The Political Processes of Administering Landscape Preservation
: A Case Study on the City of Kyoto

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1) Introduction

Interest groups reside within the jurisdiction of a local government. Most of them are concerned about administrative processes in city halls. They are eager to get benefits from city halls, and in order to have strong influence over these processes. They think that their interests should be reflected in the administrative processes. However, the interest groups are in serious conflict each other in most cases because a city hall cannot act on all their interests. The most important role of a local government office is to choose among conflicting interests, select the best one for the public, and act on it. Mayors and officials should take parts in these processes. Among these policies, unfortunately, there are some definitely mutually exclusive. In such cases, mayors cannot select the best one, or even a better one, as a rational and feasible policy. A typical example is the relationship between industrial development and environmental preservation policies. Both of them are fundamentally at odds.

There are many active interest groups in Kyoto as other cites. Of course, they have influenced the administrative processes about which Kyoto City Hall have made decisions, and they have competed with each other at the same. And because of the incompatibility of these two policies of development and preservation, no compromise has been able to be reached and consistent policies for improving the value of this city has not be able to be established. As a result, the problem continues unsolved.

2) The singularity of the city of Kyoto: The framework for analyzing the policy-making process of the city of Kyoto

Why is the city of Kyoto typically the subject of study of policy-making on development and preservation? There are several reasons to be consdered from the point of view of the singularity of Kyoto.

First of all, the city of Kyoto was the Japanease capital until 1867, and it is one of oldest cities in Japan. It was established about 1200 years ago and still represents traditional culture and history. Ancient temples, shrines and exquisite gardens as well as its historical buildings are scattered throughout the city. People in Kyoto consider them precise.

The City Hall has legislated many laws on the environmental preservation. There are traditional buildings including temples and shrines, around which have been designated as the historical preservation districts. According to those regulations, the new buildings in those districts can be constructed only under some rigorou conditions. Even reconstruction of old buildings needs to get permission from the city. The height of buildings is restricted to 20 meters in residential areas, and to 45 meters even in the center of city. Under the restrictions, the appearances of the wooden houses along some streets have been preserved for a long time, creating beautiful views.

However, such views have become rare in this city. Such cityscapes differ remarkably from about 100 years ago. Kyoto has always faced various urban problems in its long history how the city should be developed and how its resources should be exploited. Kyoto is a modern metropolis with a population of about 1,500,000 people. The National Government has named Kyoto one of its "Designated Cities" (Seirei Shitei Tosi in Japanese). It is the 8th most populous of such cities in Japan. The power of designated cities is equal with one of prefectures
and these cities play the important roles in the politics and economics of Japan. The city of Kyoto is no exception.

The geographical conditions of the city of Kyoto have limited the development of the city. The city has a very little room for development because it is surrounded by mountains and is not able to expand greatly, unlike other cities such as Tokyo and Osaka, which are able to recover land from the sea. Kyoto should take down old buildings for new construction. Despite the strict regulation to preserve the environment to make way necessary to destroy old buildings for new land use.

Although land is limited, there are many large companies such as Nintendo, Rohm, Murata and others in this city. These companies are representatives of Japanese industry and well known all over the world. Already many modern buildings serve as their offices in the central area. In order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their companies, there is even further need for construction.

The purpose of this presentation is to consider how these characteristics effect policy-making in Kyoto City Hall. When we consider administrative processes, such as policy-making conducted by local governments in regard to issues of development versus preservation, the City of Kyoto is perhaps the best place to focus our attention.

In a word, the city of Kyoto is a classic case of a city with two faces. One is an ancient city that requiring preservation policies and the other is a modern face that requires development policies. If the City Hall favors one policy, the other will oppose it because both of them are in conflict and fundamentally incompatible. And it is very difficult to cope with conflicting interests when making policy of one city. The City Hall has tried to resolve difficult problems for a long time but it has not been able to find the suitable answer.

3) The characteristics of decision-making processes in Kyoto City Hall regarding urban policy

In addition to the singularity of Kyoto as a city, there are some political reasons for the difficulties in urban policy-making as demonstrated below.

First, when there were inevitable and serious conflicts between preservation and development, city mayors in the past decades have not presented clear solutions. Most mayors have not exhibited strong leadership in decision-making of urban policy. The contents of various city plans and the exertion have been carried out by individual departments in this city. For example, the Department of Public Works can make decisions on all matters connected roads, bridges and so on. (Mayor can not intervene this decision-making process.) Moreover, the interest of the stakeholders related to each department is reflected in their policies. The Department of Public Works must consider the intents of the construction industry. The city council members are also involved with such decision-making. Most of them represent the interests of some interest groups. As a result, a so-called iron triangle has been formed in the city of Kyoto linking interest groups, council members, and city departments, who have the same concern. Similar processes, however, are carried out in most local governments in Japan.

Secondly, mayors are generally very sensitive to the interests of stakeholders who want to get much more power in order to receive more benefits from the City Hall. There are many conflicting interest groups in decision-making processes. Mayors have found themselves located in the center surrounded by conflicting interest groups, and have tried to balance the opposite stakeholders, but such a position makes their decisions inconclusive. Mayors show their special attention to the relationship among locally elected bodies (councils), officials in city hall (especially the top executives in each department) and interest groups, the iron triangle as previously stated. Such a situation is not limited to the city of Kyoto, but is also founded in other local governments in Japan.

Thirdly, because of the absence of strong leadership by mayors in decision-making processes, individual departments could decide their own polices. This is called the
decentralization process. Each department gives high priority to decision that will benefit itself. As a result, there are serious conflicts within the City Hall. For example, in one department, policies facilitating development are promoted, but in another department, policies restraining development and promoting preservation are the first priority. Mayors cannot intervene in the internal processes of each department, especially day-to-day services. Compared to other large cities in Japan, decision-making power is more often delegated to city departments in Kyoto. This process has been called department-centered policy-making (bukyoku-shugi or genkyoku-shugi in Japanese).

4) A Case Study of Reconstruction of the Kyoto Terminal Station Building

The reconstruction of Kyoto Terminal Station Building is a good example of conflicts that have arisen from the processes of development and preservation. The processes can be divided into five stages including the completion and thereafter.

Stage 1 (until 1989)

The old station building was constructed in 1952. At that time, it was an attractive building, but as time went on, circumstances changed. Population of Kyoto as well as the number of tourists gradually increased over these years. The station building became inconvenient for the public. Many people, especially commercial interests, wanted to reconstruct the station. Since the middle of the 1980s, so-called bubble economy had continued, and the atmosphere of the time facilitated such a plan. Many people thought that it was a good opportunity to reconstruct the station building. They appealed to Japan National Railways and City Hall.


A preparing company was set up by Japan National Railways, Kyoto City Hall, and commercial interests of Kyoto in 1989. The mission of the company was to gauge the public opinion in the Kyoto area and facilitate the reconstruction by getting the support of the citizens including many interest groups. On the one side, the iron triangle supporting development policies, mentioned above, extensively supported this plan. On the other side, movement against the reconstruction was also formed. The movement extended all over the city because the station building was a symbol of Kyoto. Most of the citizens remembered the uproar over the Kyoto Tower building, which now stands in the front of Kyoto station and was constructed against fierce opposition in 1965.

Stage 3 (1991-1993)

Tomoyuki Tanabe ran for the election for mayor in spring 1991, but his opponent fought a good fight. He won by narrow margin and became a mayor again. Almost simultaneously the movement opposing reconstruction of Kyoto Station Building was enlivened and activist groups arose from among the citizens' at the grassroots level in Kyoto. Most members of the Assembly were inclined to oppose reconstruction out of an awareness of their vulnerability in the next election. The Mayor also changed his attitude little by little becoming less enthusiastic about the reconstruction project.

The committee for construction held a competition for the design of the building at that time. The trend to preserve important aspects of Kyoto current at that time, as mentioned above, was reflected in the decision-making process of the committee, and as a result, a design considerably more in keeping with the image of Kyoto, lower than the other designs which were submitted and under 60 meter height, was adopted in 1992 and soon authorized by City Hall and the Assembly.

Stage 4 (1993-1997)

The reconstruction started in December 1993. During construction, the citizens’ movements were both for and against the project became intensely active. Many citizens had participated in the controversies over special character and quality of sights in and around Kyoto, and they became more and more linked to the general problem of environmental preservation.
During construction, public opinion on the question of preservation was clearly divided into two groups, one promoting preservation and the other opposing it. The business community supported the latter group and pushed the policies for industrial development. On the other side, the grassroots citizen groups chiefly supported preservation policies.

Stage 5 (after 1997)

The building was completed in 1997. This new building is very large including a department store, a theater and a museum in addition to the function of transit. From the citizens' point of view, it has become much more convenient for transportation and shopping. After completion, the voice of opposing forces grew steadily more quiet. Generally, the citizens by and large favor the new building because it is neither high, nor low, and the building has been gradually integrated into the landscape.

5) Discussion

This case study may provide some suggestions about how to administrate urban policies not only in the city of Kyoto but also other local governments in Japan. It is very important for a mayor to exhibit his/her own leadership in administrative processes. A mayor should present his own map in city's future, which would direct the destiny of the local government system. In order to attain such a map, a mayor must have the firm faith in the city administration in order to integrate his thoughts on preservation and development policies.

For many years, the urban policies of the city of Kyoto have been based on tourism and the tourist industry. Kyoto is famous all over the world for being an ancient city. However, policies to give the tourist industry priority have been limited. There are some reasons for these limitations. One is that recently there have been many sightseeing spots created outside of Kyoto. Second, the number of tourists has been decreasing because of recession throughout Japan. Third, other types of leisure industries have been developed all over Japan. A mayor must create a more attractive Kyoto to compete with other sightseeing spots. To become such a city, Kyoto also must modernize and maintain its industry. A mayor should consider many factors for making an attractive city.

In addition to the leadership of the mayor, citizen participation is necessary to destroy the iron triangle controlling decision-making processes. One of the most critical ideas for the local governmental system is self-governance for citizens by themselves. This idea means that residents in such areas should decide the future of their own lives on their own initiative. According to this idea, the public choice between preservation and development depends on the attitude of the residents. In most cases in Kyoto, however, the residents have tended to prefer development policies rather than preservation ones, because policies for preservation, like the limitation on the height of buildings, do not promote Kyoto's modernization. Under such circumstances, many people want to experience conveniences in their lives. They have chosen development policies in order to cope with insufficient of infrastructure since World War 2. On the other hand, however, same people have interests in preserving the original characters of Kyoto. These feelings toward Kyoto are incompatible.

In most cities in Japan, it is very difficult to harmonize these two policies. In such situations, both mayors and citizens are forced to aligned with each other to remove the iron triangle. Especially in Kyoto, a mayor must establish his own philosophy about public policies and set up channels to reflect citizens' opinion in the decision-making processes of local government.