International Ecolinguistics Association

Article

Neoliberal framing and survey bias in a Japanese community park development questionnaire

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Abstract

This paper provides an eco-critical discourse analysis of a questionnaire-based survey conducted by a Japanese municipality related to development plans for one of its urban parks. After discussing the unique historical roots of the concept of public parks in Japan, as well as recent historical background related to the community park's development plans, language in the city questionnaire is analyzed from an ecolinguistics perspective. The analysis uncovers a dominant neoliberal ideology and associated framing, metaphor, conviction, erasure, identity, and salience patterns. Further, a bias analysis of the questionnaire is provided that shows techniques used to manufacture consent for a neoliberal conception of the community park's future while eclipsing space for alternative visions. These findings underscore how ostensibly neutral municipal surveys can serve to legitimize neoliberal policy agendas while marginalizing alternative ecological and community-centered visions. The study highlights the need for more transparent and inclusive public consultation practices in urban planning, with implications for policy-making and civic engagement in Japan and beyond.

Keywords: ecolinguistics; discourse analysis; neoliberalism; survey bias; public parks

1. Introduction

Urban green spaces (UGS) — such as those provided by municipal parks — are now considered essential to counteract various environmental, social, and psychological problems (Jia et al., 2023). UGS are correlated with reducing heat island effect in cities (see, e.g., Liu et al., 2021) and closely associated with the maintenance of overall human health (Hartig et al., 2014; Lee & Maheswaran, 2011; Sharifi et al., 2021). Parks and other urban

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green spaces also provide habitat for wildlife, and have various political functions for humans, serving as public sites for people to gather, share ideas, rally, and even protest.

How urban green spaces come to exist, grow, shrink, or disappear, and how these spaces are used by various beings is a complicated and often contested socio-political process that can be studied from various academic perspectives. For example, examining "parkscapes" in Japan, and following the theoretical work of Lefebvre (1991), Sassen (2007), and other scholars of geographical space, Havens (2011) views physical space in constructivist terms, writing that "space, like time, is constituted by social practices that differ from culture to culture" (Havens, 2011, p. 4). When language use is conceived of as a form of "social practice", this becomes a unit of analysis that can form an effective bridge between the academic field of geography and that of applied linguistics, and this perspective can reveal how UGS are shaped by broader global discourses and local discursive practices.

Recent surveys of ecolinguistics document the field's consolidation around discourse analysis methods (Poole, 2025; Steffensen, 2024), with prominent applications to policy and institutional texts (Ha, 2023). Therefore, grounded in such methods, and also a broader "language as local practice" perspective (Pennycook, 2010), this analytical research paper seeks to explore the influence of transcultural discourses and discursive practices on the social construction of one urban green space — a small community park — in central Japan.

Questionnaires, in various forms, are a common tool used to understand public attitudes toward urban parks and green spaces, and several large-scale analyses from diverse cultural settings reveal that residents tend to value parks for their roles in wellbeing, recreation, ecological function, and social cohesion. For example, data from a large national telephone survey in the United States showed that both park users and non-users view local parks as beneficial to communities, with priorities such as accessibility, safety, and variety of amenities commonly cited (Mowen et al., 2016). Marin et al. (2021) surveyed Croatian residents using an online questionnaire and found positive attitudes toward parks across diverse localities that focused on the value of good park management and ecological richness. These findings are echoed in global literature reviews on public attitudes towards parks (e.g., Farahani & Maller, 2018; Haq et al., 2021).

However, as stated above, it would be naïve to assume that the meaning of public parks is the same across diverse cultural contexts. In order to understand the particular cultural meanings of parks in Japan, the following sections of this introduction thus explore the historical construction and legal context of Japanese parks (公園, *kōen*), highlighting the unique transcultural evolution of *kōen* in Japan, and their classification under national and municipal law. As a means of examining how discursive practices are shaping public perception about land use at the local level in Japan, this paper then provides analysis of a questionnaire-based survey (see Appendix A and Appendix B) that was used by a Japanese municipality aiming to redevelop the community park. Employing Stibbe's (2015) ecolinguistics analysis framework, I focus on how framing, metaphor, erasure, and other

linguistic techniques reinforce a dominant neoliberal narrative.

In my use of the term, neoliberalism refers to a political and economic philosophy that emphasizes free markets, deregulation, privatization, and reduced government spending, aiming to transfer control of economic factors from the public to the private sector. Neoliberalism gained prominence globally in the 1980s and is associated with leaders such as Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, but it has since shaped policy in many developed and developing countries since that time (Steger & Roy, 2010). A central tenet of this ideology is that "what can be privatized should be privatized", and in recent years this ethos has been applied to public parks throughout Japan.

Supplementing my ecolinguistics analysis of discourse in the questionnaire, this paper also examines how the questionnaire's structure and wording may have systematically influenced responses. In social research methodology, bias refers to systematic errors that occur during research processes and may skew findings (Podsakoff et al., 2012, p. 541). My analysis of questionnaire bias, specifically, shows how such "systematic errors" seem to have favored certain responses over others, leading to misrepresentation of the target population's views.

1.1. Historical context of parks in Japan

Public parks, called *kōen* (公園) in Japanese, have become ubiquitous across Japan. They have proliferated significantly over the past 150 years and now exist at a wide variety of scales throughout the nation. And though the existence of *kōen* in Japan may be taken for granted by many today, these spaces have a unique historical trajectory shaped by both indigenous traditions and Western influences that continues to evolve in the present.

During the Edo period (1603–1868), Japan was largely shut off from trade with the West, and the modern idea of public parks did not exist (Xu et al., 2024). Aesthetically pleasing traditional Japanese gardens, called *en* (園), typically existed mainly as private spaces associated with temples, shrines, or elite residences. However, with the opening of Japan to the West in the subsequent Meiji era (1868–1912), public parks, which came to be called *kōen* (公園), were established as open green spaces that could be used by people from all levels of society.

There is no record of the two-character Japanese word for public park before the Meiji Era, when it was used in direct translations of correspondences that Japanese officials had with British, Dutch, and French representatives engaged in the design process for Yokohama Park, one of the first of its kind in Japan (Sakai, 2011, p. 361). The term emerged during the Meiji government's attempts to understand urban societies in Europe and America, and at the same time, as a result of direct negotiations over spaces that would eventually become public parks in and around early foreign settlements near Tokyo (Sakai, 2011). Sakai (2011) recounts the latter historical circumstance:

> … the plural Western societies lived together in the Yokohama settlement

> bringing along different discourses on public parks created by different cultural and social backgrounds. Through working together as "Westerns" to negotiate with the Japanese government for producing open space leisure amenities, the Western discourses were hybridized and a unique transculturation was observed. (p. 348)

The Japanese ideographic compound that eventually became the standard word for "park" (*kōen*) is made up of two Chinese (kanji) characters. The first character in the word, *ko* (公), primarily means "public" or "official". It can also mean "fair" and "impartial", as in the word *kohei* (公平) which translates as "fairness" in English. The second kanji character, *en* (園), stands for "garden", or "orchard", and is used in words such as 農園 (*no-en*, plantation) and 庭園 (*tei-en,* Japanese garden). The combination of these characters, in the word *kōen* (公園), thus literally translates as "public garden".

As Japanese society became more industrial throughout the Meiji era and beyond, *kōen* began to serve a function similar to that which they served in many Western countries. Pointing to Japan's rapid industrialization at the time, Kamiyasu (2016) explains that parks during Japan's Meiji period were conceived as shared public spaces for "dispersing accumulated melancholy and recovering from labor" (Kamiyasu, 2016, p. 40, author's translation).

Havens (2011) describes the monumental cultural shift to this new "modern" spatial culture that took place in Japan during the Meiji era:

> This culture was first produced by decree from the Grand Council of State in 1873, passed through stages of negotiation among government officials, private interests, and the public that used (and sometimes abused) the parklands, and then entered the twenty-first century in deeply altered circumstances stemming from hyperurbanization, postindustrial capitalism, increasing ecological consciousness, and growing if still unequal partnerships among citizens, businesses, and the state. (p. 188)

Havens (2011) also highlights ways that newly formed public parklands in Japan "imposed visual and spatial order on a potentially unruly society only recently liberated from fixed statuses defined by the Edo polity", but later notes that "city parks from the start were meant for all residents, however much the state sought to modify their behavior to fit defined norms" (Havens, 2011, pp. 188–189).

Maeda (2024), however, problematizes the dichotomy between this notion of "public" (公) as common, open, and free — and thus meant for all comers — with a notion of "public" as a foundation for the state's imposition of order. Maeda (2024) narrates what he terms "pendulum swings" in park usage during the time between the introduction of parks in the Meiji era and the beginning of the Pacific War. Focusing on Hibiya *kōen* in Tokyo, which is a Western-style Park opened in 1903, Maeda (2024) notes that the site was

frequently used for Western music performances and other free public gatherings, and contrasts this to the use of the park for the distribution of government war propaganda via *kamishibai*[1] performances during the early decades of the Showa era (1926–1989).

According to Xu et al. (2024), such eclectic uses of parks in the prewar, wartime, and postwar periods were common, with various entities — including for-profit establishments — using "public" park spaces for diverse purposes with little regulation.

This situation continued until 1956, when a legal package known as the Urban Park Act was passed to regulate and broadly standardize city parks across Japan. Drawing upon an article written in an architectural journal in the years leading up to the passage of this act, Xu et al. (2024) write:

> The prevailing view at that time was expressed by scholar Tatsuo Moriwaki in his article Publicness of Urban Parks, published in 1949, that the establishment of parks was originally for public interests and parks should be part of public utilities that do not prioritize profits; to prevent public facilities from being monopolized by private entities, neither the park itself nor the facilities within should be entrusted to profitable activities by private entities. To restore park functions and standardize park management, the Japanese government issued the Urban Park Act in 1956, which clearly stipulated that any private rights could not be exercised within park land. (p. 10)

This ethos, according to the authors, was present in an initial period when parks were managed as purely public goods but was followed by a subsequent phase of marketization and a more recent era characterized by diversified management entities and funding sources (Xu et al., 2024, pp. 10–11).

In the decades following the law's enactment, local governments were primarily responsible for park management, but by the 1990s, fiscal austerity and the aging of park facilities prompted calls for reform. A significant revision occurred in 2003, when legal reforms expanded the scope of local autonomy and encouraged private-sector participation in the management of public services, including urban parks. This shift enabled local governments to contract out park operations and management to private companies, typically through competitive bidding. The expectation was — and continues to be — that private-based management is better at meeting diverse public needs, improving service quality and maintaining public assets more cost-effectively (Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, 2024).

Leading up to the present, a further shift toward privatization came in a 2017 revision, when the Park-PFI (Private Finance Initiative) system was introduced, formalizing public-private partnerships (PPP) in the development and operation of park facilities (Xu et al., 2024, p. 11). Under this framework, private entities could finance, construct, and operate

[1] Kamishibai is a Japanese storytelling form that uses illustrated cards in a frame to narrate stories from text written on the back.

amenities within parks in exchange for operating rights, thereby diversifying funding streams and management approaches while still maintaining government oversight.

1.2. Classifying *kōen* in contemporary Japan

Japan's Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT) has established a multi-tiered classification system for parks throughout the nation. At the broadest level, *kōen* in Japan are now divided into two main legal classifications: natural parks and urban parks.

Natural parks, governed by the Natural Parks Law, are meant to preserve scenic areas and ecosystems. These include National Parks (国立公園), Quasi-National Parks (国定公園), and Prefectural Natural Parks (都道府県立自然公園).

Urban parks, on the other hand, are created and managed by central or local governments for public use. Within this category, MLIT further classifies various types of parks serving different urban functions (MLIT, 2006). Residential District Core Parks (住区基幹公園) are a subcategory of park meant to provide essential UGS within residential areas, catering to local communities at different scales. Such parks are further divided into three different types:

1) City Block Parks (**街区公園**): Small parks of 0.25 hectares, serving residents within a 250-meter radius.
2) Neighborhood Parks (**近隣公園**): Larger parks of 2 hectares, catering to residents within a 500-meter radius.
3) Community Parks (**地区公園**), also known as "District parks": The largest of the residential core parks, typically 4 hectares or more. These parks are designed to serve community members within a 1-kilometer's walking distance of the park's radius. (MLIT, 2006, 2008)

In the broader context of Japan's park system, Residential District Parks represent an important component of urban green infrastructure, complementing larger urban parks such as comprehensive parks (*sōgō kōen,* 総合公園) and sports parks (*undō kōen*, 運動公園) which are meant for the use of all city residents (MLIT, 2006, 2008).

1.3. The contested development of a designated "community park" (地区公園)

The questionnaire that is the focus of this paper (described in detail in the next section) relates to the fate of Johoku Park in Shizuoka city, Japan. This park is designated as a "Community Park" (地区公園) within the municipality's legal framework, which follows the national guidelines set by MLIT described above. The park is approximately 6 hectares (about 14.8 acres) in size and serves several densely packed surrounding neighborhoods. The park has a large, multipurpose sports ground, children's playground, traditional

Japanese garden with a koi pond, and a grassy, tree-lined "fitness space" with exercise bars and a reflexology foot massage walking course (Figure 1). The park is also home to the city's central public library (Figure 1), which has a dedicated parking lot nearby.

Consistent with its designation as a community park serving residents within a 1-kilometer walking-distance radius, the rectangular park currently offers limited (free) roadside car parking on its north side (Figure 1) on weekends. The park is also served by city buses, and easily accessible by bicycle from throughout the city's central, densely populated area, which is flat. Small commercial parking lots in the area also provide parking spaces for a nominal fee. A local resident conducted a detailed one-year survey of these commercial parking lots in 2023 and found that there were only four weekdays during the year when all area parking lots were full to capacity (Kobayashi, 2023).

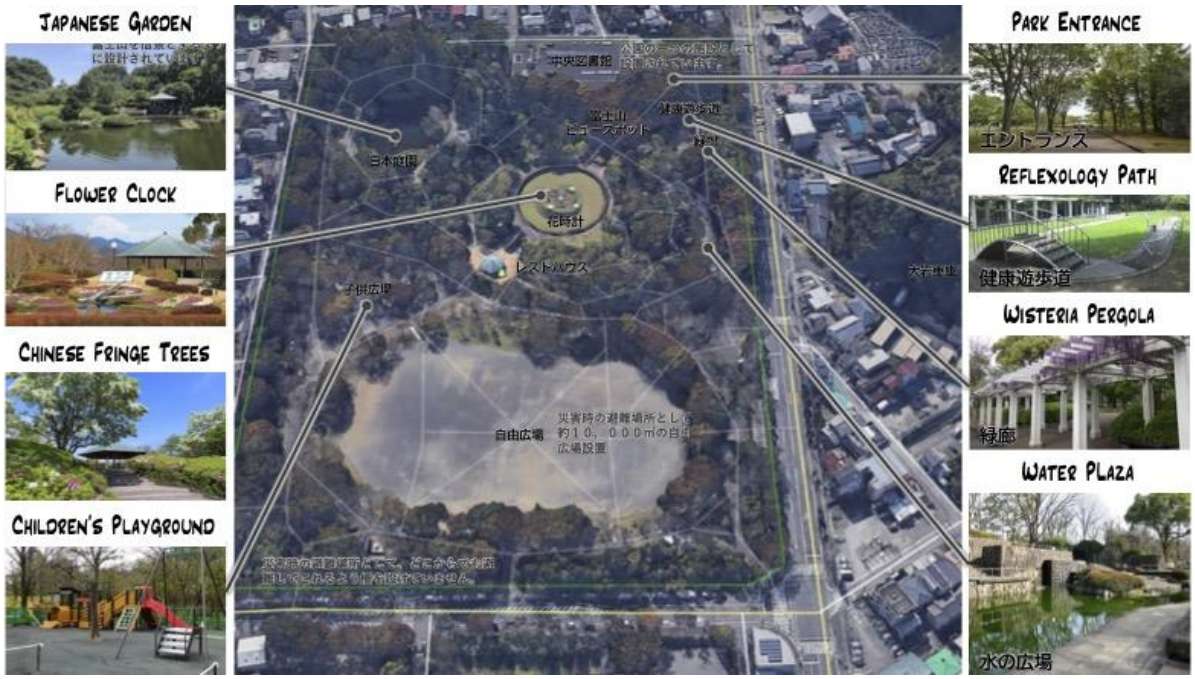


Figure 1: Annotated aerial view of the park with ground-level photography (modified to include English translations by the author). Source: Shizuoka City Park Policy Division (2024)

At the time of the city's questionnaire, the municipality had existing plans to commercialize roughly 20% of the park. The proposal was to lease this portion of the park to a local developer for 20 years at a small fraction of local market land lease pricing. In exchange, the developer would be responsible for maintenance of the leased area where they would install roughly 100 parking spaces inside the park in two locations (bringing automobiles into the park for the first time), along with a coffee shop and a childcare facility. This plan was a scaled back version of one that would have included a Starbucks café with storefront parking and drive-thru facilities inside the park. The previous plan met fierce local resistance that ended with Starbucks Japan backing out of the project and local residents suing the city for failing to properly inform the public about the city's development plans for the park in a timely and open fashion.

2. Methods

This paper presents an ecolinguistics discourse analysis of a questionnaire that the municipality used to "confirm" the views of citizens in relation to their development plans for the district park described above[2]. I selected this questionnaire for analysis because it represents a relatively short text that focuses on the transformation of a specific green space with which I — as a local resident — am very familiar. Though longer documents exist — such as the city's newly released Green Policy Plan (2025) — the short questionnaire offered an opportunity to reveal underlying linguistic practices at play in the city's direct engagement with residents through language.

2.1. Researcher ecosophy

Stibbe (2014) outlined key characteristics for ecological approaches to discourse analysis. Central among these is that ecolinguistics analysis must be grounded in an ecological philosophy, or ecosophy, that is "… informed by both a scientific understanding of how organisms (including humans) depend on interactions with other organisms and a physical environment to survive and flourish, and also an ethical framework to decide why survival and flourishing matters and whose survival and flourishing matters" (p. 119). The ecosophy that informs the discourse analysis below is one that might be described as "localist" or "place-based", asserting the following three core principles:

1) Natural places and their human and non-human inhabitants are intrinsically valuable.
2) Open public green spaces (both wild and managed) are integral to the flourishing of human and non-human beings.
3) Humans who are responsible for managing open public green spaces should communicate with the people that use these spaces, and with the public at large, in a way that is clear, open, and honest while also considering the habitat that wild and managed green spaces provide for other beings.

This ecosophy is consistent with and informed by a relational ontological stance of interbeing that is expressed in many canonical modern Japanese Buddhist teachings as well as in Shinto philosophy (see, e.g., Kasulis, 2002, 2004).

2.2. City questionnaire description

The questionnaire analyzed in this paper (see the English translation in Appendix A and Japanese language original in Appendix B) was the online version of a public survey

[2] The purpose stated in the city's survey was to confirm the existing "future direction" with residents 「今後の方向性」.

conducted by the city from October 21 to November 22, 2024, to gather opinions on the redevelopment of the district park. As noted above, the survey's purported intention was to engage residents and park users in "confirming" the park's future direction, including its facilities and management. Participation in the survey was solicited through neighborhood associations, posters at the nearby public library, and announcements on the city's official website. Responses were collected via online submissions and paper forms, with a total of 2,774 responses received.

The survey consisted of three main sections:

1) An introductory section explaining background on the park and the city's ongoing attempt to modify its contents using the "Park-PFI" framework (which is defined using the national government's description of this framework).
2) A three-column table portraying existing usage of the park, "user voices" and development plans.
3) 14 multiple-choice questions and one final open-ended question where respondents could freely express their opinions.

Questions addressed various aspects of park redevelopment, such as parking facilities, walking paths, a potential café, a potential childcare support facility, tree management, and community involvement. Notably, the online version included conditional branching questions (adaptive questioning), where additional questions were presented based on specific answers to earlier ones. This feature was absent in the paper version.

The questionnaire-based survey was conducted anonymously with no mechanism to verify participant identities in either format. It collected minimal respondent information — only age range, and postal code. And though the inclusion of the question about respondent's postal codes may have been aimed at increasing reliability and stratifying responses geographically while maintaining a degree of privacy for respondents, postal codes are publicly available and thus would not necessarily serve as a deterrent against fraudulent participation in the online questionnaire. Further, as the codes point to very specific geographical locations, the inclusion of this question may have deterred respondents concerned about disclosing personal information that could be linked to their identity. These methodological limitations raise concerns about data reliability and the potential for duplicate or non-representative responses.

The survey's structure also revealed inconsistencies in data collection methods between formats. The inclusion of adaptive questioning in the online questionnaire enriched the data but created discrepancies in the depth of information gathered between online and paper respondents.

2.3. Analytical frameworks

This study employs an analytical approach that combines ecolinguistic discourse analysis

with survey bias analysis. Stibbe's (2015) ecolinguistics discourse analysis framework was used to reveal how language constructs environmental and social narratives in the questionnaire, while bias analysis, based on work categorizations summarized by Choi and Pak's (2005), was used to identify systematic biases in question design and response framing.

By cross-referencing my findings about survey bias with the findings revealed by my application of Stibbe's (2015) framework to the text, I aimed to uncover underlying patterns that might affect the reliability or neutrality of the questionnaire while revealing the ideological and ecological stances that the questionnaire advances. This methodological combination aimed to provide a comprehensive lens through which to evaluate both the ecological implications and the objectivity of the city's questionnaire.

2.4. Ecological discourse analysis framework and process

After encountering the city's park development questionnaire in my community, I chose to analyze it from an ecolinguistics perspective. To do this, I first drew upon Stibbe's (2015) framework for ecological discourse analysis, which identifies eight "forms that stories take" (Stibbe, 2015, p. 17). Stibbe's ecological discourse analysis framework is an innovation borne out of the critical discourse analysis (CDA) tradition which was most notably developed in the work of Norman Fairclough (1989, 1992, 2003). However, whereas Fairclough's work focuses broadly on connections between discourse and social power, Stibbe's work emphasizes the way that various discursive practices shape social cognition toward nature and the environment. For its innovative approach to ecological discourse analysis, Steffensen (2024) calls Stibbe's (2015) monograph "arguably, the most impactful publication in the tradition of discourse-oriented ecolinguistics" (p. 7).

Stibbe's framework enables categorizations of textual elements related to ideology, framing, evaluation and appraisal patterns, conviction and facticity patterns, erasure, and salience, offering conceptual tools with which to identify how the survey constructs meaning, shapes perceptions, and advances certain environmental attitudes. These categories and their typical linguistic manifestations are summarized in Table 1, which is adapted from Stibbe's open course material (Stibbe, n.d.).

Table 1: Stibbe's (2015) social cognition categories for ecolinguistics discourse analysis

Social cognition		**Linguistic manifestation**
Type	***Explanation***	***What to look for***
Ideology	A story of how the world is and should be, which is shared by members of a group	discourses, i.e., clusters of linguistic features characteristically used by the group
Framing	A story that uses a packet of knowledge about an area of life (a frame) to structure another area of life	trigger words which bring a frame to mind

Metaphor	A story that uses a frame to structure a distinct and clearly different area of life	trigger words which bring a specific and distinct frame to mind
Evaluation	A story about whether an area of life is good or bad	appraisal patterns, i.e., patterns of language which represent an area of life positively or negatively
Identity	A story about what it means to be a particular kind of person	forms of language which define the characteristics of certain kinds of people
Conviction	A story about whether a particular description of the world is true, uncertain, or false	facticity patterns, i.e., patterns of linguistic features which represent descriptions of the world as true, uncertain or false
Erasure	A story that an area of life is unimportant or unworthy of consideration	patterns of language which fail to represent a particular area of life at all, or which background or distort it
Salience	A story that an area of life is important or worthy of consideration	patterns of language which give prominence to an area of life

I analyzed the original Japanese language municipal questionnaire in a multi-stage, iterative process that combined close human reading with AI-assisted validation. In the initial phase, I conducted a thorough manual review of the (untranslated) questionnaire text, highlighting and annotating language that corresponded to Stibbe's categories. With my aforementioned researcher ecosophy as a foundation for analysis, this process involved repeated close readings, with particular attention paid to how Japanese language and foreign loanwords in the questionnaire worked to construct meanings and shape perceptions about the park's current state and its imagined future. This was a bilingual undertaking because I analyzed the questionnaire text in Japanese while using Stibbe's (2015) framework categories, which are provided in English.

To supplement and validate my findings, I employed Perplexity AI, a large language model (LLM), as an additional analytical tool for systematic pattern recognition. The AI was prompted to identify linguistic patterns in the Japanese language questionnaire using the eight categories in Stibbe's (2015) framework[3]. The AI's outputs were evaluated against my stated "localist" ecosophy and for theoretical coherence with Stibbe's framework, then cross-referenced with my own annotations through a process that involved comparing findings, resolving discrepancies, and identifying complementary insights. This collaborative approach was used to enhance analytical rigor while maintaining the critical

[3] The prompt to Perplexity AI was as follows: "Conduct a systematic ecolinguistic analysis of the attached Japanese municipal park questionnaire using Stibbe's (2015) eight analytical categories from his framework for revealing 'stories we live by'. For each category, identify specific linguistic patterns in the document and explain how they construct particular environmental and social narratives. The eight categories are: 1) Ideology; 2) Framing; 3) Metaphors; 4) Evaluation; 5) Identity; 6) Conviction; 7) Erasure; and 8) Salience."

human interpretive stance required for ecolinguistic discourse analysis. A detailed table comparing researcher and AI analysis is included in Appendix C of this paper.

2.5. Survey bias analysis framework and process

On my first reading of the questionnaire, I had noticed significant biases built into the structure of questions and response options. During my training in the social sciences, I had previously learned how to avoid such problems in the construction of data collection tools such as questionnaires and interviews. However, I realized that I did not have a full list of definitions and examples of common questionnaire survey bias problems to avoid. I thus searched academic literature for a seminal paper containing these. The most comprehensive paper I found was Choi and Pak's (2005) "A Catalogue of Biases in Questionnaires". This paper, borne out of literature on health care surveying, outlines and gives examples of various sources of questionnaire bias in areas of question design, questionnaire design, and questionnaire administration. This framework is widely cited, and has proven influential in subsequent survey methodology research, with later scholars drawing upon similar taxonomic approaches in their comprehensive typology of response biases. As the name of Choi and Pak's paper implies, the work effectively catalogues the most common biasing pitfalls that can occur in questionnaire construction and implementation. These include cognitive biases identified by Krosnick (1991), "administrative mode" effects documented by Schwarz and colleagues (Schwarz & Strack, 1991; Schwarz, 1999), and also measurement issues spanning question wording, response format and design. Choi and Pak's (2005) framework simply and effectively organizes bias types described in other academic literature with concrete examples, making it a useful tool for evaluating the city's questionnaire.

In conducting an analysis of bias in the municipal questionnaire, I followed a process similar to that of my ecolinguistics analysis. However, Choi and Pak's (2005) taxonomy was applied more loosely and deductively through pattern matching rather than emergent coding, with biases identified through a (human) focus on lexical priming in question stems, structural constraints in response options, and visual/textual framing bias in supplementary materials.

3. Analysis

3.1. Ecological discourse analysis

Analysis of the city's park questionnaire (Appendix A and Appendix B), using Stibbe's (2015) framework, revealed a strong neoliberal ideology reinforced by linguistic techniques that prioritize certain values and downplay or erase others.

The questionnaire's introductory section promotes the Park-PFI mechanism and emphasizes private sector expertise through terms like "industry know-how" (民間事業者

のノウハウ), portraying privatization as the best and most efficient solution to problems posed for the park. This discourse equates redevelopment (再整備) with improvement, and privatization with revitalization, framing these processes as inherently beneficial.

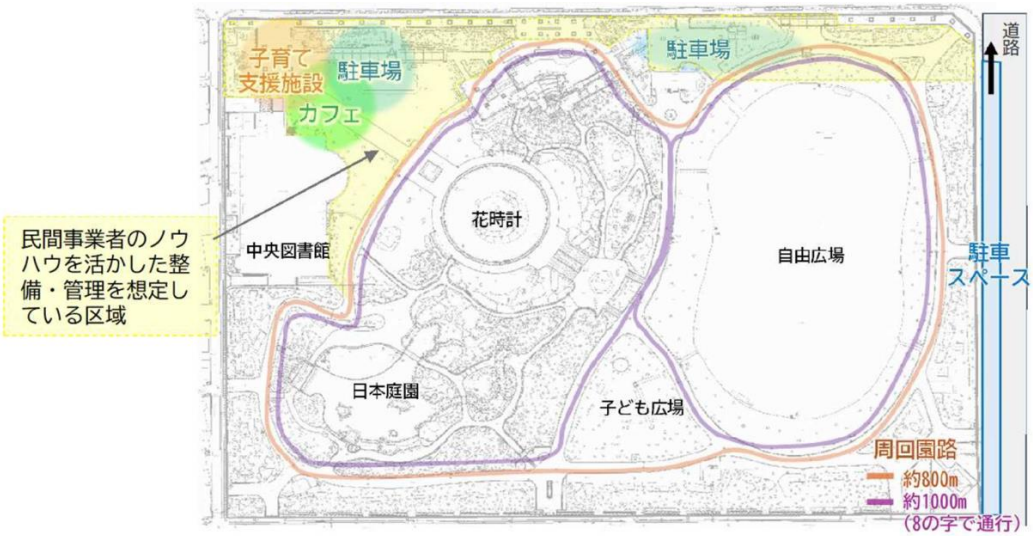


Figure 2: A map included in the front matter of the city's park questionnaire. The highlighted yellow portion indicates the portion of the park slated to be leased to a developer and includes two spaces labelled "parking area", one labelled "café", and another labelled "childcare facility". The yellow text box can be translated as "area to be developed and managed using the know-how of private industry".

A key technique in this neoliberal framing was problem-solving metaphors. The survey's front matter and questions identified concerns and problems purported to have been voiced by park users. These often focused on concerns about safety (安全性, *anzensei*) and convenience (使いやすさ, *tsukaeyasusa*) and were usually closely followed by the city's proposed private sector solutions such as the creation of amenities like parking lots, a childcare facility, and a coffee shop.

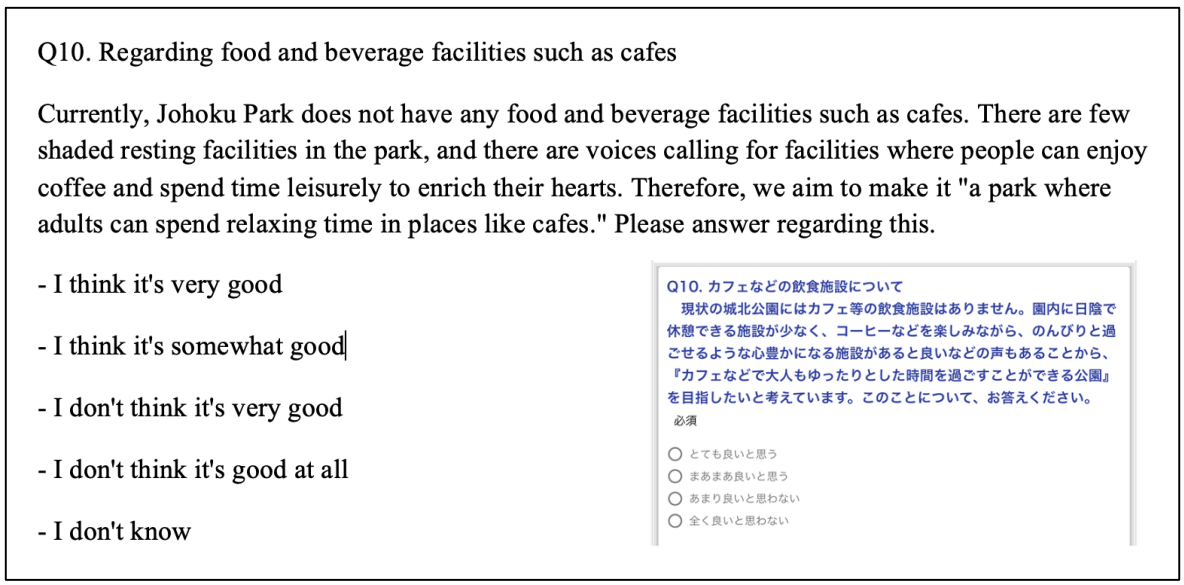
The questionnaire employs various other framing techniques to support this type of narrative as well. For example, in front matter before the survey questions, there is a 3-column introductory table that has six rows, each representing an area the city has identified as related to park redevelopment (see Appendix 2). The first column, titled "The previous character of the park and its actual usage" (今までの公園性格と実際の使われる方), frames the historical role and current use of the park. The second column, "Usage conditions and voices of users" (利用実態や利用者の声), highlights certain current usage patterns and selectively includes mostly critical, problem-focused feedback from putative park visitors (no actual survey data is referenced here). Lastly, the third column, "Future direction (proposal) (the vision considered desirable by the city)" (今後の方向性 (案)), (市が望ましいと考える姿), presents the city's proposed vision for the park's future development. This structure reinforces a private-sector development narrative by systematically linking past and present conditions to a forward-looking problem-solving

agenda shaped by privatization and redevelopment goals.

As was the case with the problem-solving metaphor, what could be called "safety framing" was found to be present in many instances throughout the document, as evidenced by frequent use of words such as "dangerous" (危険, *kiken*) and "accident" (事故, *jikko*) to justify proposed changes despite a lack of evidence of unaddressed risks to park visitors. These problems that had been identified in questions were juxtaposed with proposed solutions which involved private sector development as the only logical solutions. This framing presented all proposed changes as necessary improvements. Additionally, a "convenience" frame was evident in frequent use of terms such as "ease of use" (利用しやすい, *riyoshiyasui*), further legitimizing privatization efforts as enhancements to public spaces.

Evaluation patterns in the questionnaire include positive appraisal of proposed changes, using phrases like 心豊か (*kokoro yutaka*, enriching) and ゆったり (*yuttari*, relaxing) to describe the post-development atmosphere of facilities in the park. Conversely, the questionnaire negatively appraised the current state of the park, describing it with terms such as 危険な状態 (*kikkenna jokyo*, dangerous condition) and 視認性が悪い (*shininsei ga warui*, poor visibility). The survey also employed loaded terms like 適正に管理され (*tekisei ni kanri sare*, properly managed) to imply that the city's current park management was insufficient.

Further, the survey constructs identities by positioning park users as consumers. This is evident in the "park user voices" represented in the front matter of the questionnaire, and in many questions. Question 10 is a good example of this:


Q10. Regarding food and beverage facilities such as cafes

Currently, Johoku Park does not have any food and beverage facilities such as cafes. There are few shaded resting facilities in the park, and there are voices calling for facilities where people can enjoy coffee and spend time leisurely to enrich their hearts. Therefore, we aim to make it "a park where adults can spend relaxing time in places like cafes." Please answer regarding this.

- I think it's very good
- I think it's somewhat good
- I don't think it's very good
- I don't think it's good at all
- I don't know

Q10. カフェなどの飲食施設について
現状の城北公園にはカフェ等の飲食施設はありません。園内に日陰で休憩できる施設が少なく、コーヒーなどを楽しみながら、のんびりと過ごせるような心豊かになる施設があると良いなどの声もあることから、『カフェなどで大人もゆったりとした時間を過ごすことができる公園』を目指したいと考えています。このことについて、お答えください。
必須
○ とても良いと思う
○ まあまあ良いと思う
○ あまり良いと思わない
○ 全く良いと思わない

Figure 3: Translation of Question 10 of the city park questionnaire (screenshot of original Japanese inset bottom right)

Reference to park user satisfaction (満足度, *manzokudo*) also positions park visitors as consumers of a product rather than community members spending time in area green

space.

This question and many others related to new park infrastructure point to salience techniques that give prominence to a commercial "need" for amenities and parking lots, as well as the aforementioned emphasis on safety *concerns* over feelings that the park is in fact already a very safe place to spend time. Environmental impacts are also backgrounded, and the one photograph included as part of the questionnaire's front matter (Appendix B, p. 2) shows only an already paved part of the park, visually implying that adding facilities and parking spaces to this area would have minimal impact.

Conviction patterns are evident in how the questionnaire presents car parking needs as factual, positions aging facilities as requiring intervention, and treats commercial development as a necessary improvement.

Finally, the questionnaire employs the very significant erasure technique of omitting the park's current legal designation (which is connected to the park's purpose) as a *chiku kōen* (地区公園, community park), backgrounding environmental and pedestrian safety concerns that exist around the paving of large sections of the park for automobile parking. The park's accessibility via public transportation is also elided in favor of focus on personal car access which requires parking space. Additionally, the natural value provided by trees is largely erased in the questionnaire. For instance, the table presented on page 3 (refer to Appendix B) and in Question 10 (see figure of the questionnaire) presents a putative park user's concern that "There are few shaded facilities within the park where one can take a break." In this context, the current value of trees as shade-providers is overlooked in favor of constructed facilities that might offer shade in the future.

These techniques work in concert to create a narrative that supports development while minimizing environmental and community concerns, effectively shaping respondents' perceptions and responses in favor of the proposed changes.

Table 2: Summary of social cognition "stories" and linguistic manifestations in the municipal survey

Social cognition type	Description of the type of social cognition found in the municipal questionnaire	Sample linguistic manifestation
Ideology	Neoliberalism: promotes privatization as inherently beneficial through linguistic techniques.	Terms like "industry know-how" (民間事業者のノウハウ), equating redevelopment (再整備) with improvement and privatization with "revitalization" (性化).
Framing	Frames public space issues as solvable primarily through private sector solutions.	Links safety (安全性) and convenience (使いやすさ) concerns to amenities like parking lots, childcare facilities, and coffee shops.
Metaphor	Uses problem-solving metaphors to conceptualize problems and their solutions, often in terms of private sector logic.	Problem-solving metaphor in most questions and questionnaire link park "problems" (identified by "actual usage and user voices" (利用実態や公園利用者

		の声) in the front matter table to private sector "solutions" such as parking lots, childcare facilities, coffee shops in the questionnaire's questions and response options.
Evaluation	Positively appraises proposed changes while negatively framing current conditions.	Positive evaluation for proposed facilities: "Enriching" (心豊か), "Relaxing" (ゆったり). Negative evaluation of designated hazards: "Dangerous condition" (危険な状態), "Poor visibility" (視認性が悪い).
Identity	Constructs the ideal park user as a consumer rather than a citizen, and one whose main values are convenience, safety from natural hazards, and modern amenities.	Language of customer satisfaction such as 「公園利用者の満足度」("park-user satisfaction") positioning most park users as desiring improvements that align with the proposed private development (PFI) narrative.
Conviction	Presents the need for redevelopment and privatization as factual and necessary.	Statements in front matter and questions asserting or implying that current park conditions are unsafe (危険, *kiken*), inconvenient, and that large-scale development will resolve safety issues.
Erasure	The park's function as animal habitat is erased. The view that the park does not need redevelopment is also elided.	Absence of references to animals occupying the spaces slated for development; minimization of positive current user experiences; omission of reference to the park's current safety and visitor satisfaction.
Salience	Exaggerates various risks and benefits to justify change.	Frequent references to "dangerous" (危険), "accident" (事故), and "ease of use" (利用しやすい) to support redevelopment.

3.2. Questionnaire bias analysis

The park questionnaire included various survey design biases that likely led respondents towards support for the municipality's development narrative while sidelining oppositional views.

The most prevalent biasing flaw in the questionnaire was the use of leading questions, which likely influenced respondents' mindset towards acquiescence to park developments presented as socially desirable. Leading questions, according to Choi and Pak (2005), are a kind of positively or negatively worded bias that "can guide or direct respondents toward a different answer" (p. 4). This type of bias can work in conjunction with what Choi and Pak (2005) call "faking good", a known phenomenon by which questionnaire respondents may "… systematically alter questionnaire responses in the direction they perceive to be desired by the investigator" (p. 8). Also known as "social desirability bias", this is a respondent effect defined as "the tendency of research subjects to give socially desirable responses instead of choosing responses that are reflective of their true feelings" (Grimm,

2010, pp. 1–2).

In the municipal questionnaire, a social desirability bias was established in many of the questions by subtly or overtly framing opposition to the city's proposals as socially undesirable. Phrases such as 子ども連れのご家族や高齢者等も利用しやすい ("making the park accessible for families bringing children and for elderly individuals") implied the community park to be not currently accessible to such people, thus, positioning rejection of proposed measures as contrary to community welfare, thereby pressuring respondents to align with the municipality's development narrative.

Conditions for this type of biasing phenomenon were evident in Questions 4 through 11. As noted in the previous section, these questions followed a repetitive structure: first defining a current problem and then presenting development proposals as socially desirable solutions within the question before checking for respondent agreement or disagreement. This pattern likely primed respondents to view change as necessary and inevitable, reinforcing a predisposition towards acceptance. Question 4 — which is shown in Figure 4 below in English translation (the original is inset, bottom right) — is a typical example of this type of question:

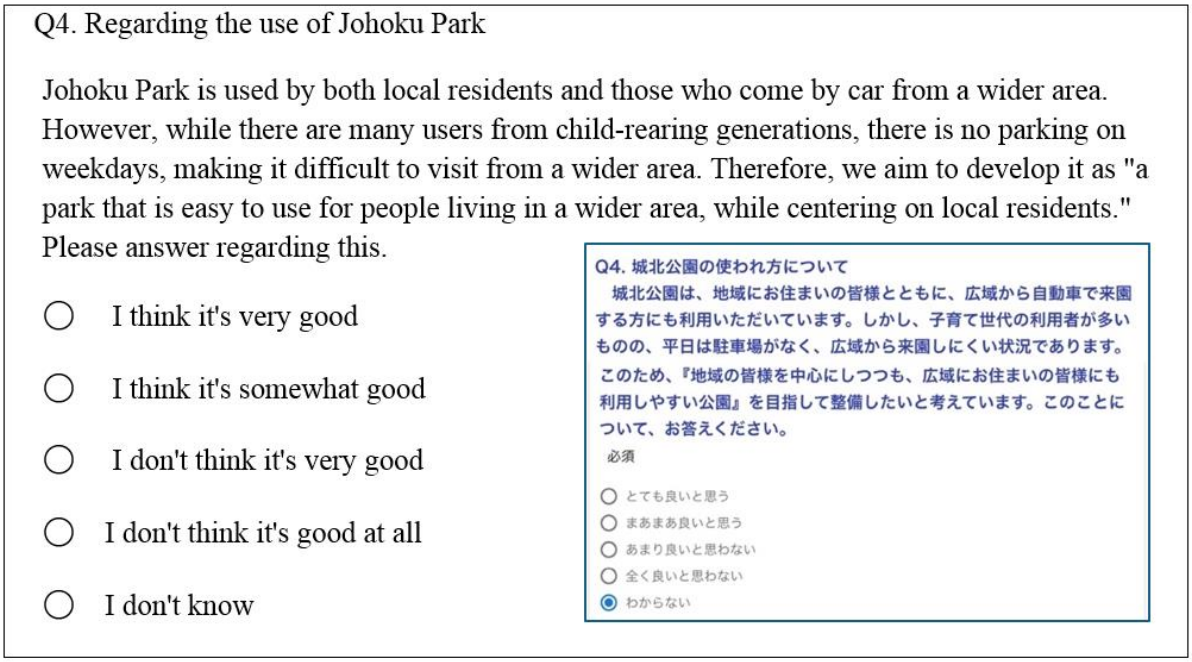


Figure 4: Question 4 from the municipal questionnaire with screenshot from the original Japanese questionnaire

Despite the park's designation as a community park (*chiku kōen*, 地区公園), defined as one designed for residents within a 1-kilometer radius, this question presents what appears to be a social good of making it more accessible to "residents from a wider area". As an online survey accessible to residents from across the city, this kind of question almost guarantees a preponderance of responses favoring development. However, as noted above in the previous section, this framing fails to present trade-offs involved in the proposed solution

and elides discussion of alternative solutions.

As shown in Figure 5 below, Questions 6 and 7 also follow this same pattern, but together form a further biasing effect through adaptive questioning that leads respondents towards acquiescence to the city's plan for parking lots inside the park.

Figure 5: Questions 6 and 7 from the municipal questionnaire with screenshots from the original Japanese inset.

These two questions frame the current car parking situation at the community park as unequivocally dangerous and present the city's proposal of paving over existing green space inside the park as the single reasonable solution. The trade-offs that would be involved in this solution are not presented, nor are alternatives such as securing more parking nearby.

The questionnaire also included a question with "forced choice bias". Such questions, according to Choi and Pak (2005), "provide too few categories" and can thus "force

respondents to choose imprecisely among limited options" (p. 3). The design of Question 14 (Figure 6) compelled respondents to select from predetermined options, limiting their ability to express opposition to development in a question about tree removal. This question, seen in Figure 6, obliges respondents to concede to some degree of development regardless of their actual stance.

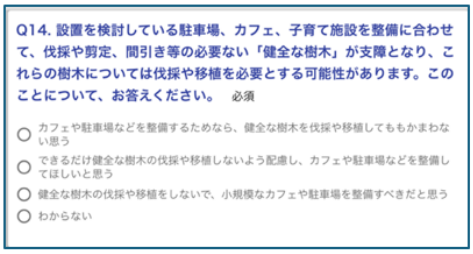
Q14. Along with the development of parking lots, cafes, and childcare facilities under consideration, "healthy trees" that do not need to be felled, pruned, or thinned may become obstacles, and these trees may need to be felled or transplanted. Please answer regarding this.

◯ I think it's fine to fell or transplant healthy trees if it's for developing cafes and parking lots

◯ I want cafes and parking lots to be developed with consideration to minimize the felling and transplanting of healthy trees as much as possible

◯ I think small-scale cafes and parking lots should be developed without felling or transplanting healthy trees

◯ I don't know


Q14. 設置を検討している駐車場、カフェ、子育て施設を整備に合わせて、伐採や剪定、間引き等の必要ない「健全な樹木」が支障となり、これらの樹木については伐採や移植を必要とする可能性があります。このことについて、お答えください。 必須

○ カフェや駐車場などを整備するためなら、健全な樹木を伐採や移植してももかまわない思う
○ できるだけ健全な樹木の伐採や移植しないよう配慮し、カフェや駐車場などを整備してほしいと思う
○ 健全な樹木の伐採や移植をしないで、小規模なカフェや駐車場を整備すべきだと思う
○ わからない

Figure 6: Question 14 in the municipal questionnaire: an example of "forced-choice bias"

Finally, the entire questionnaire appeared to be fraught with information bias. As noted above in my description of the survey document, respondents were presented with the city's interpretation of a strong need for development in the questionnaire's front matter. This section included a photograph of the park from an angle that excluded views of green spaces that would be replaced with parking lots in the city's proposal.

Though I was not able to obtain copies of resident questionnaire responses in order to conduct further analysis, the aforementioned biasing characteristics raise the possibility that the survey's outcomes were shaped by language steering respondents toward favorable views of the municipality's development plans while suppressing dissenting opinions.

4. Discussion

Referring to some of Japan's rich nature-focused traditions, Stibbe (2015), following Knight (2011), identifies some "beneficial discourses" indigenous to Japan, such as the *Satoyama* discourse of "encultured nature" and that of Haiku poetry (Stibbe, 2015, p. 32). These beneficial discourses now coexist in Japan with others that may have become influential in shaping contemporary attitudes towards land use and green spaces in the urban environs that most residents of Japan now inhabit.

However, what constitutes a "beneficial" discourse as opposed to a "destructive"

discourse is a function of the analyst's ecosophy. As stated above, the ecosophy that informs this project is one that recognizes the intrinsic value of green spaces and calls for such spaces to be managed in ways that are open, honest, and transparent for the ecological and social benefit of those who use such spaces. The "story" of neoliberalism (which I discuss more below) is contradictory to this researcher's ecosophy because it tends to value economic growth and efficiency over the intrinsic value of open public spaces like parks. In the neoliberal story, undeveloped public green space is wasted space that should be maximized for its economic potential rather than preserved for its social or environmental value. This kind of utilization of public spaces for private profit is now commonly implemented through public-private partnerships like the Park-PFI mechanism in Japan.

4.1. The neoliberal turn in Japanese *kōen* discourse

The juxtaposition inherent in "Park-PFI" seems to highlight an oxymoron: the first character in the Japanese word for park, 公, means "public", whereas the P in PFI stands for "private". The use of English words to designate the Japanese framework is indicative of an imported and adapted discourse that masks tension over the meanings of public spaces in Japan today.

Junichi Saito's seminal analysis of publicness (公共性, kōkyōsei) in a book by this name (2000) provides a critical framework for understanding this tension. Saito argues that publicness operates across three dimensions: official (公的, *kōteki*), common (共通, *kyōtsu*), and open (開かれている, *hikaretiru*), with parks embodying the third meaning — spaces that should remain "a kind of last safety net" accessible to all members of society (Saito, 2000, p. ix, author's translation). When commercial interests are integrated into park management through mechanisms like Park-PFI, they fundamentally alter the character of 公 from open accessibility to controlled exclusivity, transforming what Saito terms genuine publicness into pseudo-public commercial zones.

Recent controversies around parks throughout Japan illustrate these tensions in society. For example, redevelopment plans for *Jingu Gaien* in Tokyo have sparked large-scale protests against proposals that threaten its historic ginkgo trees and open community spaces (Associated Press, 2023). Activists argue that such projects prioritize commercial interests over community needs, local heritage, and environmental preservation. In 2023, over 285,000 signatures were gathered on petitions opposing the redevelopment plan. Still, Tokyo city has pressed forward with the project which is backed by global massive corporations such as the Mitsui Group, one of Japan's oldest and largest business conglomerates.

This situation exemplifies how powerful business interests can exert influence on government decisions regarding public spaces, advancing a neoliberal "story" that equates redevelopment of such spaces with progress. Municipal governments across Japan are known to have very close relationships with development and construction conglomerates that cannot stop building. The phenomenon has been called 土建国家 (*dokken kokka*), as

explained in a Nippon Foundation book from 2007:

> The term dokken kokka or "construction state" is shorthand for the huge "cement industrial complex" (Kingston, 2004, p. 122). It refers to a system of vested interests in construction activities that embraced Japan at different geographical levels of scale. A system of collusion between politicians, bureaucrats, and businessmen evolved and led to massive government spending on public works projects. (p. 391)

Dokken kokka is a system that dovetails neatly with neoliberal government policies which shift public lands such as parks to private sector entities for management and maintenance.

The once widespread story of parks as public commons spaces for rest, recreation, revitalization, and disaster management in Japan has been expanded into a conception of parks as city assets that should be leveraged for economic benefits. This shift is evident in a 2024 white paper from Japan's Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT), 使われ活きる公園 実践のヒント ("Parks That Are Used and Come Alive: Practical Tips"), which outlines a vision for maximizing the potential of parks through public-private partnerships and community engagement (MLIT, 2024).

This white paper (MLIT, 2024) explicitly promotes the transformation of parks into spaces that can be used to contribute to local economic growth through urban development. It states:

> In order to realize "parks that can be used and thrive", we need to shift from the conventional maintenance and management of city parks to a new approach of "utilization as an urban asset", "moving away from uniformity", and "creating parks that can be used and thrive by diverse stakeholders". (p. 1, author's translation)

This perspective reflects a broader neoliberal narrative that has taken hold in much of Japan, prioritizing efficiency and privatization over the traditional role of parks as managed green spaces accessible to all comers. The government white paper strongly advocates for introducing private sector involvement through programs like "Park-PFI", which facilitates the establishment of revenue-generating facilities within parks.

While these initiatives aim to modernize park management and increase their societal impact, they also illustrate a departure from the notion of parks as inherently communal spaces. However, by framing parks as tools for economic growth and urban competitiveness, neoliberal frameworks like Park-PFI may risk sidelining the social and environmental roles of parks. Critics argue that such policies commodify public spaces, potentially prioritizing profitability over accessibility or inclusivity.

The questionnaire and community response can thus be seen as a microcosm of a broader intergenerational conversation in Japanese society about the meaning of the

"public" space of parks. The central question becomes whether the publicness (公, *kō*) of parks will remain inherently valuable in the public mindset, or whether society will accept the commercialization of such spaces as necessary or inevitable.

This tension carries particular cultural complexity given Japan's long tradition of appreciating nature through spaces such as intensively managed Japanese gardens, tea houses, and other commercial facilities. In this context, open public green space as something separate from private business interests may represent a relatively new concept that is not be fully integrated into Japanese society.

4.2. Reframing local opposition

The municipality's decision to conduct a survey partly online about a community park created a problematic local versus non-local dynamic. As noted earlier, community parks are legally defined in Japan as those designed primarily for residents within a 1-kilometer radius. Thus, a questionnaire that is widely available to all city residents can be seen as a way of devaluing the knowledge and preferences of local residents, equalizing these to the preferences of city residents who may have little to no understanding of the trade-offs involved in development decisions. If the park were larger, and thus categorized differently, for example, as a "comprehensive park" meant to be widely accessible to all city residents, the use of an online questionnaire would seem justified. However, the park's current designation does not position it as this kind of city asset.

This distinction becomes evident when considering the results of a survey completed by a community group (城北公園大好きな住民グループ, 2025) which collected data directly from park users through questionnaire-based interviews. This group's survey results revealed that most park visitors surveyed (79%) did not favor sacrificing green space inside the park for parking lots or other human-built structures. This contrast between park user preferences and the municipality's priorities evident in their questionnaire exposes how biased consultation processes can be used to manufacture consent for predetermined agendas rather than genuinely soliciting public input.

The online survey format can thus be seen to marginalize local voices by framing physical proximity to the park as a source of bias rather than legitimate stakeholder concern. This approach aligns with neoliberal governance strategies that often privilege efficiency and scale over place-based community knowledge.

4.3. Ba, ibasho, and the erosion of authentic public space

Traditional Japanese concepts of *ba* (場) and *ibasho* (居場所) offer important frameworks for understanding what is at stake in the commercialization of more and more parks across Japan. *Ba* refers to shared space where knowledge creation and authentic community interaction emerge through mutual engagement, characterized by dialogical rather than predetermined outcomes (Nonaka & Konno, 1998; Hourdequin, 2023). Many public parks

function as *ba* where community members naturally gather, interact, and collectively steward their shared environment through monthly park clean-up and maintenance activities run by neighborhood organizations.

Ibasho — literally "place to be" — encompasses both physical locations and social contexts where individuals can exist authentically without performance or pretense (Tanaka, 2021). During COVID-19, outdoor spaces became increasingly important as *ibasho,* providing safe havens for social connection during isolation. During this period, interest in nature-based recreation increased (Ueno et al., 2022). However, the commercialization of parks may be threatening to transform them from community *ibasho* into just occasional destinations for visitors as well as customers, fundamentally altering their social function.

4.4. Implications for democratic participation and environmental justice

This language in the questionnaire analyzed here also reveals how public communication tools can encode agendas for political and economic transformations in the governance of public space. The questionnaire can be seen as both a symptom and an instrument of ongoing neoliberal restructuring in Japan, revealing systematic efforts to transform community members from participants in authentic dialogue to consumers approving pre-packaged development options. The municipality's production of a questionnaire designed to "confirm" their plan with the public is akin to seeking social "likes" on social media. The questionnaire's biases and its online distribution seemed deliberately crafted to secure approval for the development plans. However, these methods seem to have eroded trust with local residents and prevented genuine, dialogic public consultation.[4]

The environmental justice implications extend beyond this single park to broader questions about equitable access to green space in Japanese cities. For example, the same municipality's new "Green Basic Plan" (静岡市みどりの基本計画) articulates a clear preference for developing centralized "hub parks" rather than securing distributed neighborhood green space for all city residents (Shizuoka City, 2025). This reflects a more general pattern that serves municipal economic interests while neglecting the complex work of ensuring equitable access to green space across communities, preserving habitat for other living beings, and heat-island mitigation.

This case illustrates how local language practices related to an individual park reflect broader discourses amidst negotiations about the future of public space, democratic participation, and community values in contemporary Japan. The outcome of such negotiations will help determine whether future generations inherit *kōen* as urban green spaces that function as legitimate *ibasho*, or rather as commercially managed amenities that exist primarily to serve broader economic goals.

[4] In fact, the strong perception of questionnaire bias by local residents led citizens to push for more dialogic communication with the city. This led the mayor to empanel a series of monthly stakeholder workshops (**懇談会**) which concluded in July, 2025.

5. Conclusion

In examining a Japanese municipality's questionnaire-based survey about development plans for a local district park, this paper has revealed linguistic techniques that frame park development in terms of the provision of amenities from private sector businesses rather than as the maintenance of open public commons spaces. The concept of "public park" (公園) first appeared in Japan approximately 150 years ago, and its meaning has been evolving over time. This paper has illustrated the growing influence of neoliberal ideology on discourse about parks in Japan and has shown how government bodies at various levels have been promoting neoliberal conceptions of parks throughout the country. Using Stibbe's (2015) "stories we live by" conceptual framework, this paper has highlighted linguistic techniques, as discursive practices, that advance a neoliberal ideological perspective while sidelining more traditional views of the role of public parks in Japanese society. These findings contribute to growing scholarship on neoliberal environmental discourse that demonstrates how market frameworks co-opt ecological language (Tulloch & Neilson, 2014).

My analysis also revealed many biasing techniques present in the questionnaire that are likely to have influenced respondents to acquiesce to "what the city considers desirable" for the park. These techniques, whether applied deliberately or unconsciously, are problematic for the maintenance of open and honest lines of communication between city officials and their constituents.

5.1. Areas for further research

In the local park that was the focus of this paper, and in urban green spaces across Japan, further research is needed to investigate the meaning that park visitors themselves make from the spaces they use. Because of leading questions and other techniques, questionnaire-based surveys like the one the city conducted are unable to adequately reveal the authentic attitudes of park users, and how these may or may not be naturally shifting towards more commercialized conceptions of public parks in Japan.

Also, as this paper has revealed that the push to privatize parks across Japan is a top-down effort driven by central government policies, more research is needed to investigate linguistic manifestations of central government policies on the local level. Research should also search for dialogic models of community engagement and participation that allow for effective local participation in decision-making processes.

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Appendix A

Author's english translation of the municipality's park development survey

Front Matter (excluded from translation; included in full Japanese web version of the survey in Appendix B)

Q1. Please enter your postal code.

Q2. Please indicate your age group.
- Under 10 years old
- 10s
- 20s
- 30s
- 40s
- 50s
- 60s
- 70s
- 80 years or older

Q3. Regarding the redevelopment of Johoku Park

The Shizuoka City Office is planning to develop parking lots and food facilities such as cafes based on the aging of park facilities and feedback from park users. Please answer regarding the redevelopment of Johoku Park.
- I agree
- I generally agree
- I have no opinion either way
- I somewhat disagree
- I disagree

Q4. Regarding the use of Johoku Park

Johoku Park is used by both local residents and those who come by car from a wider area. However, while there are many users from child-rearing generations, there is no parking on weekdays, making it difficult to visit from a wider area. Therefore, we aim to develop it as "a park that is easy to use for people living in a wider area, while centering on local residents". Please answer regarding this.
- I think it's very good
- I think it's somewhat good

- I don't think it's very good
- I don't think it's good at all
- I don't know

Q5. Regarding community involvement

Johoku Park is a place of relaxation for the community, used for local disaster prevention drills and neighborhood association activities, and is loved by local residents, with cleaning activities carried out by the park's friends association organized by residents of the Ando district. Therefore, we aim to make it "a park loved and used by local residents, where cleaning activities by the park's friends association continue to be carried out". Please answer regarding this.

- I think it's very good
- I think it's somewhat good
- I don't think it's very good
- I don't think it's good at all
- I don't know

Q6. Regarding parking

Currently, Johoku Park does not have a dedicated parking lot, and on-street parking is allowed only on weekends and holidays on the north side road. On-street parking is dangerous due to children suddenly running out, and there are calls for a safe dedicated parking lot in the park. Therefore, we aim to make it "a park with parking that is easy to use for families with children and the elderly". Please answer regarding this.

- I think it's very good
- I think it's somewhat good
- I don't think it's very good
- I don't think it's good at all
- I don't know

Q7. For those who answered "I think it's very good" or "I think it's somewhat good" to Q6:

The newly installed parking lot aims to be an in-park parking lot that is easy to use for families with children and the elderly. Please answer regarding this.

- I think it's very good
- I think it's somewhat good
- I don't think it's very good
- I don't think it's good at all
- I don't know

Q8. We are considering securing parking spaces both inside and outside the park. Therefore, we aim to renovate the on-street parking space on the north side of the

park, which is currently only available on holidays, with safety measures to make it available for parking on weekdays as well. Please answer regarding this.

- I think it's very good
- I think it's somewhat good
- I don't think it's very good
- I don't think it's good at all
- I don't know

Q9. Regarding the circular path

Currently, there is a circular path around the park used for walking and jogging, but its location is difficult to understand, and there are steep slopes and damaged areas on the path. Therefore, we aim to renovate the path to make it "a park where people can enjoy walking and jogging". Please answer regarding this.

- I think it's very good
- I think it's somewhat good
- I don't think it's very good
- I don't think it's good at all
- I don't know

Q10. Regarding food and beverage facilities such as cafes

Currently, Johoku Park does not have any food and beverage facilities such as cafes. There are few shaded resting facilities in the park, and there are voices calling for facilities where people can enjoy coffee and spend time leisurely to enrich their hearts. Therefore, we aim to make it "a park where adults can spend relaxing time in places like cafes". Please answer regarding this.

- I think it's very good
- I think it's somewhat good
- I don't think it's very good
- I don't think it's good at all
- I don't know

Q11. Regarding childcare support facilities

Currently, Johoku Park does not have any childcare support facilities. There are voices calling for a place where children can play even on rainy days or when it suddenly rains. Therefore, we aim to make it "a park with facilities where children can play even on rainy days". Please answer regarding this.

- I think it's very good
- I think it's somewhat good
- I don't think it's very good
- I don't think it's good at all
- I don't know

Q12. For those who answered "I think it's very good" or "I think it's somewhat good" to Q11:
When installing childcare support facilities where children can play even on rainy days, what kind of equipment do you think would be good? Please answer.
- Playroom
- Kids' toilet
- Nursing room
- Snack vending machine
- Baby food vending machine
- Other

Q13. Regarding the trees in the park
44 years have passed since the park opened, and while it has become a lush green park, the densely planted trees have grown large, resulting in an overcrowded state. This condition increases the risk of accidents due to falling trees and branches, and there are concerns about poor visibility and security from park users. On the other hand, there are voices wanting to maintain a lush green park with trees. Therefore, we aim to make it "a lush green park with properly managed trees" by proceeding with the felling, pruning, and thinning of trees that are at risk of falling or obstructing visibility. Please answer regarding this.
- I think it's very good
- I think it's somewhat good
- I don't think it's very good
- I don't think it's good at all
- I don't know

Q14. Along with the development of parking lots, cafes, and childcare facilities under consideration, "healthy trees" that do not need to be felled, pruned, or thinned may become obstacles, and these trees may need to be felled or transplanted. Please answer regarding this.
- I think it's fine to fell or transplant healthy trees if it's for developing cafes and parking lots
- I want cafes and parking lots to be developed with consideration to minimize the felling and transplanting of healthy trees as much as possible
- I think small-scale cafes and parking lots should be developed without felling or transplanting healthy trees
- I don't know

Q15. Finally, if you have any opinions or requests regarding the renewal of Johoku Park, please enter them in the free comment box below.

Appendix B

A screen-printed PDF version of the full original online municipal questionnaire (11 pages) can be accessed via the link below:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cfhS5ZTGsVYbzdJwRW1PIght7pvbyape/view?usp=sharing

Appendix C

Comparison of human analysis and AI analysis using eight categories from Stibbe (2015). The prompt to Perplexity AI was:

> "Conduct a systematic ecolinguistic analysis of the attached Japanese municipal park questionnaire using Stibbe's (2015) eight analytical categories from his framework for revealing 'stories we live by'."

Narrative Category	Analysis Source	Key Finding	Overlap/ Disparity	Resolution/Integration
Ideology	Researcher analysis	Neoliberalism: promotes privatization as inherently beneficial through linguistic techniques like "industry know-how" and equating redevelopment with improvement	High overlap	Combined: Neoliberal ideology pervades document through both economic framing and expert authority positioning
	AI analysis	Municipal governance and public-private partnership ideology; techno-managerial enterprise requiring expert intervention rather than community stewardship		
Framing	Researcher analysis	Frames public space issues as solvable primarily through private sector solutions, linking safety and convenience concerns to amenities like parking, childcare, coffee shops	High overlap	Integrated: Problem-solution paradigm consistently applies private sector solutions to constructed park deficiencies
	AI analysis	Problem-solution paradigm using engineering metaphors; park framed as technical problem requiring engineered solutions		

Metaphor	Researcher analysis	Problem-solving metaphors conceptualizing problems and solutions through private sector logic, linking park "problems" to private sector "solutions"	Moderate overlap	Resolved to researcher analysis. While AI analysis resonates with researcher's analysis for the "framing" category. "Machine" and "medical" metaphors were not prominent to the researcher, and these this characterization seen to exaggerate legitimate function and safety concerns for a park.
	AI analysis	Commercial metaphors (convenience, satisfaction, services); machine metaphors (development, functions, system); medical metaphors (safety measures, repair)		
Evaluation	Researcher analysis	Questionnaire positively appraises proposed changes ("enriching", "relaxing") while negatively framing current conditions ("dangerous condition", "poor visibility")	High overlap	Synthesized: Anthropocentric evaluation hierarchy privileging proposed private developments over current conditions
	AI analysis	Positive evaluation of convenience and control; negative evaluation of naturalness when trees become "obstructions" or "dangerous"		
Identity	Researcher analysis	Constructs ideal park user as consumer rather than citizen, valuing convenience, safety from natural hazards, and modern amenities through "park-user satisfaction" language	High overlap	Merged insights: Consumer identity dominates through satisfaction metrics and convenience prioritization
	AI analysis	Bifurcated identities: consumer-citizens as passive service recipients and expert managers as providers; community stewardship marginalized		
Conviction	Researcher analysis	Presents need for redevelopment and privatization as factual and necessary, asserting current park conditions are unsafe and inconvenient	Overlap / Differing emphasis	Confirmed convergence: Privatization necessity presented as established fact requiring no justification

	AI analysis	Administrative and technical knowledge claims with high facticity; appeal to authority through court judgments and professional assessments		
Erasure	Researcher analysis	Park's function as animal habitat erased; view that park doesn't need redevelopment elided; absence of animal references and minimization of positive current user experiences	Moderate overlap	More specific researcher analysis retained over vague language in AI analysis. "Indigenous knowledge systematically erased" is far too extreme a statement for the scope of the questionnaire.
	AI analysis	Ecological processes and indigenous knowledge systematically erased; trees described only in management terms; non-human life largely absent		
Salience	Researcher analysis	Exaggerates various risks and benefits to justify change through frequent references to "dangerous" (危険), "accident" (事故), and "ease of use" (利用しやすい)	High overlap	Analysis aligned: Both analyses identify risk amplification and convenience emphasis as primary salience strategies
	AI analysis	Infrastructure and economic development foregrounded; detailed attention to parking, facilities, pathways; technological solutions emphasized		