

MSG Moderne Stadtgeschichte, Bd. 50/2 (2019), 140-143
DOI: 10.60684/msg.v50i2.2019212

Takahito Mori / Rainer Liedtke
Hitotsubashi University / University of Regensburg

**Tagungsbericht: Comparative Studies on the Development of the modern
City in Japan and Europe from the Perspective of Urban Governance**

MSG Moderne Stadtgeschichte
ISSN: 2941-6159 online
<https://moderne-stadtgeschichte.de>

Dieses Werk steht unter der Lizenz Creative Commons Namensnennung 4.0 International.
Bei den Abbildungen sind eingeschränkte Lizenzformen möglich, Weiternutzungsrechte
sind gesondert abzuklären.
© Takahito Mori / Rainer Liedtke 2019



Takahito Mori / Rainer Liedtke

Tagungsbericht: Comparative Studies on the Development of the modern City in Japan and Europe from the Perspective of Urban Governance

International Workshop of the Gesellschaft für Stadtgeschichte und Urbanisierungsforschung at Humboldt-Universität,
15th March 2019.

It is widely accepted that the modernization of the world did not entail the uniform spreading of Western “modernity” everywhere, although the globalization process since the 19th century had certainly led to an international integration of social and economic structures pushed by the initiative of Western countries. Such a viewpoint derives from Eisenstadt’s theory of “multiple modernities” that sees patterns of modernization as being “greatly influenced by specific cultural premises, traditions, and historical experiences.” According to him, Japan followed a unique path of modernization among the non-Western societies owing to its “unusual combination of similarities and differences with Western societies.” Although the opinion was formed on the basis of his wide-ranging analyses on the history of Japan, he mentioned little about the city, in which the various aspects of the modernization process could be found most clearly. It would therefore be meaningful to compare the development of the modern city in Europe with that in Japan and to include as many points of contact between the two as possible, in order to understand the historical significance of urban modernization in a transnational context.

Recent studies of Japanese urban history indicate that the prototype of the modern city in Japan was formed during the period between the Russo-Japanese War (1904/05) and the Second World War, when against the background of accelerating urbanization the ideas of modernity, in terms of regularity, functionality and rationality, contributed to the establishment of mass culture and ultimately the social mobilization for “total war”. This applied to various fields such as urban planning, public hygiene, consumer culture and the culture of the body. These views correspond in some respects with those of European ur-

ban history where especially the period between the two World Wars saw the transformation of urban space and lifestyles due to ideas of modernity in the sense mentioned above.

Such a remarkable coincidence raises the question why the modern city had developed at the same time in Japan and Europe. Starting from there, the workshop examined from the perspective of the transnational history of "urban governance", what influence the European and possibly North American experience of urbanization had on the development of the modern city in Japan and how the persistence of Japanese urban traditions could be reconciled with Western "role models". "Urban governance" is defined as a social order of urban space created by the interactions of actors in the fields of urban planning, infrastructure, housing policy, public hygiene and social policy, namely central and local governments, the army, private companies, voluntary associations, city planners and others.

The workshop consisted of seven presentations and six comments. The first two presentations were concerned with urban engineering. SATOSHI BABA (University of Tokyo) presented the Western impact on the birth and development of town and regional planning in Japan, mainly from the 1860s to the 1930s. He discussed the role of personalities, who had contributed toward introducing town and regional planning in Japan: Hiroshi Ikeda (bureaucrat in the Home Ministry), Hajime Seki (university professor of social policy and mayor of Osaka from 1923 to 1935), Yasushi Kataoka (architect), and Kazumi Iinuma (bureaucrat in the Home Ministry). BABA pointed out that they did not import ideas and techniques from a particular country but collected and integrated a lot of information on legislation, administrative system and techniques in Germany, Britain, France, Belgium and the United States. Secondly, SHUICHI TAKASHIMA (Aoyama Gakuin University) discussed the mutual reception and transfer of the concepts about civil engineering and construction between Germany and Japan with a focus on Rudolf Briske, a leading German civil engineer. He had been invited by the Tokyo Underground Railway Company to Japan as a consultant on the construction of the first underground line in Tokyo. In addition to the original task, the invitation to Tokyo gave him an opportunity to write his doctoral thesis on the earthquake-safety of buildings based on his personal experience of the Great Kantō Earthquake in 1923. It made a significant contribution to raise Briske's reputation as civil engineer after his return to Europe.

The third speaker, KATJA SCHMIDTPOTT (Ruhr University Bochum) gave an overview on the small field of urban history within Japanese Studies in Germany. Historians were often inspired by Max Weber's comparative writings on the pre-modern European and Asian city and have consequently been inter-

ested in describing specific characteristics of pre-modern Japanese cities. Some studies have challenged the notion that social relations in modern or even contemporary Japanese cities can be described as being modelled on the pre-modern village (*mura*), which would make Japan's experience of urbanisation a unique case when compared to "the West". Recently, Japanese cities have been used as case studies for the sake of comparing how cities of the same type emerged and developed in different world regions. The former coal cities in Northern Kyūshū, for example, have been compared to the Ruhr District with regard to the de-industrialisation processes that affected both regions. Other fields of study include modern literature, where historical discourses on the city as reflected in the works of Japanese writers have been examined, the history of Japanese urban planning, or the history of Japanese architecture.

TAKAHITO MORI (Hitotsubashi University) discussed the growing attention to leisure as one of the significant parallel phenomena in Japanese and European cities during the interwar period by focusing on "Kraft durch Freude" (KdF) and *Kosei Undo*, the national recreation movement in Japan organized mainly on the model of the KdF. The presentation, based on the case study of Osaka, suggested that *Kosei Undo* did not succeed as a copy of KdF, when the movement would be considered merely as recreational activities. That was primarily due to the insufficient leisure of the working people of Japan at that time. Therefore, *Kosei Undo* had to give higher priority to the "improvement of the lifestyle through reforming the urban environment". The idea was derived from the *Seikatsu Kaizen Undo* in the 1920s, which aimed to promote the welfare of the whole nation through improving individual lifestyles, from the viewpoint of "the duty to live".

SHELDON GARON (Princeton University) and JULIA MRIKO JACOBY (Max Planck Institute for History, Berlin) discussed urban disasters in Japan. GARON dealt with the question how it became normal to destroy cities by aerial bombardment during WWII. The idea to win the war by destroying "the great centres of population" had circulated globally against the backdrop of the growing influence of total war thinking. The idea originated in Europe and was studied and taken into practice for the first time by Japan in the war against China since 1937. Japan was followed by Germany and especially Britain, who advanced strategic bombing to new levels through adopting "area bombing" and "fire-bombing". The US Airforce developed the British model further for their bombardment at the end of WWII, what brought lethal damage to the Japanese cities. The prospect of aerial attacks on enemy citizens compelled nations to formulate plans for defending their own cities. The idea of civilian defence against bombardment circulated also transnationally but had very limited effects, as the case of Japan showed. According to JACOBY, the conjugation of the growing

importance of air defence with that of preparedness against natural disasters since the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923 played a role of catalyst for introducing European urban planning practices in Japan, like zoning, zone condemnation, greenbelts and garden cities. The debates in this process focused on the applicability of these knowledge to the disaster-prone Japanese environment. Thus, JACOBY concluded that the European knowledge was transformed not linearly but rather was modified based on Japanese needs and urban planning traditions.

The final speaker, BEATE LÖFFLER (University of Duisburg), traced the narration on Japanese cities published by German visitors and distant observers between 1900 and 1935, by using various kinds of sources such as picture postcards, woodprint series, statements of famous personalities (e.g. Franz Baltzer, Herrmann Muthesius, Fritz Schumacher or Bruno Taut) and less known ones (e.g. Peter Jessen or Rudolf Briske). The multi-layered approach clarified how German narrators established patterns of imagination and attribution of “Japaneseness”, such as developed in course of European Japanism, both with contemporary concepts of a modern city and urban development and their on-site experiences in Japan.

Every presentation except GARON’s was commented upon by German experts on European urban history: the presentation of BABA by CHRISTOPH BERNHARDT (Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space) from the perspective of the history of urban planning, TAKASHIMA by RALF ROTH (Goethe University Frankfurt) from that of the history of the public discussion about the railway system in Europe, SCHMIDTPOTT and MORI by RAINER LIEDTKE (University of Regensburg) from that of the historiography of the European urban history and of the perception of the European city, JACOBY by GARON from that of social history of Japan in the interwar period, and LÖFFLER by DIETER SCHOTT (Technical University of Darmstadt) from that of the relation between architecture and the notion of progress in urban environment. Through the short discussions after each comment and the closing discussion, every participant shared the view raised by SCHMIDTPOTT that future research in urban history will be shaped by the trend to form more collaborative research groups and by the growing influence of global or transnational history. And it was also accepted as meaningful to organise a Specialist Session at the EAUH 2020 by some participants and publish the result of the workshop in the form of an anthology.

Associate Prof. Dr. Takahito Mori, Hitotsubashi University, tmori@econ.hit-u.ac.jp

Prof. Dr. Rainer Liedtke, University of Regensburg, Rainer.Liedtke@geschichte.uni-regensburg.de