are still designed to suit the 'desirable' roles of Japanese women (McVeigh 2004: 231-237). Most importantly, through this kind of segregation and guidance for women by the state's administration, Japanese women do not have equal opportunities at the workplace.

Although the 1946 Constitution of Japan protects the citizenship of Japanese women, feminist movements in Japan are seemingly far behind their Western counterparts. A famed feminist slogan 'the personal is the political' appears to be paradoxical to the social history of Japanese women. The message is originally for the empowerment of

Western women to articulate their constraints in private life as issues in the public world. In nineteenth century Western liberal society, it was mainly religions and civil society which worked to cultivate 'female virtues' rather than the state's authority. In Japan, the authority took advantage of the role of women in the private domain to promote 'the public' (nationalistic) paradigm in their family life. However, the global economy has dismantled the ideal of a full-time housewife in Japan. Many Japanese women have been socially and economically marginalised as a result of an increase in the incidence of divorce as well as single (and aging) women and single mother households in recent years (Förster and d'Ercole 2005). Nevertheless, the weak development of feminism in Japan seems to be a consequence of the state's dominance over the private domain, which can be read conversely as 'the personal is the political (the state's domain)'

## **6. The public interest in Japan's planning system**

### *The state and the market*

The particular characteristics of the relationship between the state and the market in Japan have had a crucial impact on the concept of the public interest in its planning policy. In fact, the ideology of economic development as the public interest in planning has had lasting effects on its built environment. The prime role of Japan's developmental state in relation to planning was to build infrastructures, and renew the built environment in order to catch up with modernisation. The requirement for new buildings and infrastructures in the process of its early industrialisation created the enormous demand for construction works. Through this process, the construction industry quickly grew and became one of the largest business sectors in modern

Japan<sup>3</sup>(Woodall 1996; Keizai Koho Center (Japan Institute for Social and Economic Affairs). 2003; Foreign Press Center Japan 2005). Indeed, not merely the construction industry, but other businesses such as civil engineering, architecture, material supplier, surveyors, finance, insurance, advertisement and real estate, all benefited from the development and renewal of the built environment (Buntrock 2002).

The way in which Japan's construction sector emerged determined the subsequent relationship between the state and the industry in planning in Japan. The liaison is inevitably clientelistic since it often exhibits connections between politicians, bureaucrats and businessmen. As a consequence, the sector became a hotbed of corruption (Levy 1993; Woodall 1996; Schlesinger 1997), often involved with the criminal underworld as an agent (Hill 2003; Kaplan and Dubro 2003). Tanaka Kakuei (1918-93, the former prime minister of 1972-74), who ruled Japan's post-war politics even a decade after his conviction for a bribe, epitomises the reality of Japanese planning policy which has been consumed by the greed of private interests under the gleaming façade of the public interest as economic growth. The cosy relationship between state institutions and industries formed a formidable 'growth machine' as 'construction state'(Woodall 1996; Schlesinger 1997; Babb 2000; Kerr 2001; McCormack 2001).

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<sup>3</sup> The share of construction industry in Japan's GDP output consisted of 11.3 per cent in 1980 and 10.4 per cent in 1990. The ratio had been around 10 per cent during the 1990s and declined to 6.3 per cent in 2003 (Foreign Press Center Japan, 2005: 80). The GDP share of Japan's construction industry is distinctive compared to the other advanced economies: 4.8 per cent of the US (1999), 5 per cent of the UK (2000) and 4.5 per cent of France (1999) (Keizai Koho Center 2003:42). Furthermore, the industry still employs 6.2 million people, Japan's 9.8 per cent of the working population in employment in 2002 (ibid :113)

In fact, the tendency was enhanced in post-war Japan when the government created numerous public companies to facilitate infrastructure development (Johnson 1978). *Nihon Doro Kodan* (the Japan Highway Public Corporation) and *Nihon Toshi Seibi Kodan* (the Housing and Urban Development Corporation) were prominent public companies to support land development under the supervision of the former Ministry of Construction. Other ministries, too, held the significant numbers of public companies to support developments. Moreover, in order to fund those developments, the state also operated many public or semi-public financial institutions such as the *Nihon Kaihatsu Ginko* (Japan Developmental Bank), *Norin Chukin* (the central financial institution for agricultural, forestry and fishing co-operatives), *Shoko Chukin* (a special corporation for helping small businesses) and *Yubinkyoku* (the post office). The public sector has played a leading role in changing the nature of Japan's built environment through these public institutions.

In addition to the state institutions, private sector agencies, in particular, *zaibatsu* groups and railway companies actively invested in land. Since the Meiji period, these sectors have been beneficiaries of state land distribution policies. They have held land in prime locations in major Japanese cities. As the equity market had been for a long time relatively underdeveloped in Japan, land was the most important collateral to fund businesses. It was economical too since the fixed property tax in Japan was set very low (Koo 1998: 172-173)<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, as urbanisation progressed at a fast rate along with industrialisation, housing, real estate and retail sectors actively

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<sup>4</sup> In Japan, the fixed property tax is levied against the price of the property registered to the authority. Generally speaking, there is a huge disparity between the market price and the registered price. The standard property tax rate in 2005 is 1.4 per cent of the registered property price. However, Richard Koo explained that in 1984 the tax rate to his property in Tokyo was mere 0.065 per cent against the market price while he paid 3.2 per cent of the market price of his U.S. property to the authority as the property tax.

invested in land, too. This was helped by the continuous expansion of public transport networks and weak development controls. As a consequence, even before 'the commodification of space' (Madanipour 1996: 137-42) by large real estate developers, banks and security companies become commonplace in post-Fordist Japan, the principles of *tochi no shohinka* (the commodification of land) and *tochi shinwa* (the myth of land in which the land value would continue to increase forever) was firmly set in Japan's transactions of space.

### *The public sphere as political community*

In contrast to the planning histories in Western Europe and the USA, the development of Japan's planning seems to be of little relevance to an 'open' political community. In fact, a political community for planning exists in Japan, however it is extremely confined and characterised by closed access to stakeholders. First of all, autonomous civil society, which comprises an integral part of the public sphere in Western liberal democracies, was ultimately absent in Japan's planning policymaking. In the planning history in the West, civil society, in particular non-profit organisations, contributed a great deal to improving the condition of working class housing, creating amenities and preserving environments. In fact, these associations initiated and shaped the direction of planning policy in Western liberal democracies. However in Japan, the institutional arrangements for planning policy prevented autonomous civil associations from exerting strong influence on the formation and the outcome of planning policy.

Furthermore, the conflicting legacies of its intellectuals as collaborators of the authoritarian state in pre-war Japan (Nakayama 1984; Barshay 1988), and the

distinctive characteristics of planning professionals and academics also shaped the ideology of Japanese planning. Planning in Japan was seldom considered as a part of social science to mediate different interests about the built environment. It was regarded as technology to materialise the construction of 'new' developments and art to demonstrate 'modernity' (Smith 1978; Coaldrake 1996). Accordingly, there was no particular training for planners to study planning as a political process. Professional endeavours were concentrated on how to effectively build or renew spaces and provide infrastructures. Because planning policy community as civil society has been underdeveloped and confined within the domain of the state and market in Japan, the public interest representing collective concerns for citizens has hardly been raised in its policymaking processes.

Throughout the post-war years, the weak development control was required to enable the transformation of spaces in Japan. Indeed, 'non-development control' seemed to be implicitly justified to be 'in the public interest' for politicians, bureaucrats, businesses and farmers for a long time. First of all, developing industry-related infrastructures served the needs of the Japanese economy well when the nation was progressing towards industrialisation. A planning system which focused strong land-use controls seemed to be an obstacle to facilitate infrastructure and economic development. .

Second, businesses and farmers who were the major supporters of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) called for a weak development control system too. For the businesses, land was viewed as a simple commodity for the collateral of loans as well as speculation. Farmers who became new landowners as a result of the Allied

Occupation's land reform benefited from uncomplicated procedures for changes in land-use: from farming to residential and industrial use during the rapid urbanisation period of post-war years. The incomes from agriculture in Japan were low because the productivity of farming was not high enough from small-scale farming which was carried out by former tenant farmers. As the farming population exceeded well over 70 per cent of the entire Japanese population in the early 1950s, 'the freedom of land-use' won the support of the majority of the electorate who hoped to increase chances for social betterment. As a result, strong property rights were well-entrenched planning policy in post-war Japan.

Third, Japan's core planning professionals too, such as civil engineers and architects, could gain from more development projects, in particular, generously funded government projects. As Japan's planning regulations have obliged the minimal restrictions on building designs to accord with the surrounding environment, Japanese architects have enjoyed enormous freedom to put forward avant-garde designs. After all, the state and the market both shared the same objective as a developmental state, and the collaboration appeared to be fairly legitimate until recently.

### *The public realm as social life*

One of the most distinctive notions about Japanese cities is the failure to recognise social life as the public realm. Why sociability has not been recognised as the public realm in Japan's planning system is again due to the beginning of its modern planning and the concept of 'public'. When modern planning was imported to Japan, planning was a tool to demonstrate a city as a showcase of the modern state in the early Meiji period (Smith 1978; Fujimori 1990; Cybriwsky 1998). Furthermore, the

government's investments making 'public' spaces were mostly concentrated on the high city in Tokyo while investment on the low city was fairly neglected (Cybriwsky 1998). Public spaces in Japan were built to display the power of the nation-state to the world. This intention is quite visible both in Western-style buildings completed in the Meiji period and ultra-modernist public buildings designed by Tange Kenzo (1913-2005) in post-war years. This is a consequence of the modern Japanese state absorbing its society.

Moreover, there has been a contradiction amongst the Japanese elite towards the idea of modernisation. Although its planning professionals and architects worshiped modernisation as progress towards 'the first-class nation', the Japanese elite in secret feared the impact of modernisation and industrialisation on the society. The incoherent landscape in modern Japan partly illustrates its elite's ambivalent attitude towards modernisation. For instance, the Japanese authority and establishment emphasised the importance of efficiency, rationality and technologies in planning education (Masser and Yorisaki 1994). This belief led planners and architects to continuously destroy natural beauty or allowed the demolition of its historical townscapes for industrial and commercial projects (Kerr 2001; McCormack 2001). However, the same Japanese establishment promoted the value of Japanese tradition and its 'unique' culture to its citizens and abroad (Japan External Trade Organization 1999).

Indeed, regardless of neighbourhoods' opinions, changes in landscape and the physical renewal of the built environment have never stopped in modern Japan. Japanese prominent architects who frequently bragged of Japan's cultural

distinctiveness in their works often caused the destruction of its landscape and old neighbourhoods (Popham 1985; Stewart 1987; Knabe and Noennig 1999; Kerr 2001; Buntrock 2002). Modern Japanese architects' insensibility to existing environments started to show worrying signs in the 1970s when Japan joined the top league of industrialised economies. The affluence of the nation and the freedom of land-use made Japanese architects experiment with post-modernism arts everywhere. Their sense of superiority is also based on middle- and high-brow Japanese architectural culture that has been supported by both the authority and industry since the Meiji period (Knabe and Noennig 1999; Buck 2000). Neighbourhoods affected by new developments do not have any formal right to be consulted with or to challenge plans so that it further reduced community cohesion. The concept of urban design which belongs to the public domain has not yet been established in Japan.

#### *The domestic and public domain*

The spatially most deprived group during Japan's early industrialisation was women. Although the role of Japanese women was that of homemaker, female factory workers occupied more than 70 percent of its workforce in 1910-14 (Norman and Woods 2000: 152). Young girls from poor farming villages were also sold to cities or even abroad as prostitutes to support their families in pre-war Japan (Hane 2003: 207-225). A common experience for these women was that their employers locked them up in housing of notoriously poor conditions (Hane 2003). Even respected women of the upper classes did not have the freedom of movement as they were barred from public spaces like streets and cafes, in particular political venues such as the parliament building (Mackie 2002). Women's bodies were considered to be in the public (state) domain to serve the nation (Tipton 2001: 61)

Spatial exclusion of women from the public domain seemed to persist in contemporary Japan. Japanese cities continued to expand outwards and commuting time has become ever longer (Japan. Department of Urban Planning of Tokyo 1998: 147)<sup>5</sup>. While male workers are expected to work long hours, female workers are expected to quit a job after the birth of the first child and to become full time housewives (Imamura 1987). Many housewives in suburban areas were isolated at home with inconvenient access to nurseries, shopping, doctors and other public facilities (Nihon Keizai Shimbun 2005: 13-16). Japanese cities were also not designed very well for children or the elderly (Nihon Keizai Shimbun 1996). There are few open spaces, day care centres, elderly homes and recreation facilities matched with residents' needs (Japan. Department of Urban Planning of Tokyo 1998). Japan's typical narrow streets are not divided for pedestrians and cars. Many streets are not well lit, and electric light poles and bicycles occupy pavements whose surfaces are not always smooth. Women are worse off by these conditions as they dominantly engage in non-paid work as carers and also live longer than men. These facts explain that not only women were excluded from voicing their opinions in planning policymaking processes (Ueno 1995), but also few female professionals, academics and civil servants worked to promote an alternative view of the public in planning (Koito 2004).

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<sup>5</sup> As Japanese employers pay travel cost to work, 48.4 percent of the daytime population in Tokyo's 23 special wards came from outside this administrative area.

## **7. Conclusion**

Japan's late entry to modernisation significantly affected its interpretation of the public interest and planning. As Japan's prime modernisation objective was the creation of economic growth to establish sovereignty, the boundary between the state (public) and the market (private) led to contradictory planning regulations. Japan's central bureaucracy dominated the public sphere to maintain the developmental state regime, by restraining and guiding civil society in planning policy-making. As the state has been identified as the centre of both public and private domains, the role of civil society as well as the concept of 'social' as 'public' has been severely conditioned. Moreover, the fixed role of gender promoted by the state also has prevented the mould of 'public/private' distinction from breaking in its planning practices. The idea of the public interest has been so static in Japan that its planning policy has failed to be more accountable to its citizenry.

Although the public interest was once rejected in Western planning policymaking as being elitist, technocratic and undemocratic, the idea of 'public' representing democracy, participation and sociability has thrived and even revived as an important principle in city planning lately (Taylor 1994; Gehl and Gemzæe 1996b; Campbell and Marshall 2000). The resilience of the public interest seems to represent its capacity by which citizens can transform planning to render it more accountable and democratic to everyone affected. As Western histories illustrate, Japan's planning culture of the developmental state could change if the discourses of the public interest were to be contested in all arenas of policy processes: legislature, public administration and judicial system.

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