

## **Special feature: *Kokudo-gaku* (national land infrastructure planning) as code**

### **The advancement of *kokudo-gaku* (national land infrastructure planning)**

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**Hisakazu OHISHI**

JSCE Fellow

President, Japan Institute of Construction Engineering

The land is something that we tend to take for granted, like the air around us. Nevertheless, ever since people began to live on the Japanese archipelago, human efforts have expanded the scope of land that is productive and safe for habitation. These efforts are the reason why we can enjoy the benefits of the land, living on it safely and improving its productivity. Without these human efforts to improve our national land infrastructure, it would not be possible to reap the benefits of the land, or to expand those benefits.

We often hear about China's active efforts to improve its social capital. Today, China is working vigorously to improve its national land infrastructure and build social capital in order to ensure safety and efficiency, improve the public welfare, and increase international competitiveness. This does not only apply to China. It is probably not possible to find any country that has no financial difficulties, anywhere in the world. All the countries of the world are striving for greater competitiveness in spite of their financial difficulties. Not only in developing countries in Asia and elsewhere, but even in the U.S., which has a rapidly growing budget deficit and a high level of existing infrastructure, the development of social capital is still on the rise. With a declining population that is increasingly elderly, Japan needs to think seriously about how to maintain its national strength in the future, and it must begin to make preparations.

Students are taught repeatedly about the characteristics of our national land, beginning in elementary school and middle school, and they have a fairly good grasp of these facts. However, their education is woefully inadequate in terms of comparative knowledge of the characteristics of other countries of the world which are economic competitors of Japan, as it relates to the development of social capital on each country's land. In addition to differences concerning natural conditions, such as ground conditions, the flow of rivers, and the occurrence of earthquakes, Japan also differs widely from other countries in terms of its social conditions, including the structure of landholding and views on land ownership. This is a significant handicap in the effective use of land, and should also be recognized as a factor which impacts Japan's international competitiveness.

Therefore, in addition to the history of Japan's national land infrastructure, its natural conditions, and the development of its cities, it is also necessary to determine its social conditions, such as views on land ownership, in comparison to other countries.

The land environment of Japan is largely the result of human efforts by our forefathers, right down to the natural scenery of its forested hills. There are very few areas like the Shirakami mountain range which have been completely unaffected by human efforts. We live amid the results of difficult, costly

efforts by our predecessors to improve the land. We cannot place ourselves outside that process today.

Our current situation is one of rigorous economic competition with the peoples of other countries. Japan is highly dependent on foreign countries for resources such as oil and food. Japan's competitiveness in the manufacturing industry, including motor vehicles and machinery, is what allows us to purchase those necessities. Our competitiveness vis-à-vis other countries is largely controlled by Japan's level of infrastructure development, in addition to untiring efforts by businesses. Without the establishment of proper harbors, airports, and roads that can be used safely and efficiently, a business could not become fully competitive, no matter how hard it tried. In other words, we must not assume that Japan already has adequate airports or that its road network already covers the entire country, without stopping to consider the level of Japan's infrastructure in comparison to that of competing countries. Japan cannot merely stand idly by while competing countries continue to gain more efficient production capabilities through efforts to improve their own national land infrastructure. It is important to understand that if Japan's manufacturing industry loses its competitiveness, there will be no way even to procure food.

Unfortunately, the phrase "public works" does not convey the image of a worthwhile investment, and it does not bring these aspects to mind. That phrase has a rather dirty image, and the kind of shallow debate that is based on that phrase cannot help to identify the steps that Japan should be taking today. If efforts to improve the national land infrastructure lie at the very essence of social capital development, we need an expression that has a broader understanding and image. I believe that the word *kokudo-gaku* (national land infrastructure planning) provides an

especially good understanding of the concept.

It is not acceptable for Japan to adopt a self-denigrating, pessimistic view of history because of its declining, increasingly elderly population. If we assume that the outlook for the future is dim and that we will be forced to live a poorer life tomorrow than today, then that assumption will lead to an existential view and living for the pleasures of the moment. Signs of this trend are already starting to appear. If things go wrong, it is even possible that totalitarianism could prevail.

It will take wisdom and ingenuity to set Japan, which is currently beset with the problems of a declining, increasingly elderly population, back on track to become a society that is full of hope and potential. We must build a participatory society in which every citizen can participate on the side that supports society, and we must maintain international competitiveness in order to ensure economic affluence. A radical shift is needed in various institutions, as represented by the conventional legal system. Considering educational problems, we must build a system that promotes social participation by school and college students. We must also prepare an institutional environment that allows capable and motivated women, elderly persons, and disabled persons to exercise their full capabilities.

At the same time, it is also necessary to build mechanisms that will make it possible to develop this kind of universal society, and to make it more intelligent. For Japan to retain its current position with regard to East Asian nations which have been showing remarkable growth, it must build the kinds of social capital that will allow it to develop and maintain competitiveness. All of these steps will require efforts to improve the national land infrastructure. Our generation has not measured up to past generations in our efforts to raise children, but we have an obligation to at least provide these few

children with a society where they can live in safety and affluence.

Instead of an irrational debate that focuses on emotional aspects and image, I am looking forward to an essential, profound, fact-based discussion in the name of national land infrastructure planning.