

# The Dispute on Urban Autonomy Evoked by the Discourse of Garden City: The Case of Japan in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Hitoshi NISHIBE\*

## I. The person integrating “here and now” and the discourse

What *can* we human creatures do faced with geographical and historical opportunities and restrictions? In the last two decades critical geographers have devised ways to break down epistemological and institutional barriers so that anybody can do what s/he likes doing. On the other hand, we have rarely seen the creativity, fantasy and instinct of each person being discussed among them. Instead, we see the Euro-American ideal in their competitive society that holds that every person should be given equal chances and receive different outcomes as a result of his/her *own* efforts. Nonetheless, the field and span of our lives is so limited because of the nature of our physical body that we can never receive quite equal chances.

Critical geographies revealed that the geographical categories hitherto taken for granted were social constructs, enhanced the sensibility to difference and hybridity, and criticized power severely. In those processes which were influenced by post-structuralism, the anti-humanistic human model as the intersection of such discourses as race, class and gender was substituted for the humanistic human model in the Enlightenment as the human spirit transcending the body and the world. As a result, the whole personality was broken into many pieces that were allocated to each collective representation. In order to think about the creativity of the person, we have to recover the humanistic human model “here and now” and propose a two-edged human model in which every person both internalize and get rid of the cultural systems.

I constitute such a model through Gestalt psychology (Köhler 1969; Lewin 1951). Each person centers his/her psychological field where attractive forces and repulsive forces are generated and conveyed between the person and his/her environment. The field includes only the facts that are co-existent with and significant to him/her. When s/he discovers a new relation between the facts and the dynamics in the psychological field, intuition occurs. These intuitions make up the creativity of a person.

When the psychological field is restructured and extended through intuitions, it turns into a multi-layered field including the realms of fantasy, dreams and memory as well as the realm of reality. A discourse links the several facts in this extended psychological field through intuition. The modality of the connection is called the story. It is also the cultural equipment to switch over the intentions or purposes of the person to assumable variations through the multi-layered unreal realms (Bruner 1986). Thus, while the discourse regulates each person’s

---

\* Osaka city University, JAPAN    nishibe@lit.osaka-cu.ac.jp

behaviour and statements, s/he can make active use of the discourse for the sake of him/herself. This is pivotal in reflection of my first question.

## **II. The mayor of Osaka City and the state bureaucrats as the persons integrating within Japanese society in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century**

After the Meiji Restoration in 1867, Japan strove to enter more actively into the global capitalist economy with promotion of new industries. As a result, by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Japan had built the foundation of an industrial country through the aid of the compensation deprived of China in the Sino-Japanese War. Many goods were still self-sufficient in rural areas. The local economy where the demand and the supply were balanced in a narrow domain remained superior in Japan. But the Japanese economy was just being restructured through capitalistic development. A considerable amount of the rural population flowed into urban areas where they experienced terrible conditions and were severely exploited<sup>1)</sup>. Some socialist thought prevailed among those citizens who began the struggles of the people of Japan against the state. These conditions had become obstacles to capitalistic development. To make matters worse, the state finance was almost bankrupt due to the vast expenditure for the Russo-Japanese War<sup>2)</sup>.

Here I present two subjects who were responsible for this social condition. One is the (deputy) mayor of Osaka City, Hajime Seki, and the other is the state bureaucrat in the Interior Ministry represented by Yuichi Inoue. Seki is known as a pioneer in the thought concerning the city in Japan. While he had deepened his ideas concerning the city, he had restructured Osaka City into a modern city through many engineering and social works<sup>3)</sup>. On the other hand, in the pre-war Japanese state government, the Interior Ministry had the jobs of rigidly producing, managing, and disciplining the people and the land of Japan, including police, local administration, civil engineering, hygiene, social work and town planning. Both subjects were forced to cope with urban-rural problems and social problems.

## **III. The interpretation of the discourse of Garden City from the viewpoint of the state bureaucrats**

The original discourse of Garden City, which was advocated by Ebenezer Howard in 1898, circulated around advanced capitalistic countries. It developed into Garden Suburb, the regional planning and new town planning within the United Kingdom. It required the urban-rural amalgam where the vigour and pleasure of the urban area married the comfort and beauty of the rural area to resolve the large slum problem in big cities. There are three characteristics of the discourse: the presentation of the economic system to build a Garden City, the idealization of the cooperative society which consists of persons in various classes, and the project to constitute the self-supplied urban-rural amalgam with the help of high technology.

Although the original discourse of Garden City was urban fundamentalism, the state bureaucrats turned its principle into both urban and agricultural fundamentalism when they introduced it most influentially to Japan in 1907. They thought they could solve both the urban

and rural problems through the spirit of Garden City, urbanizing the rural area and ruralizing the urban area.

There were several reasons why they adopted such a standpoint. First, even if the cities began to attract many people, the population in the rural area was much larger than the urban area<sup>4</sup>. They had to cope with the decline of the rural area due to population drain and financial crisis. Second, they had put the foundation of the nation state on the landlord system in the rural area. They were very afraid that the nation state might be destroyed if the rural area continued to decline and to be negatively impacted by the urban area. Last, they did not have enough funds to sufficiently protect the rural area.

They wanted the rural area to be financially independent to such a degree that it would not be a burden to the state, but to be politically dependent to such a degree that it might spontaneously receive the state objectives. Next, they attempted to persuade the local leaders to be loyal, to work hard, and to co-operate each other with a Confucian ethic mixed with the discourse of Garden City. When they visited Letchworth, they found the ideal model of those morals and ethics in its facilities and its residents that were located inside rich nature.

The discourse of Garden City reformed by the state bureaucrats turned into an ideology to defend the state regime and finances. They admired the rich nature of Japanese cities and villages and promoted the popular romanticist desires for nature. However, they secretly tried to recover the order in the rural areas. They did so not because they wished to relieve the people of miserable conditions, but because they hoped to repress the claims of such people without expending much money.

#### **IV. The interpretation of the discourse of Garden City from the viewpoint of the mayor of Osaka City**

In 1922, Hajime Seki, the deputy mayor of Osaka City, criticized the state bureaucrats for a misunderstanding of the original discourse of Garden City. He suspected that they had not been able to understand the spirit of Garden City despite their detailed accounts of European Garden Cities, referring to their statement that Kyoto, Tokyo, and other Japanese cities were no doubt Garden Cities. He insisted that anyone who wanted to argue about the Garden City should examine enough the origin of the discourse as a socialist thought.

He categorized the European Garden Cities into three types. The first type was the Garden City in the narrow sense, more specifically, that advocated by Howard. The second type was the Garden Suburb where comfortable houses were provided in the planning. The third type was the cultural village built by utopian socialists, which is a set of the plant and the worker's houses. He evaluated each type of Garden City. He said that the Garden City in the narrow sense should not be adopted because it attempted to revive medieval cities on the basis of the back-to-the-land movement even in the days when foreign trade and large industries were largely being developed. As a result, he liked the Garden Suburb best.

Consequently, he described an ideal image of the future city as a solar system. To put it concretely, there is a central city in the middle of the system just as the sun, around which there are some residential districts surrounded by open space with ample nature. These residential

districts are connected through a full transit system. This image was derived from ‘Social City’ in Howard’s original discourse, that is to say, the cluster of a central city and several Garden Cities as a unit. However, he did not follow Howard exactly. His image was not that of the cluster of the autonomous cities but rather that of the cluster of the residential districts dependent on the central city. As you can see on this image, Seki himself developed the discourse of Garden City in terms of a more urban fundamentalism than Howard did. This discourse of the mayor is a vivid contrast to that of the state bureaucrats.

His career and the history of his own ideas account for the reason why he took such a position when applying the discourse and why he focused on ‘Social City’ that seems to be an additional part of Howard’s discourse. Seki was a political economy professor at Tokyo Commercial College from 1897 to 1914, the deputy mayor from 1914 to 1923, and the mayor of Osaka City from 1923 to 1935. When the Japanese economy developed rapidly after the Sino-Japanese War, he went to Belgium to study policy studies. Taking this opportunity, he realized his own key concept of ‘national economy’. The national economy is the organic economic relations where the people who have a common culture, custom, and education engage themselves in co-operative production activities made possible by the division of labour within the frame of the nation state.

He recognized the relation between the national economy and the state policy from the social reformist viewpoint. He said that we had to construct a strong community among all Japanese people through the division of labour. Thus, it was extremely favorable for him that some of the population left the rural area of the self-supplied economy and went to the urban area to develop the industry. But various problems take place when greedy persons seek their self-interest without recognizing their responsibility as members of society. In this regard, the state needs to intervene in the relation and eliminate the problems.

As the national economy was built up, the regional division of labour was increasingly developed through the railway network, and the local centralization of specific industries was seen more often. Nevertheless, in 1910 Seki discovered the case of local decentralization of industries in England since 1900. He thought it came from the movement of the Garden City and he noted the Garden Cities as a disturbing factor in this process. After a while, he identified them as one of the social reformist techniques that could resolve the slum problem. The image of the solar system occurred to him as the ideal of social policy. In his thought, the railway network played a significant role in this model as well as in the national economy.

In this way, the solar system model of the ideal city as the connection between the utility districts had a parallel relationship with the concept of the national economy as the connection between various local industries. The discourse of the Garden City was the trigger Seki used to link the national economy to the ideal city model. In this place, nature was given social reformist value because it could offer a way to restructure the overcrowded and unsanitary cities into livable ones.

## **V. The conflicts over the town planning of Osaka City in operation**

Although the citizens of Osaka City had struggled against the state government for urban

autonomy since 1888, the strategy to win autonomy led by Seki became active after the promulgation of the Town Planning Law in 1919. It became unavoidable that Osaka City would extend its administrative domain in late 1910's because the domains of the surrounding towns and villages became urban areas, some of which contained the slums. Therefore, the town planning area of Osaka City had to be set up across administrative boundaries in order to put the solar system model into practice. However, no one had yet determined how the town planning area should be handled in the Town Planning Law.

Osaka City and Osaka Prefecture, a branch office of the Interior Ministry, presented their own proposals of the town planning area for Osaka City in 1921. Osaka Prefecture proposed a larger area than Osaka City did by the inclusion of some rather distant central places like Sakai City in which approximately 80,000 persons lived. Osaka municipal bureaucrats thought that they should leave the area for population growth in the future and that they did not need densely populated places. On the contrary, state bureaucrats thought that the area should exist as a setting for the adjustment of urban life among cities, towns, and villages around Osaka City and that it should not necessarily be dependent on Osaka City. Consequently, the proposal of Osaka City was decided upon as the area with the help of the Osaka City Council and the surrounding towns and villages.

This conflict contained such significant problems as to undermine the foundation of the local administration in prewar Japan. The Osaka municipal bureaucrats attempted to restructure Osaka City in itself, while the state bureaucrats planned to reorganize the region around Osaka City. The former wanted to make Osaka City transcend the surrounding towns and villages, while the latter tried to decrease the power of Osaka City with antagonism from the surroundings. As we remember, the former had interpreted the discourse of Garden City in terms of urban fundamentalism, while the latter had interpreted it in terms of both urban and agricultural one. As a result, the concept of nature was linked to the dispute on urban autonomy or local administration.

We can see this conflict in the design of the transit system in 1925, too, which was vital to the solar system model of the ideal Osaka City. The Osaka municipal bureaucrats designed the subway system extending as far as the boundary of the town planning area, while the state bureaucrats cut down the part of the planned subway line running parallel to the private railway line. The former accepted the modification by the latter in order to rapidly put the plan into practice. However, the former attempted to make firm the connection among specific districts in the area and to enrich the finances of Osaka City with the municipal transit system, while the latter wanted to protect the private railway companies in conspiracy with the state government and to harness the dynamism of Osaka City. In this way, their conflict over the interpretation of the discourse of Garden City influenced the spatial arrangement of a material facility.

## **VI. Conclusion**

I focused mainly on the mayor of Osaka City and the state bureaucrats in the Interior Ministry as the persons integrating "here and now". They were both elite persons in Japanese society in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. They had profoundly internalized the loyalty to the nation state

Japan and blessed the Japanese capitalist development. However, they recognized the Japanese urban-rural relationship respectively, exerting their own creativity.

Their psychological fields contained the expanding urban area and the still broad rural area in the real realm. Furthermore, these fields contained in the unreal realm their fear of the menace of the imperialist world order and the internal collapse of the state regime by urban problems and social struggles, their social responsibility as the elite for the future of the nation, and their accumulated knowledge, perspectives, and experiences.

Within these psychological fields, these facts were articulated by the discourse of Garden City. We can find their intuitions in the way they recognized the utility of the discourse for combining these facts favorably from their own standpoints. The mayor of Osaka City used the discourse to develop nature in terms of the social reformist urban policy. He focused on the 'Social City' model, especially in the original discourse of Garden City. He would then restructure Osaka City into a coalition of the utility districts, namely the urban division of labour through the analogy of the national economy. It decided the guideline of the town planning in Osaka City. Today that inheritance continues in Osaka City. On the contrary, the state bureaucrats used the discourse to excite the romanticist longing for nature. They thereby aimed to stabilize the local administration, suppressing the population flow. They focused on the construction of the moral co-operative society in rural areas, especially in the original discourse of Garden City.

Their dispute over the discourse expresses how they tried to take advantage of nature in the rural area from their own standpoints.

## Notes

- 1) The population of Osaka City was 332,425 in 1882, and shifted to 1,331,994 in 1912. It increased to one million people in 30 years.
- 2) The Japanese government spent 1,7 billion yens for the Russo-Japanese War when the state budget was 300 million yen a year.
- 3) An English biography of Seki has been published recently. See Hanes (2002).
- 4) The population ratio in major cities was still 10.07% in 1908. It extended to over 30% in the 1930's and surpassed the rural one in the 1960's.

## References

- Bruner, J. (1986): *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. Harvard University Press, London, UK.
- Hanes, J. E. (2002): *The City as Subject: Seki Hajime and the Reinvention of Modern Osaka*. University of California Press, Berkeley, USA.
- Köhler, W. (1969): *The Task of Gestalt Psychology*. Princeton University Press, New Jersey, USA.
- Lewin, K. (1951): *Field Theory in Social Science*. Harper, New York, USA.