

# The port city of Yokohama

## Its history of requisition by foreign occupation forces and redevelopment in the aftermath due to citizen–local government collaboration

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### Abstract

Yokohama was not a colonial port city, but foreign forces seized the city for decades after the Japan's defeat in the war. The author clarifies the historical background of the process of derequisition and its redevelopment. Since opening its port in 1859, Yokohama has developed as an international trading city. The city was destroyed by a major earthquake in 1923. Although it recovered as a modern city in the 1930s, it was again devastated in air raids during the war. After the US military seized the city in 1945, the state government had to lease land from landowners and provide it to the US, which continued to be stationed in Japan under the US–Japan Security Treaty. The city government continued to request the land's release to the original owners. The Honmoku District was seized as a residential area for US families. Due to the prolonged requisition, landowners sold their land to the state to pay taxes, and half of the district became state property. The city planned to use the state property for civic purposes. Intense negotiations between the state and the city dragged on for a long time, finally concluding in 1982.

### Keywords

Port city, requisition by foreign forces, state government, local government, collaboration with citizens

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Fig. 1. Location of the Tokyo Metropolitan Region in Japan.



Fig. 2. Location of Yokohama City in the Region

## INTRODUCTION RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND PREVIOUS STUDIES

This study focuses on the acts of requisition carried out by foreign forces (the US military as an occupation force) after the Pacific War (1941–1945) in the port city of Yokohama. It examines how citizens and the local government effectively collaborated in its derequisition and subsequent redevelopment processes.

The Port of Yokohama in the south of Tokyo (Fig.1, 2) was built artificially to open the country to Western powers in 1859 by the Tokugawa Shogunate regime (Fig.3). Thereafter, it developed steadily until the Great Kanto Earthquake (1923), which destroyed the entire city in an instant<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, it was rebuilt in a relatively short period of time and returned to engaging in world trade as a modernized port city. However, during the Pacific War, the city was burnt to the ground due to US aerial bombings. The central business and harbour districts were seized by the occupation forces. Adjacent to the central business district, the Honmoku District, the subject of this study, was requisitioned as a residential area for US military families (Fig.4).

The surrendering state government (national government) had to accept all the occupation forces' demands that insisted on their foreign force's right (Fig.5) to expropriate privately-owned land for the construction of military facilities wherever they needed. Thus, the state was forced to select suitable sites to requisition from possible candidate districts. On the other side, landowners kept demanding their land be returned under their district right. In between was the local government, which defended the district right and demanded restitution from the state. Afterwards, the occupation forces became 'stationed forces' requested by the host-nation, meaning that Japan paid most of expenses under the Japan-US Security Treaty. However, the US military did not reduce their presence in Japan.

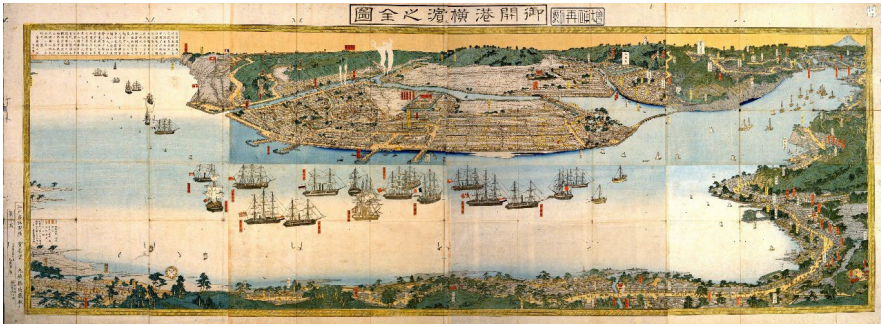


Fig. 3. Old drawing of Yokohama Port during the Tokugawa Shogunate regime

Moreover, there was the city right regarding to where the US military facility was to be relocated. All local governments, including Yokohama City, maintained the position that they would not recognise requisition within their municipal boundaries. Although they kept demanding the return of the land, this was contradicted by the fact that if alternative facilities were to be provided outside their cities, new requisitions would be required. The state was also required to develop land and buildings at alternative facilities, which would incur huge costs. Besides these rights, there was the civic right of the local municipality in question to utilize part of the returned state-owned land for all citizens.

As explained above, the problems the landowners of the requisitioned land faced were complex, involving a wide range of administrative institutions and citizens of other local governments. Therefore, we expect it is possible to derive clues from the case of Honmoku as to how all the institutions and citizens concerned collaborated to settle requisition and redevelop their returned land with respect to their various rights. Among the various collaborations was the coordinative and crucial role of Yokohama, which this study seeks to clarify. The 1960s in Japan gave rise to the 'innovative local governments movement', which emphasized collaboration with citizens. Yokohama's Ichio Asukata (mayoral term 1963–1978) was a central figure who strongly advocated this movement.

Research papers on requisition by foreign forces are limited in Japan's academic community. Regarding the legal structural aspect, the actions of the occupation forces can be classified into requisition, (forcible exploitation of property owners) and procurement (contracts with property owners). From the overall aspects, it could be termed as requisition even after the peace treaty 1952 (Kozeki 1974)<sup>2</sup>. There are some papers about requisitioned villages in Okinawa highlighting its changes in folklore aspects. From the town planning viewpoint, historical analyses of city structural change caused by requisition by the occupation forces were conducted in a series of papers (Murakami 2021)<sup>3</sup>. As for the collaborative relationship between citizens and administrations concerned with requisition, historical analyses of the derequisition and redevelopment processes could not be found. Therefore, this study attempts to provide some insights on these issues.

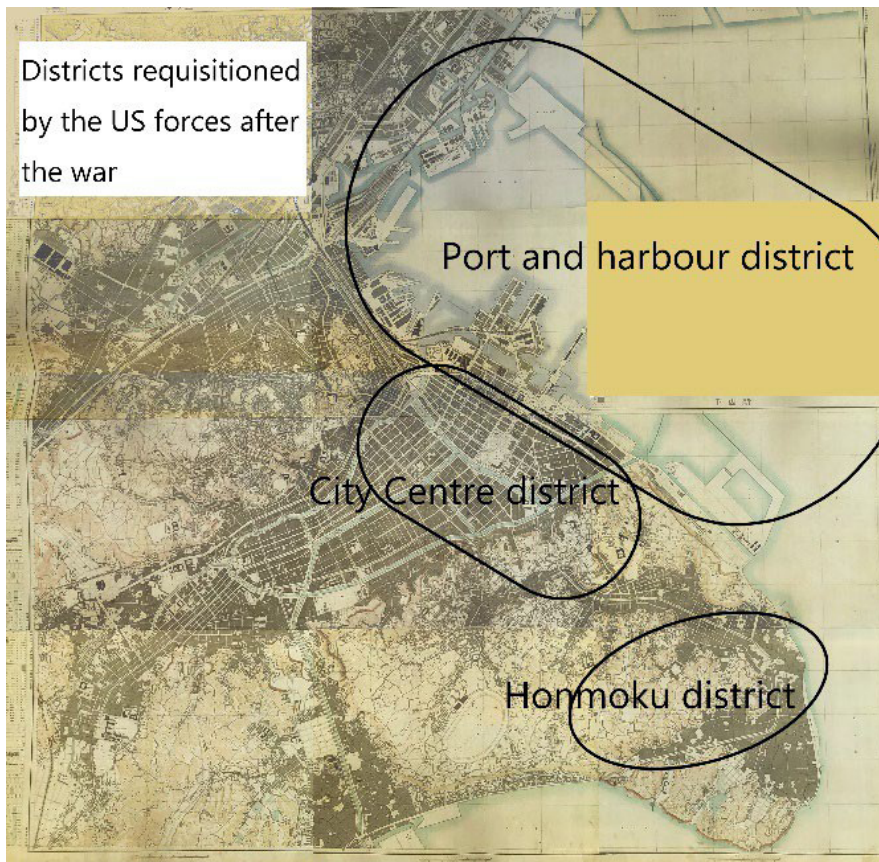


Fig. 4. Districts requisitioned by the US forces after the Pacific War depicted on the old map of 1935.

## REQUISITION BY OCCUPATION FORCES

The occupation forces, mainly US troops, arrived immediately after the announcement of Japan's surrender in August 1945. They started to use the port area as a logistical base for transporting supplies to the entire occupation forces, and the central business and commercial area served as the US military headquarters and barracks. The surrounding upmarket residential areas, where houses remained, were used as high-grade officers' quarters. Following this, the residents in the Honmoku District adjacent to the centre were forcibly evicted on short notice from the End-of-war Liaison Office (1945), a newly set-up state agency tasked with supporting the occupation forces, in September 1945<sup>4</sup>. The US military then requisitioned Honmoku District to build housing precincts for junior officer class families. Honmoku used to be an upmarket residential district from which wealthy merchants commuted to the city centre by limousine before the War. It also had a fishing village and entertainment clubs for international sailors.

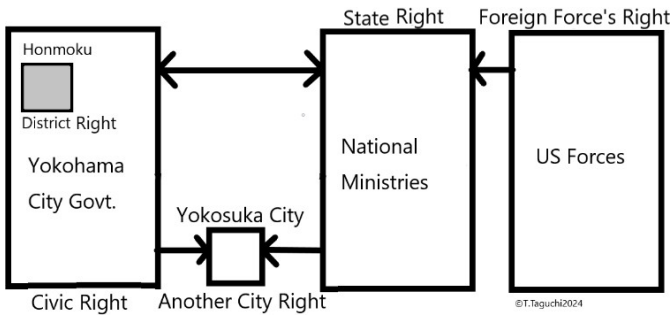


Fig. 5. Concept of the collaboration between different institutions and people concerned

When the US forces first arrived at the enemy territory, their foreign force's right was to tame officials of the surrendered state as proxies and to plunder the enemy's reserves. Thus, the initial requisition activities seemed very forcible compared to the later ones. The requisitioned residential area of Honmoku, 88.2 hectares in space by the sea, was divided into two parts (Fig.6): District 1 on the sea side across Honmoku Street (Fig.7) and District 2 on the land side (Fig.8), including Wadayama Hill (planned hilltop park). District 2 included officers' housing, a shopping centre, a sports facility with night lighting, and a primary school<sup>5</sup>.

While the Japanese liaison office worked for the US forces, the Ministry of Finance (MoF) acquired the land from evicted landowners who had to give their lands to the MoF in lieu of the Special Property Tax (1946-1951). In terms of the size of landholdings, there were small landowners with less than 100 square meters and large landowners with 5,000 square meters of land. As of 1982, there were 488 landowners in New Honmoku (the official name of the planned district), of which 208 were individuals, 252 were co-owners, and 28 were corporations. Of the total area, 33.2 per cent was privately owned, 48.8 per cent state-owned, 0.5 per cent prefecture-owned, and 2.5 per cent municipal land.

The legitimacy of the act of requisition at the end of the war is questionable. Under the Potsdam Declaration, which Japan accepted, its sovereignty was guaranteed. The Japanese government served as a proxy of the occupation forces in an indirect administration. For this reason, the state enacted the special law to establish a state public corporation called the 'Special Procurement Agency' (1947), which employed existing governmental networks and local administrations to find suitable sites for requisition<sup>6</sup>. The agency issued notifications that did not need affected owners' consent. From the viewpoint of international laws, the Hague Rules of Land Warfare (1899) exceptionally permits the seizure of military land or construction of bases when the other country has not yet surrendered and fighting is still ongoing. After surrender, looting is prohibited and the principle of respect for private property is to be observed.



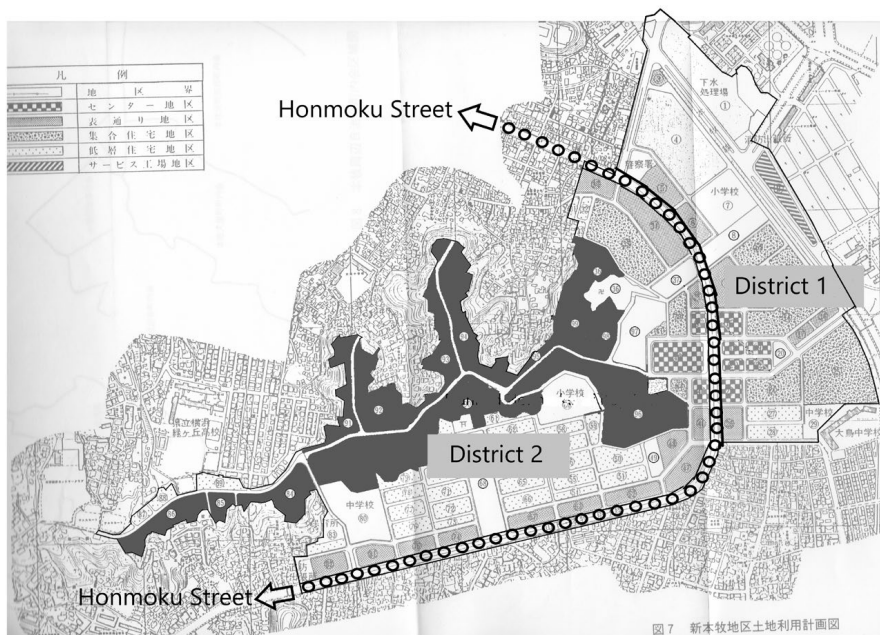


Fig. 6. Location of Honmoku Districts 1 and 2

The requisition also stalled the reconstruction of Yokohama after the war for a long time. The occupation of Japan lasted until 1952, when the Treaty of Peace with Japan was signed, but in the same year the Japan-US Security Treaty, which permitted US forces to maintain a presence in Japan, was signed. As for derequisition by the Asukata Administration, there were 730 hectares of requisitioned land at 27 sites in 1963, with 130 hectares at 14 sites released in the 15 years leading up to 1978 at the end of its administration.

## CAMPAIGN FOR THE PROLONGED REQUISITION BY THE US FORCES

In 1951, the prefectural and city governments and the local business community formed the 'Yokohama City Reconstruction Council' and launched a campaign to end Yokohama's requisition. This campaign did not allow private landowners to participate. Economic reconstruction did not progress due to the requisition of the city centre. Because of the revision of the Japan-US Security Treaty in 1960, the name of the land seized was changed from requisitioned property to property provided by the Japanese government. However, nothing changed for landowners. The Defense Facilities Agency (DFA) (1962), whose role was taken over from the Special Procurement Agency, had to conclude lease agreements with landowners until when the land was no longer needed by the US forces. If a civilian landowner did not agree to a lease contract, the land was expropriated by the DFA.



Fig. 7. Old photo of the District 1 on the right and Japanese houses on the left



Fig. 8. Old photo of the District 2 on Wadayama hill (planned area of the hilltop park)

In 1961, a steering committee was established in the city council to promote the lifting of requisitions, and the committee submitted written requests to the state. In 1962, US forces abruptly announced that they would not mind returning the land if alternative facilities were to be built at the Japanese expense. Hearing this, the landowners formed the “Honmoku De-Requisition Council” (120 members) in 1963 and tried to appeal their will. This was the first time the landowners of Honmoku organized their own pressure group, which continuously demanded that the Honmoku District return their land to them as soon as possible. Unfortunately, the campaign ceased. In the mayoralty election of 1963 Asukata, a socialist party member, was narrowly elected mayor by defeating conservative candidates. Following his election, he commissioned a private consultancy that produced a bleak concept of industrial development for the entire district<sup>7</sup>.

In 1966, the DFA offered the city the disposal of state-owned land in District 1 if the city would set up an alternative facility for its relocation. When returning the leased land to the original landowners, the obligation was to return the land to its original state, as it was when leasing began. In response, the city argued that the return of the requisitioned land was the responsibility of the state government.

However, negotiations with Yokosuka City, which was considered a possible relocation site, became stacked. Yokosuka City was officially seeking to reduce the size of the US military base, so relocation was not an easy issue to accept. On the other hand, from an industrial viewpoint, the US naval base had a huge dockyard that employed thousands of local people. This is another city right. In addition, Yokohama was cautious that the separate return of District 1 could result in a freeze in District 2. The landowners formed the ‘Honmoku Redevelopment Council’ (500 members). In 1967, the Director General of the DFA approved the establishment of alternative facilities under the responsibility of the state government. In 1968, the Yokosuka City Council approved the relocation.

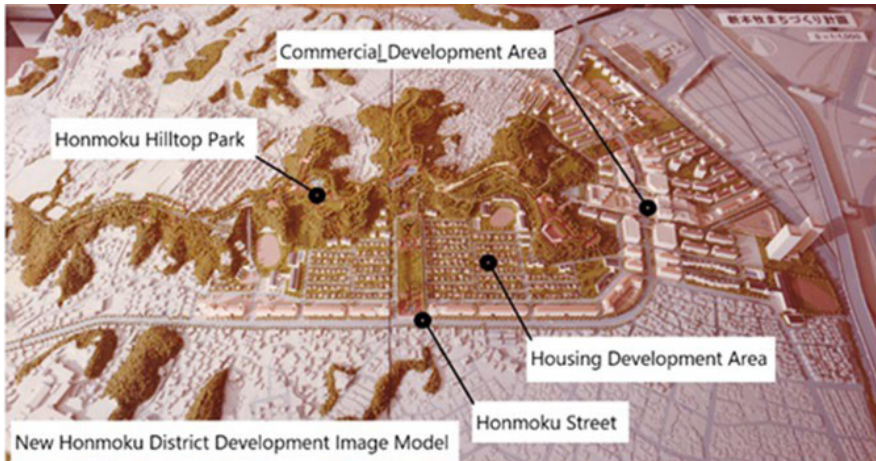


Fig. 9. Comprehensive Plan formulated by the Urban Design Section

In 1968, planner Akira Tamura (1926–2010) joined the city administration from his private practice as the head of the Planning and Coordination Office, which was newly established for him as a control tower for all city management and planning aspects. Tamura forged a strategy of derequisition of Honmoku District and created redevelopment concepts<sup>9</sup>.

In 1971, landowners complained to the city that a redevelopment plan for their land should be drawn up in consultation with landowners. The land to be returned from the DFA was private, and could not be used without their consent, implying Asukata's initial industrial plan. Moreover, they asked for a comprehensive development plan, as it would only be acceptable if Districts 1 and 2 were returned en bloc. In 1972, the state recognized that their one-year lease contract system could not exceed 20 years under Civil Law. In response, a campaign by landowners to refuse to renew the lease started, but this movement did not accelerate the de-requisition.

In 1972, Tamura's urban design section in his Planning and Coordination Office compiled a comprehensive plan for Districts 1 and 2 (Fig.9) that introduced the Land Readjustment Project (LRP)<sup>9</sup>. LRP is a common method that has been used for the last 100 years' planning history in Japan. It is based on a public-private partnership instrument, in which governments and landowners bear the redevelopment costs and benefits in places. The urban design plan was an excellent one, to which landowners did agree.

In 1972, Mayor Asukata and Tamura met the Director General of the DFA and requested that the idea of the 'Special Accounting Policy' be abandoned. Under the 'Special Account Policy Law for Specific State-owned Property Development' (1957), the costs of relocating the US forces base were to be met through the disposal of state property on the site of the base in question. Asukata said that since the land had been requisitioned for more than 25 years, the state and local governments had to take the burden of installing infrastructure and public spaces in the LRP. Thus, the city claimed to use state-owned land free of charge. Asukata expressed that if the city had to buy state-owned land, its price should be below the acquisition cost.



In 1973, the US forces proposed that the entire land would be returned if an alternative facility for District 2 was also provided. In the same year, at a meeting between the landowners and the city, the landowners inquired about the LRP's delay from the initial schedule, because they did not understand the relationship between the state policy and the LRP. The landowners then set up a 'Redevelopment Study Committee', which met frequently and began to study the process of the LRP by themselves<sup>10</sup>.

In 1974, the city introduced the selective replotting method in relation to its LRP, which was endorsed by the Ministry of Construction (MoC) and applied for the first time in LRP history<sup>11</sup>. This method allowed landowners to choose their land from the various land use categories according to their future life plans. In regular LRP, land is not selective and is replotted at approximately the same location as that of the previous land. In addition, in this method, land is not used as an independent unit but as a joint construction required such as specific land uses and building plans for each plot.

In 1974, the Central Committee of State Property expressed that it would be appropriate to consolidate the dispersed state land using the LRP in Honmoku<sup>12</sup>. Moreover, it was acknowledged that the MoF as the biggest landowner would participate in the city's LRP. Following this comment, the landowners' study group recommended that the city strengthen its MoF lobbying to promote the relocation of the US force base and utilize state-owned land for public facilities. Thereafter, the two Landowners' Councils merged to form the 'New Honmoku Development Promotion Council (NHDPCC)'.

Over time, land disposal policies by the MoF had become a popular topic. In June 1977, the city appealed to general public about the history and character of the New Honmoku Project. It expressed a need for contributions from the MoF to the LRP. Despite the fact that New Honmoku was a local issue, it needed to gain understanding and broad public support. In October 1977, the DFA finally requested that the mayor of Yokosuka agree upon the relocation of the District 2.

## THE DISPUTED LAND POLICY BY THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE

The MoF intended to sell state-owned land at a high price. However, local governments countered that returned state-owned land should be disposed of free of charge and utilized for the benefit of the local community.

In 1975, the MoC, which was legally in charge of the LRP, expressed opposition to the relocation costs being raised through the disposal of state-owned land<sup>13</sup>. However, this was ineffective due to the power structure among the state ministries. In 1976, the Central Council on National Property fixed its policy of land disposal, 'Three Division of state-owned land system'. The returned state property was divided into three parts by area: 1) for use by local authorities (local use), 2) for use by the state government or government-related bodies (state use), and 3) for the time being reserved for disposal (reserved land). The reserved land was also reserved for the formulation of a utilization plan itself to assess changes in future socioeconomic conditions.

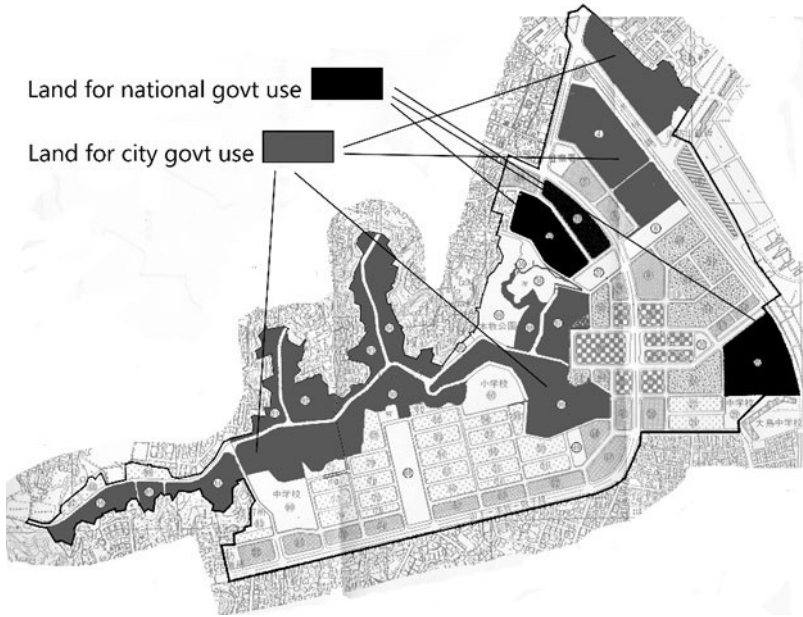


Fig. 10. Initial concept of the state land use by the Yokohama city administration

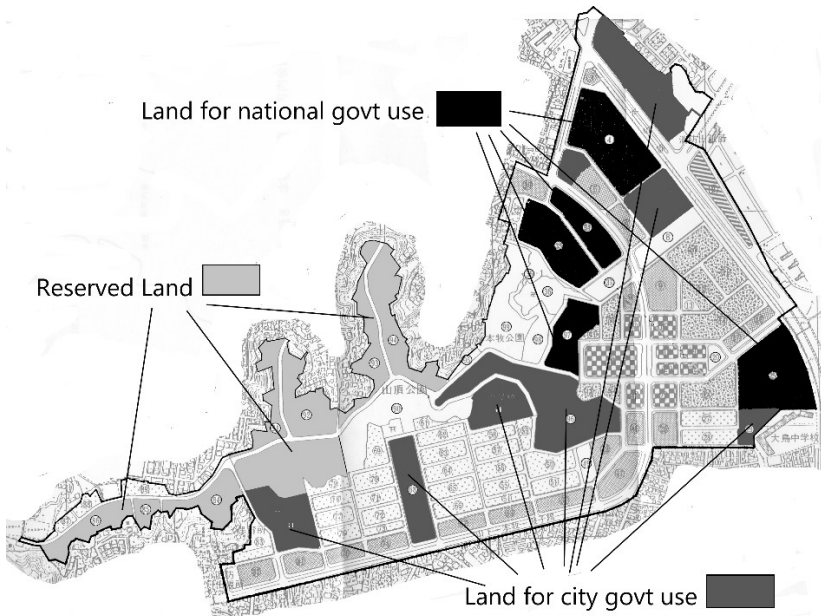


Fig. 11. Final concept agreed upon by the MoF and the city government

In 1977, it was announced that Mayor Asukata would step down midway through his term of office to take up the post of the Japan Socialist Party Chairman. Amidst the turmoil in the city administration, the New Honmoku Development Office in charge of the project hurried to begin the legal procedure of the LRP and sought the consent of the MoF. In doing so, official documents were exchanged between the city and the MoF in March 1978. Documents were based on the following principles: (1) a fair contribution ratio, (2) the principle of matching the replotting of state-owned land (flat state-owned land would not be consolidated into the hilltop park), (3) prior consultation on the replotting of state-owned land before the project plan was publicized (only the state was given special treatment and its wishes were listened to), and (4) the state would formulate a utilization plan for state-owned land (the city's plan would be ignored). Michikazu Saigo, who had served as vice-minister of the Ministry of Home Affairs, was elected as mayor in April 1978. Tamura, the director general of the Planning and Coordination Office who had been in command until then, was removed from his post by Mayor Saigo (mayoralty term 1978-1990).

Subsequent moves by the city and landowners proceeded according to the original policy, whether intentionally or unintentionally, regardless of a written agreement with the MoF<sup>14</sup>. In 1978, the city conducted a land-use intentional survey in which landowners were asked about their future land use. In 1979, the city presented the 'New Honmoku Development Plan' to the NHDPC, which was readily approved. This plan envisaged a hilltop park and other areas that the MoF was restricted to use (Fig.10). The MoF strongly opposed the plan.

Meanwhile, although a legal planning decision in terms of the LRP planned area was made, specific details of the

project, such as replotting, contribution ratio, and reserved land, had to be legally determined soon<sup>15</sup>. Termination of the requisition was scheduled in 1982. Subsequently, several amendments were made. As the MoF demanded the replacement of half the hilly state-owned land with flat land, it would increase the assessed right of flat land. Mayor Saigo accepted the disposal of land for a fee.

All new Honmoku areas had already been on the right track to be included in the planned Building Control Agreement, which would prevent the establishment of facilities on the hilltop area. Tamura used this building-control agreement as a restrictive tool for the MoF<sup>16</sup>.

In addition, the city was obliged to help the MoF resolve the problem of illegal occupation of state property adjacent to New Honmoku. The city outsourced the civil engineering work for the LRP to the Housing and Urban Development Corporation, an affiliated state-owned corporation. The Corporation bought state-owned land and constructed housing.

In October 1981, the MoF announced that it had agreed to 25.3% for state use, 37.5% for local use, and 37.2% for reserved land (Fig.11). The media included reserved land for local use and understood it 74.7% as local use. The MoF's land disposal policy appeared to have been achieved, but the wording was used to the advantage of each administrative body. In March 1982, when all alternative facilities were completed, Honmoku Districts 1 and 2 ended its 36 years of requisition.



Fig. 12. View of the residential area in the New Honmoku in 2023

## MANAGING THE BUILDING CONTROL AGREEMENT BY CITIZENS

In 1982, the NHDPC resolved the Building Control Agreement at its general meeting. Since the zoning regulations set out in the City Planning Act 1968 and the Building Standards Act 1950 are loose, it was impossible to set detailed controls covering each plot. Furthermore, there were no provisions for joint construction and no legal measures to regulate the use of land by new owners even when state-owned land was sold to them.

Circumstances emerged that required the MoF to enter into the Agreement<sup>17</sup>. This was caused by potential leaseholders who either rented land from the landowner and ran a tenancy business, or lived on the land themselves. Although prewar and wartime leases could be registered with the national agency, most cases did not have a formal contract with the landowners. Such tenants were called 'potential leaseholders'; among them were many latent leaseholders that had become state-owned. If they were allowed to regain their rights, they would also be rightful owners of the Agreement. The MoF would not be able to dispose or use the land without their consent.

Lawsuits restoring potential land leases began in 1982, just after the Building Control Agreement came into force. The issue was whether justifiable grounds existed for terminating the land lease between the former lessee and the MoF. In 1988, a verdict ruled that state-owned land had been converted into public facilities, with a need to utilize the land. By contrast, the plaintiff had no concrete land-use plan, and it was not its only property, as it had another place of residence. Therefore, the plaintiff was assumed to have no land requirements.

In 1985, in addition to the Building Control Agreement, the Building Control Guidelines were approved by the general meeting of the NHDPC, which covered urban design features such as sloping roofs, colouring, advertising regulations, greening, and cleaning. The Building Control Agreement was legally binding, but the set of guidelines was non-binding. A standing committee of landowners in charge of administering the agreement and guidelines was established, with a local architect as an advisor. The committee meets once a month, and only after this review is finished an application for a building permit can be submitted to the city administration. The committee is a volunteer initiative by landowners that continues to work until today (Fig.12).





Fig. 13. View from the Hilltop Park in 2023: primary school on the left and housing below

## CONCLUSIONS

Even after the US military's status was changed from an occupation force to a stationed force, it effectively met its own land needs through the act of requisition, communicating its requests to the occupied state authority and/or later independent state agency to raise their foreign force's right. During the occupation period and afterwards, the state government conducted requisition operations as a proxy agent of the occupation forces and, if they accepted, provided alternative land for the relocation of bases. The state's right was to persuade any districts of municipalities to accept what no one else wanted to take—the requisition order. During the protracted requisition, many private landowners gave up on restitution and sold their land to the state. The state cannot avoid its responsibility simply because the state authority in charge of requisition differs from the ministry in charge of state property. The landowners had their district right and continued to demand early restitution and compensation. Asukata argued that the state should not do real-estate business on their land in those districts and that their land should instead be utilized as a civic right for the benefit of the districts and the entire city. In addition, as in Yokosuka, the relocation negotiations proceeded by taking into consideration another city right. Without an alternative site, the return of the seized districts would not have been possible.

Asukata proclaimed the collaboration with the citizens to be indispensable. According to this principle, the Asukata Administration grappled with fulfilling objectives such as the collective return of the Honmoku District, the obligation to restore the land to its original condition, and the local use of state-owned land. Moreover, without the planner, Tamura, the Asukata Administration would not have been able to achieve a successful collaboration with the landowners and citizens in the restitution campaign and subsequent redevelopment project. Accordingly, the landowners did not just put forward their demands to the city but also communicated with the city closely and changed their attitude to one of thinking together and collaborating proactively.

In 2023 author conducted a survey about the ownership in the Hilltop Park that proved a successful transition of all state-owned land to the municipal possession (Fig.13). In retrospect, the example of Honmoku illustrates the importance of collaboration between citizens and public institutions for town-making.

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## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

**Toshio Taguchi** is an independent scholar who studies the planning history of Yokohama. Taguchi worked at Yokohama city as an urban designer. Taguchi and other peer scholars have set up voluntary institution and conducted research activities, in a scientific and objective manner, to re-evaluate Yokohama's planning.

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