Women's Expectations of Imperial Reconstruction Planning at Tokyo

A Gender Historical Approach to Urban Planning in Prewar Japan

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Abstract

This paper critically reevaluates the predominant male-centric and planner-centric narrative in urban planning history in Japan through a gender historical lens. It delves into the aftermath of the Great Kanto Earthquake (1923), examining the interplay between the women's movement and urban planning, explaining their subsequent divergence. Initially, it investigates how Mary Beard introduced urban planning issues to the Japanese women's movement post-earthquake, as evidenced by women's magazines. The paper then analyses the treatment of brothel, sangyōchi and nigyōchi (red-light district) locations as urban planning concerns within the women's movement, highlighting the public prostitution system. It scrutinizes the response of male-dominated urban planning authorities to women's movement demands, revealing a reluctance to intervene despite acknowledging the link between prostitution and urban planning. The analysis shows the alignment of interests between the women's movement and urban planning during protests sangyōchi and nigyōchi. However, the women's movement gradually shifted focus towards viewing the prostitution issue as a humanitarian concern, moving away from urban planning solutions. Finally, this paper illustrates how the convergence between the women's movement and urban planning, observed briefly after the Great Kanto Earthquake, was disrupted by political inaction from authorities and the abolitionist movement's ideology.

Keywords

Great Kanto Earthquake, Japan, gender history, women's movement.

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INTRODUCTION

An important milestone in the process of introducing modern urban planning into Japanese society was the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 and the subsequent Imperial Capital Reconstruction Plan. In 1919, Japan enacted its first City Planning Law and Urban Area Building Law, establishing a legal framework for modern urban planning. Only four years later, a major earthquake and fire struck the capital, causing significant damage to Tokyo and Yokohama. However, it also presented a unique opportunity to implement various urban planning methods, such as land readjustment, on a large scale, and to modernize Tokyo into an imperial capital. Consequently, a body of literature has accumulated in the history of urban planning, focusing on Goto Shinpei, who led the Imperial Capital Reconstruction Plan¹.

Of course, the portrayal of Shinpei Goto as a hero and the history of imperial city reconstruction have already faced criticism from various perspectives². Goto's ambitious plans were also subject to contemporaneous ridicule³. However, the narrative of urban planning history, which appears to privilege a limited number of politicians and urban planners, is not confined solely to imperial reconstruction plans. Leonie Sandercock once pointed out this phenomenon, criticizing previous urban planning histories for often collectively legitimizing urban planning by emphasizing its rationality and public nature⁴. Since her critique, the position of urban planning authorities has been de-centered in urban planning history, and it has been reframed from the perspective of other actors whose practices are integral to urban planning and those who are impacted by it⁵. One of the issues she identified from this standpoint was the exclusion of women from urban planning history.

To be sure, this is not to imply that there have been no attempts in Japan to examine imperial reconstruction planning from the perspective of the people who experienced it, rather than solely from that of the planners⁶. However, by following Sandercock's argument, we recognize a lack of a gender-historical perspective not only in the Imperial Capital Reconstruction Plan but also in the broader history of urban planning in Japan.

Nevertheless, a few previous studies indicate that the women's movement became intertwined with urban planning in response to the unprecedented situation of the Great Kanto Earthquake⁷. Additionally, Yang suggests that the abolition of prostitution movement and urban planning briefly converged after the Great Kanto Earthquake, although not necessarily within the realm of urban planning⁸.

On the other hand, insufficient examination has been given to how the women's movement and urban planning intersected during this period, and why this connection later weakened. To elucidate this, it is imperative to analyze the policies of the city planning and reconstruction authorities, predominantly composed of men, in addressing the demands of the women's movement, and to comprehend the interplay between the two.

From this perspective, this paper will first trace the development of the Great Kanto Earthquake and the women's movement, establishing how the issue of urban planning gained prominence within the women's movement. Subsequently, with a focus on the public prostitution issue, it will scrutinize the evolution of the relationship between public prostitution and urban planning, while simultaneously unraveling how this connection weakened, drawing from insights derived from the women's movement and the urban planning framework. Finally, after organizing the analysis presented in this paper, we will assess the inaction of the city planning authorities and the constraints of the abolition of prostitution movement.

THE GREAT KANTO EARTHQUAKE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

MARY BEARD'S VISIT TO JAPAN

In examining the relationship between women and urban planning in Japan, Mary Ritter Beard emerges as a significant figure. She was the wife of Charles Austin Beard, an administrative scholar and historian who was invited by Shinpei Goto to advise the Tokyo Institute for Municipal Research⁷.

Upon assuming the mayoral office of Tokyo in 1920, Goto established the Tokyo Institute for Municipal Research in 1922, mirroring the New York Bureau of Municipal Research, aiming to overhaul the structure of the Tokyo City Council, which was fraught with a series of dubious cases. Goto extended an invitation to Charles, who had served as a director of the New York City Council, to join him. In September of the same year, Charles, Mary, along with their daughter Miriam and son William, embarked on a visit to Japan. Mary, with a profound interest in women's labor and the suffrage movement in Japan, visited several girls' educational institutions and delivered speeches at conventions organized by women's organizations. The Beard family returned to the USA in March 1923 after a stay of approximately six months⁸, just six months before the Great Kanto Earthquake struck.

On September 1, 1923, Charles and Mary received news of a major earthquake in Tokyo. At Goto's behest, they returned to Japan, where Charles engaged in discussions with Shinpei Goto regarding the reconstruction of the Imperial capital. Meanwhile, Mary witnessed the formation of women's organizations in response to the earthquake in Japan. She deepened her connections by distributing milk and bedding, thereby enhancing their social presence through relief efforts⁹. Mary was invited to a general meeting of the Tokyo Women's Federation, during which she delivered a speech on the role of women in the reconstruction of the imperial capital¹⁰. Of particular interest to this paper is her mention of the relationship between women and urban planning¹¹.

What specific points did Mary emphasize? She outlined 'considerations regarding the relationship between women and urban planning' and advocated for women's engagement with urban planning by addressing issues such as the proximity of residential areas to industrial zones, the accessibility of transportation hubs from residential areas, methods for constructing more comfortable homes, the adequacy of transportation for shopping needs, and the safety of footpaths¹². The proposals here are closely related to the gradual progression of suburbanisation in Japanese society at the time, as in the United States. The Great Kanto Earthquake

spurred this trend, and the points made by Mary would have been matters of note to the new middle-class women who, at the time, were rationalising their lives around the suburbs. However, what Mary was seeking here was not to criticise the gender geography that was being formed - men's work in the city centres and women's housework and childcare in the suburbs - but rather to get women interested in urban planning on the basis of this gender geography.

Following the Great Kanto Earthquake, Mary published several articles in various women's magazines, consistently advocating for women's deliberate involvement in urban planning. She highlighted that urban planning had not been a focal point within the Japanese women's movement¹². Furthermore, she emphasized that although 'the position of women is not essentially different from that of men', significant issues such as the profit- driven public prostitution system, women's labor, the right to vote, and direct suffrage remained paramount¹³.

URBAN PLANNING ISSUES IN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AFTER THE GREAT KANTO EARTHQUAKE

How, then, did the Japanese women's movement address urban planning in response to Mary's call? Contrary to Mary's awareness, there were not many discussions on imperial reconstruction plans or urban planning in women's magazines during the same period.

However, urban planning was relatively frequently mentioned in a roundtable-style article in Fujin Kōron titled 'Jyoryū Shinsai Zengo Konwakai' (Women's Discussion Group on the Post-Disaster Reconstruction of the Imperial Capital). Moderated by Yusaku Shimanaka, the head of Chuō Kōron, leading intellectuals and women's activists, including Kikue Yamakawa, Mumeo Oku, Akiko Hiratsuka, and Azuma Moriya, gathered to exchange views on the development of the women's movement post-disaster. Among them, Moriya Azuma, a member of Kyofukai (Japan Christian Women's Organization) and a prominent figure in the abolition of prostitution movement, argued for the implementation of the 'metropolis plan', even if it meant sacrificing the 'Marunouchi Building', one of the era's most representative modern structures ¹⁴.

The sentiment favoring large-scale urban planning following the earthquake was not limited to Moriya. For instance, in its November 1923 issue, Josei (Women) featured a special segment titled 'Demands from the Private Sector for the Reconstruction of the Imperial Capital'. Female intellectuals like Akiko Yosano and Kikue Yamakawa were queried about their reconstruction demands, with Yosano advocating for the abandonment of the downtown area in favor of building a new city towards the northwest suburbs, with the Meiji Jingu Shrine area as the central hub¹⁵. The prevailing consensus, among both men and women, was that an ideal imperial capital should be constructed at this juncture.

Of significance in Moriya's stance was her reference to Franz Adickes and her advocacy for large-scale urban planning through land readjustment. Adickes, the mayor of Frankfurt, is renowned for institutionalizing land readjustment. It was rare during this period for someone to delve into urban planning methodology and stress the importance of a reconstruction plan for the imperial capital, making Moriya's viewpoint exceptional within the women's movement. Moriya advocated for women's further cooperation in land readjustment to advance the re-

construction of the imperial capital ¹⁶. They criticized old landowners and affluent individuals with large estates while generally supporting the expansion of roads and the creation of numerous parks as outcomes of the reconstruction plan. However, the women's movement also grappled with other crucial issues intrinsically linked to urban planning, particularly those concerning brothels and *sangyōchi* in the abolition of prostitution movement.

THE PUBLIC PROSTITUTION ISSUE AND URBAN PLANNING

THE SHINJUKU JŪNISŌ AND NIGYŌCHI ISSUE

The movement against brothels and *sangyōchi* did not originate solely after the Great Kanto Earthquake. Criticism of the public prostitution system began spreading from the 1910s onward, coinciding with the proliferation of *kagai* (brothels, *sangyōchi* and *nigyōchi*) in urban areas¹⁷.

For instance, in 1922, a year prior to the Great Kanto Earthquake, Yodobashi town councillors submitted a petition for the designation of *nigyōchi* in Shinjuku. Their aim was to establish a *nigyōchi* that would attract commerce and elevate land values, thereby increasing tax revenues. However, this proposal faced staunch opposition. At the forefront of this opposition was Yasui Tetsuko, then the academic supervisor of Tokyo Women's University situated in Yodobashi, Shinjuku. In 1922, she spearheaded a campaign against the designation of Jūnisō, which were in close proximity to Tokyo Women's University, upon learning of plans to designate the area as a *nigyōchi*. Eventually, her efforts resulted in a temporary withdrawal of the designation ¹⁸.

How did this movement intersect with urban planning? During this period, Yasui visited Mary in Japan and sought her opinion on the nigyōchi and urban planning. The following exchange occurred between them:

Mary told me that in the USA, before carrying out city planning, the women of the city would gather together the small tasks of one section of the women in their area and carry them out, so that they would be able to do this in one direction or another and finally produce an orderly city plan with great results. My friend could not help but blush when she told me that she wanted to know what the Japanese women's ideals for urban planning were. I don't have a concrete plan for city planning, but I would like to work with a serious mind and do my share of the work'9.

This account sheds light on the relationship between urban planning and the women's movement prior to the Great Kanto Earthquake. Yasui's visit to Mary and her inquiry about urban planning reflect her recognition of the designation of the nigyōchi as an urban planning concern. However, the exchange also highlights that Yasui, despite being a prominent figure in the women's movement, did not possess concrete proposals for urban planning.



Fig. 1. The vicinity of Jūnisō in 1955.

PETITIONS TO THE RECONSTRUCTION AUTHORITIES

As previously discussed, the women's movement gradually acknowledged the public prostitution issue as a matter of urban planning. Amidst this awareness, the devastation caused by the Great Kanto Earthquake, which destroyed brothels in Yoshiwara and Suzaki and claimed the lives of many prostitutes, presented an opportunity to reframe the issue of public prostitution within the realm of city planning. Notably, Mary underscored the significance of the public prostitution issue when urging women to engage in urban planning²⁰. Similarly, public prostitution emerged as a pivotal topic in the aforementioned discussion groups. Akiko Hiratsuka advocated for the abolition of public prostitution at this juncture, even if private prostitution persisted. However, the authorities' stance was contrary, expressing intent to 'restore Yoshiwara and Susaki again'. In response, Waka Yamada sharply criticized the authorities, attributing their stance to their male-dominated composition²¹. The gender disparity within the reconstruction authorities was criticised through the lens of the brothel issue.

Particularly noteworthy was Azuma Moriya and Ochimi Kubushiro's visit to the Prime Minister, Home Minister, Mayor, and Superintendent on September 13, where they petitioned for 'no brothels to be established in the Greater Tokyo City Plan' and 'no geisha towns to be placed on the main street at all'. Such measures were deemed necessary for the 'reconstruction of morality'. For instance, it was considered a moral and social education concern for underprivileged girls to witness and admire well-dressed geisha²². In response to the petition, Home Affairs Minister Goto expressed that it would be open to consideration if public opinion was raised. Yamada countered, suggesting that Goto's approval alone could suffice, irrespective of public sentiment. Hiratsuka added that public opinion was indispensable, while Shimanaka asserted that Goto's solitary efforts would be insufficient²³. Here, they thought that the crux of the issue lies not in urban planning itself but in the influence of 'public opinion' that shapes it.

Goto's stance, indicating a dependency on public opinion, steered the trajectory of the abolition of prostitution movement. Gradually, the movement mobilized to galvanize public sentiment, establishing a network that spanned the empire and launching a widespread petition campaign against the public prostitution issue nationwide²⁴.

URBAN PLANNING AND THE PUBLIC PROSTITUTION SYSTEM

But why did Goto respond that it depends on public opinion? To explore this point, it is essential to elucidate the relationship between the public prostitution system and urban planning²⁵. Japan's public prostitution system underwent reorganization after the Meiji Restoration through measures such as the Prostitute Emancipation Ordinance, establishing a fundamental policy of 'enclosure of public prostitution in licensed areas = control' and 'control of private prostitution = elimination'²⁶.

Specifically, 'brothels' where prostitutes operated were designated by the police under the 'Regulations for the Control of Prostitutes' (Ministry of Home Affairs Ordinance No. 44, 1900). Moreover, police stations overseeing the *sangyōchi* in Tokyo Prefecture were authorized to regulate only establishments that had commenced operations during the Edo or early Meiji period, in accordance with the Regulations for the Control of restaurants, waiting teahouses and geisha shops. However, these regulations were inconsistently enforced by police commissioners, and from the 1910s onwards, additional business districts were gradually authorized²⁷.

While the police held jurisdiction over entertainment-related establishments, Japanese urban planning legislation also incorporated provisions regarding the location of such establishments. The former City Planning Law, for instance, in Article 10, paragraph 2, introduced a district system known as 'scenic districts' to maintain the public morals of designated areas. The purpose of this designation was 'to prevent so-called brothels, rental rooms, eating and drinking establishments, and other buildings from being scattered throughout the area without restriction'²⁸. Thus, similar to the women's movement, city planning authorities believed that brothels should be regulated through urban planning and formalized this approach.

However, the implementation of the public morals districts never materialized. This is because even the basic interpretation of public morals zones was subject to disagreement, with differing opinions on whether certain buildings should be collectively constructed in 'scenic districts' (permitted zones) or prohibited within them (prohibited zones)²⁹. This lack of consensus underscores the low priority given to the designation of 'scenic districts', evident in the persistence of fundamental interpretational discrepancies. Nevertheless, it was not institutionally unfeasible for the Ministry of Home Affairs, responsible for urban planning, to clarify operational policies for 'scenic districts' and implement them, especially amid the escalating movement to abolish prostitution. So, why did Goto, as the Minister of Home Affairs, offer the ambiguous response that it was 'up to public opinion'?

This is because the designation of brothels and three business districts had implications for land redevelopment and involved various interests. Historically, authority over such designations resided with the police commissioner in Tokyo Prefecture (and the prefectural governor elsewhere), fostering a strong connection between the designation of the kagai ($sangy\bar{o}chi$ or $nigy\bar{o}chi$) area and the nexus of traders, politicians, and police 30 . Additionally, there were voices within the city council recognizing the tax revenues generated by brothels and $sangy\bar{o}chi$ as significant 31 . Consequently, the designation process was structurally complex, making it challenging for objections from marginalized genders to gain traction. Moreover, it is

noteworthy that the Imperial Capital Reconstruction Department, established during Gonbei Yamamoto's cabinet, lacked sufficient political support. The Imperial Capital Reconstruction Plan faced considerable criticism in both the Imperial Capital Reconstruction Council and the Imperial Diet, leading to substantial budget cuts³². Given these circumstances, the reconstruction authorities likely lacked the political leverage to incorporate the regulation of brothels, a sensitive issue, into the Imperial Reconstruction Plan.

On 22 December 1923, a 'draft proposal on the non-reinstatement of burned-down brothels' was submitted to the House of Representatives (47th Congress), yet it was not deliberated upon and was shelved. In response, the abolitionist movement shifted its focus towards suffrage advocacy rather than the abolition of the public prostitution system³⁴. However, as the movement expanded and diversified, controlling the location of brothels through urban planning gradually became less prominent.

Subsequently, in 1927, when the Superintendent of Police designated several *sangyōchi* and *nigyōchi*, the Tokyo Institute for Municipal Research recommended to the Superintendent that permitting tea houses and other *nigyōchi*-related facilities in residential areas, as defined by the zoning system of the Building Regulation Law, would be unjust.



Fig. 2. Juniso Natural Hot Springs Hall, opened in 1958. Planning Study 1971.

However, it is essential to note that the Tokyo Institute for Municipal Research did not advocate for the abolition of prostitution. Instead, it distanced itself from such considerations under the auspices of 'public morals and entertainment,' emphasizing a proposal grounded solely in the 'city planning locality perspective³³⁵. Even after the Great Kanto Earthquake, issues surrounding the brothels, <code>sangyōchi</code> and <code>nigyōchi</code> remained distinct from urban planning efforts. Furthermore, the Tokyo Institute for Municipal Research was not inherently supportive of the women's movement³⁴. Thus, although the location of brothels and <code>sangyōchi</code> sometimes intersected with urban planning concerns, particularly regarding the preservation of residential environments in areas populated by the emerging middle class³⁵, authorities and urban planning experts intentionally refrained from aligning this with the abolition of prostitution movement.

CONCLUSION

How did the women's movement and urban planning converge following the Great Kanto Earthquake, and why did this connection diminish? In response to this question, this paper confirmed that there was not originally a strong awareness of urban planning issues on the part of the women's movement, but rather that the issue of urban planning was introduced by Mary Beard. Fundamentally, they endorsed urban planning initiatives even post- earthquake and held specific expectations of Goto concerning brothel regulations.

The reconstruction authorities also acknowledged the close link between the public prostitution system and urban planning. Despite the potential for systematic intervention in its spatial distribution, they refrained from active involvement due to political constraints. The political passivity of Goto and other male-centric urban planning authorities perpetuated and strengthened a distinct geography of sexuality.

It is noteworthy that the rationale behind the opposition to the new designation of brothels and $sangy\bar{o}chi$ in the abolitionist movement differed subtly from the demand for their zoning. While the abolition of prostitution movement critiqued the systematic sexual exploitation of women, zoning initiatives for $sangy\bar{o}chi$ and similar areas emphasized the moral values associated with geisha and prostitutes. Urban planning considerations regarding the placement of brothels, $sangy\bar{o}chi$ and $nigy\bar{o}chi$ encapsulated a logic reflecting pre-war Japanese society's moral values concerning sexuality in spatial contexts³⁶³⁸, rendering geishas invisible through a different lens than before.

On the other hand, the women's movement, in the process of making a broad appeal to the problems of the public prostitution system, stopped pursuing it in depth as an urban planning issue. This may be because, from the perspective of the abolition of prostitution movement, the restrictions in city planning were not based on the perspective of 'humanitarian issues', but on the perspective of improving the living environment of urban spaces, and therefore did not have a strong persuasive power to keep people together in the movement. Thus, the prostitution abolition movement, which flourished during the Great Kanto Earthquake, once emerged as an urban planning issue, but as the reconstruction of the imperial capital pro-

gressed, it was eventually treated as an issue other than urban planning. The women's movement and urban planning, which came close for a moment, were separated by the political inaction of the authorities and the ideology of the abolitionist movement. As a result, the gendered issues in urban planning in this period itself disappeared.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR(S)

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IMAGE SOURCES

Figure 1 Shinjuku Rekishi Hakubutsukan, *Shinjukuku no Minzoku 6: Yodobashi Chiku hen*[Folklore of the Shinjuku Ward 6: Yodobashi Area], 2003.

Figure 2 Toshi Seizu Sha, Shinhkukuku[16] Juniso Homen 1954-58 Kasai Hoken Tokushu Chizu [Shinjuku, [16] Juniso area, 1954-58 (Special Fire Insurance Map)], 1999.

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- 3. Sandercock, Introduction, 2-6.
- 4. Ibid. 2-6.
- 5. Avermaete, "Death of the Author, Center, and Meta-Theory".
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- 12. Beard, "Shin Toshikeikaku to Fujin," 26.
- 13. Beard, "What Should Japanese Women Do Now?" 58-9.
- 14. Fujin Koron, "Joryu Shinsai Konwakai," 114.
- 15. Josei, "Teito Fukko ni taisuru Minkan karano Yokyu," 171.
- 16. Fujin Kōron, "Joryu Shinsai Konwakai," 113-6.
- 17. Kagai vary from region to region, but in Tokyo, they are often referred to as 'sangyōchi' (kagai in the

narrow sense). A sangyōchi typically consists of restaurants, waiting teahouses, and geisha shops, where the geisha shop dispatches geisha to the restaurant and the waiting teahouse. In the case of 'nigyochi', most consist of restaurants and geisha shops. In Tokyo, geisha performed singing, dancing, shamisen (a three-stringed Japanese banjo), and other arts, whereas prostitutes were authorized by the state to engage in prostitution in brothels (kagai in the broad sense of the term also includes brothels). While most sangyōchi were located in the vicinity of the entertainment area, brothels were formed as closed spaces on the periphery of urban space according to the 'Regulations for the Control of Prostitutes' (Ministry of the Interior Ordinance No. 44, 1900). However, although prostitutes and geisha were formally distinguished by the presence or absence of prostitution, there were not a few geisha who engaged in prostitution. Kato, Kagai, chap. 1.

- 18. Takenaka, "Shufu wo Yobisamashita Huryo Gyunyu Mondai," 50.
- 19. Yasui, "Navameru Fujin ni Kawarite," 35-6.
- 20. Beard, "What Should Japanese Women Do Now?" 59.
- 21. Fujin Kōron, "Joryu Shinsai Konwakai," 86.
- 22. Ibid. 94.
- 23. Ibid. 93-4.
- 24. Yang, "Kanto Daishinsai to Haisyo Undo," 98.
- 25. The relationship between the public prostitution system and urban planning has largely remained unclear, with the exception of Okamoto. Although Japanese urban and architectural history often addresses brothels and hanamachi (flower districts), studies on them have typically been confined to examining their location in urban space and the nature of their business. The relationship between these establishments and the gender order of urban space has not been adequately analyzed.
- 26. Obinata, Nihon Kindai Kokka no Seiritsu to Keisatsu, 290.
- 27. Kato, Kagai, 136-59.
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