

## **Reconstruction in service of the Japanese nation: Yokohama city and the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923**

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**Abstract:** *This paper examines the history of the reconstruction of Yokohama city after the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake in Japan and finds a basis of comparison with the reconstruction of Kobe city after the 1995 Great Awaji-Hanshin Earthquake. It suggests that a prominent feature of both reconstructions was a focus on the building of major national infrastructure projects, and that the enlistment of municipal residents and resources in national infrastructure building is an example of political elites 'cashing in on chaos' to strengthen their own position through disaster reconstruction. By examining the nature of the two earthquake reconstructions, which are separated by more than 70 years, it is evident that some degree of continuity exists in the Japanese nation building project.*

### **Introduction**

This paper looks to history to understand the political and economic contours of the reconstruction that was carried out in Kobe city after the 1995 Great Awaji-Hanshin Earthquake. This reconstruction is generally seen as having failed to deliver essential housing, services and public infrastructure to local residents.<sup>1</sup> The reconstruction of Yokohama city after the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake, which killed around 100,000 people, is described by historians in a similar way. Its main achievement, in the view of commentators, was 'massive reinforcement of the [Japanese] nation's infrastructure', including the expansion the Port of Yokohama and the creation of the Keihin industrial belt.<sup>2</sup> In 1973, Yamada Mamoru observed that this reconstruction left unrestored local housing, sewerage, water and rubbish disposal facilities.<sup>3</sup> He attributed this failure to Yokohama city officials' prioritisation of major national infrastructure projects in the city's reconstruction. This paper will talk about national infrastructure projects in the same way Gavan McCormack has in his chapter "The Construction State" as projects that 'reinforce... the priority of central, industrial and urban needs over regional, rural or agricultural interests.'<sup>4</sup> Most commonly, these projects aim to meet national commercial,

technological, military and strategic objectives. Over the reconstruction years 1923-35, Yokohama officials lobbied for the building of a number of infrastructure projects in the municipality, including an industrial belt, and for the expansion of Yokohama's international port. Jeffrey Hanes, in 2000, echoed Yamada's evaluation of this reconstruction when he wrote that '[t]he architects, planners and engineers who implemented the [earthquake] reconstruction program aimed not merely to restore previous infrastructural arrangements, but to strengthen and solidify these arrangements.'<sup>5</sup>

The paper first describes the response of Yokohama government officials in the months after the disaster. Soon after the earthquake, officials indicated a desire to reconstruct Yokohama city in line with the nation building goals of Taisho era (1912-27) Japan. Sandra Wilson has described the Taisho era as a time in Japan when 'the concept of local autonomy [was] remade from above, until it assumed a form specifically designed to strengthen and serve the needs of the [Japanese] nation state.'<sup>6</sup> Following on from Wilson's thesis, this paper cites the reconstruction of Yokohama city after the Great Kanto Earthquake as one example in which a municipality of Japan was enlisted in, and its leaders actively pursued, nation building in the Taisho era. In the reconstruction, the physical form of municipal Yokohama was reshaped to reflect the nation building imperatives of Taisho era Japan.

The paper secondly draws a parallel between Yokohama's earthquake reconstruction and Kobe's reconstruction of the 1990s. This comparison aims to suggest that the 'remaking of local autonomy' in Japan did not end in the Taisho era. 'Cashing in on chaos', as anti-globalisation writer Naomi Klein phrases it, continues in Japan today, with earthquake disasters continuing to present an opportunity for political elites to co-opt the residents and resources of Japan's municipalities in the consolidation of Japanese nationhood.<sup>7</sup>

### **Yokohama and the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake**

Koike Tokuhisa in 1925 wrote that 'Yokohama was eliminated from the living world in a puff of smoke' in the Great Kanto Earthquake.<sup>8</sup> Of the nearly 100,000 houses in Yokohama in 1923, 63 per cent were destroyed. Adding

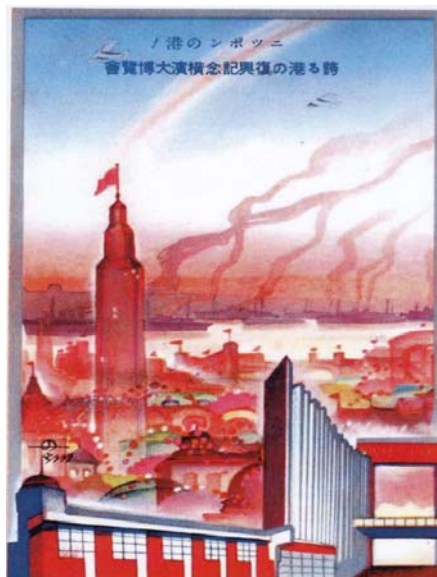
those houses that were partly destroyed, 95 per cent of households were left without shelter in the disaster.<sup>9</sup> The destruction of Yokohama's urban environment extended further than its built environment. Cliffs and riverbanks collapsed into the city's waterways. Together with corpses and burnt out boats, this made rivers and canals impassable. Passage through city streets was similarly obstructed by road fissures, rubble, corpses, fallen trees and powerlines and refugees fleeing with hand drawn carts piled high with household items. There were cries of despair in the city as people lost sight of their loved ones in the crush of the crowds swarming the inner streets.<sup>10</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of this disaster, Yokohama municipal officials were anxious that Tokyo acknowledge the city's predicament. Mayor Watanabe Katsusaburo worried that because Tokyo had been similarly affected by the earthquake, and because Yokohama was located nearly 30 kilometres south of the capital, 'everyone would focus on Tokyo and Yokohama would be forgotten.'<sup>11</sup> Indeed, rumours that Yokohama was 'doomed' proliferated in the capital immediately after the earthquake.<sup>12</sup> Railway ministry officials, who had been in Yokohama at the time of the disaster, reported back to the central government that there was 'no possibility of recovery for the city.'<sup>13</sup>

Just eight days after the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1 September 1923, the secretary of Yokohama city assembly, Nara Takeji, travelled to the Japanese capital. There he confessed to Tokyo's mayor Nagata Yujiro that Yokohama was in a 'pathetic' state; there was no hope for the city's future. Forty thousand of its citizens were killed and 90 per cent of its land area was burnt out. Nara concluded dramatically that the city's only hope for survival lay in its incorporation as part of greater Tokyo.<sup>14</sup> Nara's suggestion was a radical response to the situation faced by the city after the magnitude 7.9 earthquake, as Yokohama belonged to a different prefecture, and had an independent administration.<sup>15</sup> Not surprisingly, therefore, his suggestion was never pursued.

Nonetheless, Nara's plea for municipal incorporation indicates the mindset of Yokohama government officials following the Great Kanto Earthquake. In

order that the earthquake not render Yokohama ‘doomed’ or ‘forgotten’ by the Japanese nation, officials sought to use the city’s reconstruction to forge closer ties with Tokyo as the physical, psychological and philosophical centre of the nation. They initially lobbied the central government for the city’s inclusion in the Home Ministry’s Imperial Capital Reconstruction Plan (ICRP), which targeted the disaster areas of Tokyo. When the plan was abandoned two months after the earthquake in December 1923, municipal officials waged a campaign for the reconstruction and expansion of Yokohama’s port as the ‘lifeblood’ of the Japanese nation (see Figure 1).<sup>16</sup> They plotted the ‘saving’ of the city through rebuilding it in the vision of the infrastructure needs of a newly industrialising Japan. Even if city officials had wanted to make projects that relieved and restored the lives of local residents after the earthquake, they were acutely aware of the tenuous position that Yokohama occupied within the Japanese nation because of the earthquake. They knew that reconstruction money would be secured, and the city’s importance confirmed, if Yokohama’s reconstruction took on the shape of a project to enhance national infrastructure.



**Figure 1:**

**Japan’s port! The Great Yokohama Exposition: Proudly commemorating the reconstruction of Yokohama Port, 1927 Postcard.**

While Yokohama city might not have been geographically ‘peripheral’ in Japan, with the occurrence of the earthquake local officials certainly perceived their city to be far removed from the priorities of the centre. The national government had imposed a *taisan-shugi* [evacuation and dispersal] policy on Yokohama immediately after the disaster because there was a ‘break down of social order and a shortage of food’ in the city.<sup>17</sup> This prompted Mayor Watanabe to wonder whether the city ‘would be killed because of the great number of citizens evacuating its bounds.’<sup>18</sup> Of further concern was the rumour circulating in Yokohama immediately after the earthquake that the national capital was to be physically transferred to another location. This would effectively position Yokohama at a further distance from Tokyo. While the Japanese emperor soon decreed that the imperial capital would not be moved, Koike notes that one impetus for the municipal government’s publication of the *Yokohama shi nippou* [Yokohama City Daily] newspaper for 30 days after the earthquake was a need to calm the ‘anxiety of [Yokohama] residents about... rumours of the transfer of the capital [*sentō*].’<sup>19</sup>

Yokohama municipal officials committed themselves to petitioning, telegramming and visiting Tokyo authorities immediately after the earthquake. Even before the establishment of a temporary municipal office in Yokohama Park on the day of the earthquake, city officials travelled to the home ministry to report on damage sustained to Yokohama, and to request assistance. Until the collapsed Kanagawa railway bridge was replaced with a temporary structure on 4 September, officials had to walk the 30 kilometres to Tokyo to make requests for national support.<sup>20</sup> In the two weeks after the disaster, Yokohama officials, including Secretary Nara, made four visits to the capital. The visits entailed the presentation of wide and varied reasons as to why the city should not be forgotten in the reconstruction; reasons that ranged from the necessity of the Port of Yokohama for the future survival of the capital, to the possibility of Japan attracting negative international attention if the many foreign residents of Yokohama weren’t properly attended to in the disaster.<sup>21</sup>

Back in Yokohama, the message of the emperor’s rescript on reconstruction ‘not only for restoration but for future development’ was taken up by Mayor

Watanabe in his 'mission statement' headlining the first issue of the *Yokohama shi nippou* newspaper on 11 September 1923. Less than two weeks after the earthquake, and even though Yokohama was still in the midst of intense disaster relief efforts and attempts to suppress civil unrest, Watanabe proclaimed that the reconstruction of Yokohama 'as an international trading city' was 'not at all an impossible dream'.<sup>22</sup> At the first meeting of the Yokohama city assembly on 11 September he additionally proposed that, before all else, Yokohama municipal government should announce publicly that the city was 'ready and willing to build an ideal [*risouteki*] greater Yokohama that was double the size of the previous city'.<sup>23</sup> His slogan for the reconstruction, 'the building of a new Yokohama' [*Shin Yokohama shi no kensetsu*], was repeated in editorials of the *Yokohama shi nippou* thereafter.

Therefore in the weeks after the earthquake, Yokohama officials pursued reconstruction as the city's highest priority before relief and restoration. At an emergency sitting of the Yokohama municipal assembly held just two weeks after the earthquake on 15 September, Watanabe attempted to elicit a pledge from the municipal assembly to reconstruct the city, no matter what the plans of the capital. Watanabe later stated that he made the request because he 'thought that the uncertainty circulating within the municipality, [indicated by the fear that] "Yokohama is doomed", needed to be dispelled'.<sup>24</sup> The assembly's reply to his suggestion that they 'did not have the authority to declare such a decision', and that it 'would be against the law for the assembly to permit such a resolution' reflected the mindset of municipal officials that the city's reconstruction was to be a national affair.<sup>25</sup> Holding out for this meant that, as Yamada Mamoru has described, 'for a long period after the earthquake, no concrete plans for the reconstruction of Yokohama were made, and the city was left in a state of destruction.'<sup>26</sup>

### **The Imperial Capital Reconstruction Plan**

After the emergency assembly on 15 September 1923, Yokohama city councillors embarked on an unprecedented visit to all of the ministries of the national government. To each minister they presented a resolution passed by

the Yokohama city assembly that, 'at all costs, Tokyo and Yokohama should be treated as the same unit.'<sup>27</sup> The petition called for 'similar treatment in reconstruction for Yokohama [as Tokyo]' and, as item number one, requested that Yokohama be included in the ICRP.<sup>28</sup>

Yokohama municipal officials campaigned for the city's inclusion in the ICRP on the grounds that the national capital was historically dependent on Yokohama. Yokohama officials cited the city's status as Japan's only international trading port, the only port in the capital region and one of the three largest ports in the Far East as reasons why Tokyo could not fulfil its role as the imperial capital without concurrently reconstructing its 'gateway'.<sup>29</sup> Abe Yasunari suggests that 'Yokohama officials' argument that Tokyo was dependent on their city echoed previous attempts by municipal officials to construct an urban mindset that was closely intertwined with the capital. He quotes a *Yokohama boueki shimpou* [Yokohama Trade News] editorial as propagandising in 1922 that, 'materially and spiritually, Yokohama has been a place that has contributed overwhelmingly to the progress of national destiny.'<sup>30</sup> In fact, Yokohama had been transformed from a fishing village only because it had been designated a treaty port in July 1859. Nonetheless, Mayor Watanabe reiterated the story of Yokohama's historical importance to the Japanese nation in an announcement to the city assembly soon after the earthquake,

I strongly believe that Yokohama must now be put at the centre of the national government's administration. It goes without saying that Yokohama is the gateway to the nation's capital. Tokyo is able to be the imperial capital because of its incorporation of Yokohama and, without Yokohama, Tokyo would not be fully complete in its status as the imperial capital.<sup>31</sup>

The wish of Yokohama municipal officials to have the city included in the reconstruction plans of the capital was eventually granted. The impetus for Yokohama's inclusion came not, however, from any acknowledgment of Tokyo's historical dependence on Yokohama as a port city. Rather, as Hanes

contends, the earthquake was viewed by Tokyo planners and bureaucrats as an opportunity to strengthen the economic base of the imperial nation.<sup>32</sup> The man who led this charge was known as the 'big braggart', Home Minister Gotou Shimpei. He saw the earthquake disaster as an opportunity to enact broad spanning urban social and infrastructure reform, and drew up a plan for the reconstruction of the earthquake-affected areas of *both* Tokyo and Yokohama.<sup>33</sup>

Gotou's ICRP incorporated Yokohama's reconstruction as part of the 'rebuilding of national unity'. The national government would fund Yokohama's reconstruction, and Yokohama would be made an integral part of the grand new imperial metropolis. Gotou proposed that the Port of Yokohama 'be equipped with facilities so that the port can [again] serve as a gateway to Tokyo.'<sup>34</sup> At his direction, the head of the home ministry's civil works bureau devised a plan to repair the greatly damaged port. It was reported that the national government would make 'great efforts to achieve the port's third phase expansion, which had been delayed, as part of Yokohama's reconstruction.'<sup>35</sup> The Reconstruction Board requested that Yokohama supply representatives to the Board, together with projected reconstruction budgets and city plans. Mayor Watanabe supplied a comprehensive proposal for Yokohama's reconstruction to the board on 10 November 1923.<sup>36</sup>

As mentioned, the Japanese emperor had declared in his Imperial Rescript on Reconstruction of 5 September 1923, that Tokyo would be reconstructed to 'not only recover its original condition but also to look toward future development.'<sup>37</sup> Home Minister Gotou Shimpei waged a campaign for reconstruction that went beyond even the high aims of this rescript. He said that the earthquake reconstruction represented 'the hopes and dreams of Japan itself', and that the sudden emergence of a vast, scorched land was a 'true, golden opportunity' to 'construct an ideal imperial city' and turn the earthquake disaster into prosperity.<sup>38</sup> The national mood after the earthquake was that a 'clean slate' had been presented on which monumental visions of reconstruction could be played out. The visions imagined not only utopian physical reconstruction, but also comprehensive moral reconstruction, as



Janet Borland has discussed.<sup>39</sup> Further, the home ministry's English language volume promoting the reconstruction, *The Great Earthquake of 1923 in Japan*, shows the proportions that the reconstruction took on as a nation building project,

The almost total destruction of Tokyo, the capital of the Empire, and the complete destruction of Yokohama, the foremost of our leading ports, inflicted upon the nation a cruel wound and one not easy to heal. Japan ranked with the principal Powers of the world after the Russo-Japanese War... Suddenly an act of God struck her a terrible blow, and the devastation of the metropolis and prosperous cities and towns greatly affected her international position. When we take this fact into consideration, we are bound to believe that the restoration of the Imperial Capital is necessary for the restoration of the Empire.<sup>40</sup>

Yokohama city officials channelled this hyperbolic national mood in their own framing of a vision for a 'new' Yokohama city after the disaster. In their pronouncements after the earthquake, this took the form of reconstruction plans for the city as 'greater Yokohama' [*dai-Yokohama*]. City officials crafted the rhetoric of their announcements to complement the discourse of 'national greatness' that Wilson has observed as circulating in Japan around this time.<sup>41</sup> They declared the commitment of the city and its residents to the 'transformation of Yokohama into a major industrial city.'<sup>42</sup> In the plans presented by the municipal government to the Reconstruction Board, Yokohama's reconstruction comprised the ambitious projects of an expanded port and breakwater, coastal land reclamation and Keihin (Tokyo-Yokohama) industrial belt.<sup>43</sup>

Wilson has identified industrialisation rhetoric as comprising one prong of the 'national greatness' discourse circulating in Taisho era Japan. She writes, for example, that, at the many expositions that were held during the Taisho era,

The linking of the central symbol of the nation – the emperor – with the idea of national progress and international status elevated these

concerns to the highest possible level, suggesting that the goal of national greatness – expressed primarily through industrial production... should surpass all other goals.<sup>44</sup>

Yokohama municipal officials attempted to use disaster reconstruction to reinvent their city as an historic and central pillar of the nation's industrialising project. Through plans for reconstruction, they positioned the city as ready to service the industrialising requirements of the nation in the Taisho era. In Yamada's critical view,

Major infrastructure projects planned under the guise of 'disaster reconstruction' furnished the needs of the national capital, rather than the disaster recovery needs of local citizens. Officials effectively 'capitalised on catastrophe' to position their city closer to the centre of the empire's power and wealth in 1920s Japan. The Imperial Capital Reconstruction Plan...was Tokyo-centric and involved state power to prioritise industry and the military... [T]he city jumped on the bandwagon of imperial capital-centrism in order that Yokohama... would be reconstructed.<sup>45</sup>

### **The demise of the ICRP**

In December 1923, the Reconstruction Board was disbanded, and the ICRP was scrapped due to lack of finance ministry support. Yokohama municipal officials, who had been working closely with Gotou, were compelled to narrow the basis of their appeal for the reconstruction of Yokohama as key to the viability of the nation. Tokyo had already given the municipality a clear indication of the type of earthquake reconstruction plans that it would support. These were plans that would furnish the centre with industrial infrastructure that was paid for by municipal residents. Yokohama municipal officials narrowed their reconstruction plans to focus almost entirely on the expansion of the Port of Yokohama.<sup>46</sup> The eight-item resolution bill of 15 September 1923 for Yokohama's reconstruction had listed the demand that 'the repair of Yokohama Port should be carried out swiftly and in an idealised manner' as

item number five. Yokohama Deputy Mayor Aoki, speaking later at a citizens meeting on 16 December 1923, said the following,

Looking at the future reconstruction plan, in relation to Tokyo, there are plans for the expansion of roads to 20-30 *ken* and the construction of primary school parks, none of which has been planned for Yokohama. I, personally, can put up with this if Yokohama's lifeline, its port, is properly reconstructed.<sup>47</sup>

Phrases that proclaimed the Port of Yokohama as the 'gateway to the capital' [*Teito no genkan*], the 'imperial port' [*Teitokou*], and 'the lifeblood of the capital' [*Teito no ikichi*] emerged popularly in the press in Yokohama around this time. At its crescendo, Mayor Ariyoshi Chuichi, who had taken over from Mayor Watanabe on 7 May 1925, proclaimed that the city had initiated the construction of a new port seawall because the Port of Yokohama had an obligation to the 'happiness of world human civilisation.' He continued that, with this, the Port of Yokohama would become not only the nation's most equipped major port, but also the most well established port in the Orient.<sup>48</sup>

Even with the abandonment of the Imperial Capital Reconstruction Plan, municipal officials continued to sell the reconstruction of Yokohama city in terms that would generate the most benefit for the industrialising nation. The Port of Yokohama was not only the city's most tangible historical link to the prosperity of the capital and the nation, it was the only feature of the municipality that was, at that point in time, indispensable to the centre. The focus on Yokohama's port in the city's reconstruction contrasted with the lack of attention given to water, sewerage, and transport facilities, as well as land rezoning. Because so much land was rezoned after the earthquake to make way for the Keihin industrial belt, Yokohama residents became desperate to secure plots for housing and farming. An editorial in the 8 February 1924 edition of the *Yokohama boeki shimpou* newspaper wrote that,

The biggest flaw of the Yokohama reconstruction is that, even though regular citizens of the city have urgently needed many things after the

earthquake disaster, these needs have been largely ignored... The most obvious and terrible of these is the [local government's] failure to intervene in disputes between landowners and tenants.<sup>49</sup>

### **Municipal 'reconstruction' as the nation's port**

Greatness, which is expressed with the Chinese character pronounced 'dai', meaning 'big', appeared for a second time in the reconstruction plans of Yokohama officials, this time in 1929. On 1 June, Mayor Ariyoshi unveiled in a radio broadcast from the Tokyo Central Broadcasting Station five projects that would comprise the renewed '*dai-Yokohama*' reconstruction plan, and support the national government's plans for industrial infrastructure. Three of the five projects related to the expansion of the Port of Yokohama. Moreover, the projects aimed specifically to connect Yokohama's port to the capital:

Since Yokohama is the imperial capital's international port, domestic port facilities should be constructed at the Sumida river estuary in order to properly connect Tokyo harbour with Yokohama Port. Also, to contribute to the development of a coastal industrial district, the Keihin [Yokohama-Tokyo] canal shall be constructed.<sup>50</sup>

The editors of *Yokohama koushi* [Yokohama port history] note the centrality of the port in the life and history of Yokohama city in writing that 'when speaking of "Yokohama"... both now and in the past, the city emerges out of the structural pillar of the "port economy" [*minato keizai*].'<sup>51</sup> Yokohama emerged as a port town only after being opened up to international trade when put under the direct control of the central Shogunate in 1859. In 1889, Yokohama was one of 39 towns nominated by the national government for incorporation as a city, and had the highest rate of growth and population concentration of these newly designated cities.<sup>52</sup> This was in contrast to Tokyo which increased in population only after 1891, when major railroad lines gave it access to the 'lifeblood' of trade flowing from the port of Yokohama.<sup>53</sup> Yokohama faced losing the substantial power that this history granted the city when, after the earthquake, in words of Mayor Watanabe, 'any former shadow of the well-equipped port facility [had] completely disappeared.'<sup>54</sup>

Ariyoshi made plans for three major industrial projects soon after taking office, beginning with the construction of a port seawall. The third phase of port expansion was recommenced after the end of the port restoration in 1925. A seventeen-year budget plan for the expansion was submitted to the assembly, to be funded by the municipal government for the first three years, and then jointly financed by the municipal and national governments thereafter.<sup>55</sup> In actual fact, Yokohama municipal government ultimately paid for the entire expansion. The reconstruction debt weighed heavily on municipal finances for many years, causing the city's residents much hardship.<sup>56</sup> By 1937, the total amount of municipal bonds on issue (unredeemed) amounted to 17.91 million yen. Per capita, this was 236 yen or 1,120 yen per Yokohama residential household.<sup>57</sup> Further, reconstruction expenses blew out Yokohama's extraordinary account, and this continued with the later municipalisation of housing and public works.

Reclaiming its history as the 'imperial port' was a costly feat for Yokohama city. Reconstruction expenses were so extreme that, from 1931 when the municipal bonds issued for the reconstruction were incorporated as a special accounting item, the size of Yokohama's extraordinary account exceeded that of the general account.<sup>58</sup> The amount of municipal bonds on issue increased from around 28 million yen in 1923 to 55 million yen in 1924, 70 million yen in 1925, and 100 million yen in 1928.<sup>59</sup> Most of the money went towards port and canal expansion, as well as land reclamation to facilitate the development of a major industrial belt between Yokohama and Tokyo. Because of the earthquake disaster, Yokohama city residents effectively ended up paying for a portion of Japan's national infrastructure into the 1930s.

The efforts of Yokohama residents in building and funding this major national infrastructure were cynically commemorated under the banner of 'disaster reconstruction'. Yokohama residents were praised in official speeches given at both the 1927 and 1929 municipal reconstruction commemoration ceremonies held in Yokohama, both of which were attended by members of the imperial family. Nonetheless, Mayor Ariyoshi was careful to frame his

public comment on the massive building project as commemorating a *local* event by acknowledging city residents who had ‘made earnest efforts to restore the mission and function of the city in the reconstruction.’<sup>60</sup> The true nature of the sacrifice that residents had been expected to make after the 1923 disaster was expressed less obliquely in a speech by agriculture and forestry minister Yamamoto Teijirou. At the 1929 ceremony he proclaimed that ‘the citizens of Yokohama should not lose the spirit they have now for reconstruction, and should contribute more and more to the prosperity of the Japanese nation’; he instructed that this commitment, moreover, ‘should never cease’.<sup>61</sup> Yokohama’s ‘reconstruction’ of the previous six years had indeed been a project to enhance the prosperity of the Japanese nation. This fact was reiterated in the commemoration speech of Japan’s minister of commerce and industry, Nakahashi Tokugorou, at the 1929 commemoration. He said that,

The superiority of the Japanese populace is evident in the fact that a spirit of unyielding diligence and effort has meant that [Yokohama’s] reconstruction has been carried out very quickly... we should be celebrating today not just for Yokohama city, but also for the reconstruction of Yokohama Port as the imperial gateway, and for the reconstruction of industrial Japan.<sup>62</sup>

The call for Yokohama residents to make ongoing sacrifice in this endeavour was put out by Japan’s prime minister at the time, Tanaka Giichi, who delivered the last word at the 1929 commemoration ceremony,

We can be proud that the city has become one of the biggest trading ports in the Orient. When the large-scale construction of Yokohama Port (which is currently underway) is completed, it is already not hard to imagine the prosperity that will ensue. I hope that those citizens involved in the reconstruction will be satisfied not just with changing the appearance of the city, but will make further efforts to fully establish the city’s facilities in order to contribute to the future of the nation.<sup>63</sup>

## **The Great Awaji-Hanshin Earthquake**

At first glance, Yokohama's reconstruction after the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923 and Kobe's Awaji-Hanshin Earthquake reconstruction onwards from 1995 are similar in their large-scale project style. In addition to Kobe airport, a Port Island biotechnology complex, Harima Science Garden City, and a medical and pharmaceuticals industry belt were key projects of the Kobe reconstruction. The revival of existing industry was also a priority, with manufacturing in greater Kobe being restored to 98 per cent of pre-earthquake levels less than 15 months after the earthquake. The Hanshin expressway was rebuilt in 21 months, and the complete reconstruction of the port was achieved in 26 months.<sup>64</sup>

In both cases, earthquake reconstruction implemented through major industrial projects did not deliver disaster relief to local citizens. Ten years after Kobe's earthquake, which killed 5,999 people, economist Katsuto Uchihashi wrote in a Japanese daily newspaper in January 2005 that 'neither the city of Kobe nor its economy has really revived [sic]. The effects of the quake disaster are still felt.'<sup>65</sup> Kobe's reconstruction was marked by large-scale, nationally-beneficial construction projects, the largest being the offshore airport. The reconstruction took place in an era of widespread local government amalgamation, and the decentralisation of local government functions and financing. More than restoration and relief, the reconstruction had at its heart, the attainment of national infrastructure goals; in twentieth-century Japan these were major transport and logistics facilities servicing the Asia region.<sup>66</sup> Kobe's mayor ignored a plebiscite of residents that returned a majority opposition to the airport plan. Plans that were previously unviable were suddenly made possible by the advent of the earthquake, as a newspaper reported was apparently the case for the airport,

In a meeting with the transport ministry in November [2003], a group of business leaders... admitted that the contentious Kobe airport was not originally necessary, but that it was built as part of the city's restoration plan after the 1995 earthquake.<sup>67</sup>

Kobe city government faced severe financial difficulties in pursuing large-scale reconstruction projects during a time of long-term recession. Between the years 1999 and 2003, the city spent 31.1 billion yen to construct the airport. This produced debts of 3.28 trillion yen by 2002.<sup>68</sup> The city had debts of 1.7 trillion yen already existing before the quake.<sup>69</sup> Municipal residents were not only enlisted in long-term debt repayment, but they also suffered the environmental damage imposed by the huge land-reclamation project underpinning the airport development. Furthermore, the major-project style of the reconstruction, designed to grab the media's attention, diverted public focus away from the issues of housing and health that pressed on individual residents in the disaster aftermath. It was five years before all those placed in temporary housing were provided with a place to live.<sup>70</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Due to the number and nature of the years intervening between the Kanto and Awaji-Hanshin earthquakes, it is difficult to draw any definite parallel between the two reconstructions. Analysis of the 1923 Yokohama city earthquake reconstruction suggests that a historical precedent exists in Japan for earthquake reconstruction failing to deliver desirable outcomes for municipal residents. The scope of this article has precluded lengthy examination of the arrangements of the centre-municipal administrative relationship that might have been behind the nature of the reconstructions that were carried out in Kobe and Yokohama.<sup>71</sup> Even setting these arrangements aside, the intention of municipal political elites to use the earthquake reconstruction to build infrastructure that would primarily benefit the industrial (or other) goals of Tokyo, suggests that a particular kind of centre-municipal arrangement endures in modern Japan. In both reconstructions, as a result of municipal and national government moves to 'cash in on chaos', previously unviable infrastructure projects were realised, and their construction was paid for by municipal residents.<sup>72</sup> In the case of Yokohama, these projects (an international port and industrial belt) redefined the city to directly service the capital. One could conclude, therefore, that the Japanese nation-building



project over the past seventy years has capitalised on catastrophe in furthering its aims, thus calling into question the idea of natural disasters as destroyers of nations, as paradoxically, the resulting reconstruction can be used as an aid to nation building.

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<sup>1</sup> Katsuto Uchihashi, 'Poor Kobe quake victims fall through cracks', *Asahi shinbun*, 21 January 2005, at: <http://www.asahi.com/english/opinion/TKY200501220158.html>, Accessed 3 June 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Gavan McCormack, *The Emptiness of Japanese Affluence*, ME Sharpe, Armonk, NY, 1996, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Mamoru Yamada, 'Keihin in okeru toshi mondai no keifu: 5 Kanto daishinsai to Yokohama fukkou 2 [Genealogy of Tokyo-Yokohama urban problems: the Great Kanto Earthquake and Yokohama's reconstruction (No. 5)]', *Jimbun kenkyuu* [Studies in Humanities] Vol. 55, 1973, p. 107.

<sup>4</sup> McCormack, *The Emptiness of Japanese Affluence*, p. 52.

<sup>5</sup> Jeffrey Hanes, 'Urban Planning as An Urban Problem: The Reconstruction of Tokyo After The Great Kanto Earthquake', *Seisaku Kagaku* [Policy Science], Vol. 7, No. 3, March 2000, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Sandra Wilson, 'The Discourse of National Greatness in Japan 1890-1919', *Japanese Studies*, Vol. 25, 2005, p. 45.

<sup>7</sup> Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, Metropolitan Books, New York, 2007; see also <http://www.naomiklein.org/main>, Accessed 3 June 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Tokuhiisa Koike, *Yokohama fukkouroku* [Record of the Yokohama Reconstruction], unknown publisher, Yokohama, 1925, p. 217.

<sup>9</sup> Shunsuke Tsurumi, *Nihon no 100-nen* [100 years of Japan], Chikumashobou, Tokyo, 1960, Vol. 5, p. 30.

<sup>10</sup> Koike, *Yokohama fukkouroku*, p. 271.

<sup>11</sup> Yokohama Shiyakusho Shishi (eds), *Yokohama shi shinsai shi* [A History of the Yokohama City Earthquake Disaster], Yokohama, City Hall, 1931, Vol. 1, p. 71.

<sup>12</sup> See 'Otorare sanzan ataru shi no Yokohama [The Tragedy of the Withering Dead in Yokohama]', *Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun*, 9 October 1923, or 'Fuhai shita shitai gaumi ni ukabi riku ni yokkoharu kage mo nai Yokohama', *Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun*, 12 September 1923, reprinted in Ikegami Jirou, *Kanto daishinsai touji no shimbun kiji* [Newspaper Articles from the Time of the Great Kanto Earthquake], (private publication, details unknown), pp. 168 and 21.

<sup>13</sup> Yokohama zeikan 120-nen henshuu iinkai, *Yokohama zeikan 120-nen shi* [A 120-year History of the Yokohama Customs Office], Yokohama zeikan, Yokohama City, 1981, p. 307.

<sup>14</sup> 'Yokohama wo dai-Tokyo to tougou ni shitai [I want Yokohama to become an amalgamated

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part of Greater Tokyo]', *Tokyo nichinichi shimbun*, 11 September 1923, reprinted in Ikegami Jirou, *Kanto daishinsai touji no shimbun kiji*, p. 20.

<sup>15</sup> A number of developments had seriously weakened the position of Japan's municipalities in their relationship with the centre by the Taisho era. Firstly, the 1 October 1911 Regulations for the Organisation of Cities (Law No. 68) subjected municipal government to more stringent national government requirements of delegated administration [*shi no koukyou jimū*]. The law specified that local government would be made responsible for the levying and collection of taxes and fees, the management of tram lines, water-works and other utilities, the building and operation of primary schools, public health activities, provision of care for dependents, control and advancement of labour, and the building of roads, bridges and canals. Secondly, in the Taisho era, the delegated administrative duties of the national government were carried out by municipal government on the basis of an unfunded mandate. That is, requirements for municipal implementation of education, public works and city planning programs were established (i.e. mandated) by the national government but requisite funding was not provided. Thirdly, by the Taisho era, municipal government had to obtain higher approval for loans, large or small, and control over municipal borrowing was exercised by the finance ministry. What cities could spend was limited by tax rates, which were fixed by the home ministry. Municipal tax revenue was derived mainly from surtaxes on national taxes and only in cases of special necessity could local taxes be levied. The larger proportion of municipal revenue now came from local fees and a comparatively small amount from subsidies from the national treasury. See Chapter 1 of Caroline Spencer, 'At the Epicentre of the Japanese National Periphery: The Reconstruction of Yokohama City After the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake,' unpublished MA thesis, The University of Melbourne, Asia Institute, 2005.

<sup>16</sup> See Charles Schencking, 'Catastrophe, Opportunity, Contestation: The Fractured Politics of Reconstructing Tokyo Following the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 3, 1996, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Koike, *Yokohama fukkouroku*, p. 263.

<sup>18</sup> Yokohama shiyakusho shishi, *Yokohama shinsai shi*, p. 73.

<sup>19</sup> Koike, *Yokohama fukkouroku*, p. 435.

<sup>20</sup> Yokohama shiyakusho shishi, *Yokohama shinsai shi*, p. 71.

<sup>21</sup> Yokohama shiyakusho shishi, *Yokohama shinsai shi*, p. 71.

<sup>22</sup> Katsusaburo Watanabe, 'Hakkou no shushi [Mission statement of publication]', *Yokohama shi nippou* [Yokohama City Newspaper], 11 September 1923.

<sup>23</sup> *Yokohama shi shi* [History of Yokohama City], Yokohama City, Yokohama, 1989, vol. 5.1, p. 89.

<sup>24</sup> Yokohama shiyakusho shishi, *Yokohama shinsai shi*, p. 72.

<sup>25</sup> Yokohama shiyakusho shishi, *Yokohama shinsai shi*, p. 72.

<sup>26</sup> Yamada, 'Keihin in okeru toshi mondai no keifu', p. 107.

<sup>27</sup> 'Yokohama shi no shourai ni tai shi kokka no enjo shizoku [Municipal calls for national

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support for Yokohama City's future]', *Yokohama shi nippou* [Yokohama City Daily], 11 September 1923.

<sup>28</sup> 'Yokohama shi no shourai ni tai shi kokka no enjo shizoku'; *Yokohama shi shi*, vol. 5.1, p. 91.

<sup>29</sup> Together with Shanghai and Hong Kong.

<sup>30</sup> Yasunari Abe, 'Yokohama no shinsai fukkou rekishi no ishiki (1923-33) [The Yokohama disaster reconstruction and historical consciousness (1923-32)]', *Nihon shi kenkyuu* [Research into Japanese History], April 1998, p. 123.

<sup>31</sup> Yokohama shiyakusho shishi, *Yokohama shinsai shi*, p. 79.

<sup>32</sup> Hanes, 'Urban Planning as an Urban Problem', p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Schencking, 'Catastrophe, Opportunity, Contestation', p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> Schencking, 'Catastrophe, Opportunity, Contestation', p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> 'Repair construction to Yokohama Port to cost 10 million yen', 13 September 1923, *Tokyo nichinichi shimbun*, reprinted in Ikegami Jirou, *Kanto daishinsai touji no shimbun kiji*, p. 34.

<sup>36</sup> 'Application is made for a budget for Yokohama's reconstruction of 580 million yen', 11 November 1923, *Tokyo nichinichi shimbun* [Tokyo Daily Newspaper], reprinted in Edamatsu Shigeyuki et al, *Taisho nyuusu jiten* [Newspaper encyclopaedia of the Taisho era], Mainichi Komyuunikeeshonzu, Tokyo, 1986-1989, Vol. 6, p. 230.

<sup>37</sup> Yuusuke Tsurumi, *Goto Shinpei*, Goto Shinpei-haku Denki Hensankai, Tokyo, 1938, Vol. 4, p. 582

<sup>38</sup> Hanes, 'Urban Planning as an Urban Problem', p. 127; Nobuki Mochida, *Toshi zaisei no kenkyuu*, Tokyo University Press, Tokyo, 1993, p. 12.

<sup>39</sup> Janet Borland, 'Capitalising on Catastrophe,' unpublished MA thesis, The University of Melbourne, 2003.

<sup>40</sup> Home Office, *The Great Earthquake of 1923 in Japan*, Tokyo, 1926, p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> As discussed by Sandra Wilson in 'The Discourse of National Greatness in Japan, 1890-1919', *Japanese Studies*, Vol. 25, 2005, pp. 35-52.

<sup>42</sup> Katsusaburo Watanabe, 'Yokohama shi no shourai ha dai kougyou chi da [The future of Yokohama as a major industrial district]', *Yokohama shi nippou*, 10 October 1923. See Abe for discussion about the dedication of Yokohama residents to the reconstruction as 'national citizens'.

<sup>43</sup> For example, 'Kokka teki keizai hakai wo naosu ha kouwan no shuuchiku ga daiichigi [To fix the destruction of the national economy, the repair of Port is top priority]', 19 September 1923 *Yokohama shi nippou* and 'Yokohama shi no shourai ha dai kougyou chi da [Yokohama City's future is as a great industrial district]', *Yokohama shi nippou*, 9 October 1923.

<sup>44</sup> Wilson, 'The Discourse of National Greatness in Japan', p. 39.

<sup>45</sup> Yamada, 'Keihin in okeru toshi mondai no keifu', p. 107.

<sup>46</sup> This shift in the campaigning of Yokohama representatives is narrated in the official *Yokohama fukkou shi* [Yokohama reconstruction history], which was published in 1932 and

overseen by Yokohama mayors Watanabe Katsusaburo and Ariyoshi Chuuiichi. In particular, the transcripts of the official speeches given at the 1929 Yokohama Reconstruction Commemoration event included in the volume illustrate the shift.

<sup>47</sup> Mamoru Yamada, *Keihin toshi mondai shi* [History of Keihin Urban Problems], Kouseisha, Tokyo, 1974, p. 138.

<sup>48</sup> Yokohama municipal office, *Yokohama fukkou shi*, 1932, Vol. 4, p. 738.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Yamada, 'Keihin ni okeru toshi mondai no keifu', p. 105.

<sup>50</sup> Koike, *Yokohama fukkou roku*, p. 447.

<sup>51</sup> Yokohama kou shinkou kyokai, *Yokohama koushi*, Yokohama-shi kouwan kyoku kikakuka: Yokohama, 1989, Vol. 1, p. 73.

<sup>52</sup> Yuzo Kato, *Yokohama past and present*, Yokohama City University, Yokohama, 1990, p. 97.

<sup>53</sup> Takeo Yazaki, *Social Change and the City in Japan: From Earliest Times through the Industrial Revolution*, Japan Publications, New York, 1968, p. 317.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Yamada, 'Keihin ni okeru toshi mondai no keifu,' p. 148.

<sup>55</sup> Yokohama municipal office, *Yokohama fukkou shi*, Vol. 3, p. 382.

<sup>56</sup> Kato, *Yokohama Past and Present*, p. 142.

<sup>57</sup> Yokohama shiritsu daigaku keizai kenkyuujo, *Yokohama keizai bunka jiten*, Yokohama, 1958, p. 45.

<sup>58</sup> Yokohama shiritsu daigaku keizai kenkyuujo, *Yokohama keizai bunka jiten*, p. 43.

<sup>59</sup> Yokohama shiyakusho shishi, *Yokohama shinsai shi*, p. 45.

<sup>60</sup> Yokohama municipal office, *Yokohama fukkou shi*, Vol. 4, p. 737.

<sup>61</sup> Yokohama municipal office, *Yokohama fukkou shi*, Vol. 4, p. 826.

<sup>62</sup> Minister of commerce and industry, Nakahashi Tokugorou, at the 1929 reconstruction commemoration held in Yokohama, quoted in Yokohama municipal office, *Yokohama fukkou shi*, Vol. 4, p. 827.

<sup>63</sup> Minister of commerce and industry, Nakahashi Tokugorou, *Yokohama fukkou shi*, Vol. 4, p. 823.

<sup>64</sup> George Horwich, 'Economic lessons of the Kobe earthquake', *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, Vol. 48, no. 3, 2000, p. 522.

<sup>65</sup> Uchihashi, 'Poor Kobe quake victims fall through cracks'.

<sup>66</sup> Uchihashi, 'Poor Kobe quake victims fall through cracks'.

<sup>67</sup> Eric Johnston, 'Kansai in dire need of airport guidance', *The Japan Times*, 27 February 2004.

<sup>68</sup> 'Kobe airport woes', *The Daily Yomiuri*, 31 March 2004, p. 2.

<sup>69</sup> McCormack, *The Emptiness of Japanese Affluence*, p. 13.

<sup>70</sup> Uchihashi, 'Poor Kobe quake victims fall through cracks'.

<sup>71</sup> See footnote no. 15 for a brief discussion of this relationship.

<sup>72</sup> Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, p. 1.